



Press Release

18 September 2012 — For Immediate Distribution

This past Saturday, Toronto Blue Jay player Yunel Escobar chose to display offensive and vulgar language on his eye black during a Major League Baseball game in Toronto. Subsequently, the Toronto Blue Jays suspended Mr. Escobar for three games, and will donate his lost pay to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and the You Can Play Project (YCP).

OUTSPORT TORONTO is deeply disappointed and saddened by the behaviour of Mr. Escobar, and the negative messages that his conduct delivers. Because of his actions, athletes everywhere – amateur and professional – will continue to remain in the closet, will continue to avoid sports, and will continue to have their sense of self demeaned.

OUTSPORT TORONTO is a strong believer in the power of sport to build character, build health and wellness, and strengthen communities, and believes that the benefits of sport should be accessible to all, regardless of race, colour, ancestry, creed, nationality, place of origin, age, disability, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Unfortunately, there is still far too much homophobia in sports today, to the point where athletes young and old, skilled and beginner, avoid sport and do not fully realise the full potential of participating in sport. Mr. Escobar's actions have worsened and reinforced LGBT athletes' perception of sport – and professional sport in particular – as not being welcoming, inclusive, and safe.

OUTSPORT TORONTO shares the Toronto Blue Jays' opinion that this negative situation can become a positive. We are fully supportive of the club's decision to direct Mr. Escobar's lost pay to two great organisations such as GLAAD and You Can Play, the latter with which **OUTSPORT TORONTO** shares a good working relationship. While punitive measures may be seen by some as merely retributive, **OUTSPORT TORONTO** feels that the length of a suspension can be effective in demonstrating how serious a ball club views such behaviour. Unfortunately, this minor suspension will send a message to those offended by Mr. Escobar's actions that the Toronto Blue Jays view this as a minor issue.

OUTSPORT TORONTO offers its assistance to The Toronto Blue Jays in demonstrating that the club does in fact view this situation seriously. **OUTSPORT TORONTO** has experience in developing anti-homophobia policies and procedures for the Toronto District School Board, and is currently working on an LGBT policy for an Ontario amateur sport organisation. **OUTSPORT TORONTO** will be contacting the Toronto Blue Jays in this regard, and will be extending an invitation to the club to attend its "Scrum", an amateur sports and recreation conference for the LGBT community that is being held in Toronto on October 19th & 20th.

Mr. Escobar's actions were indeed immature, offensive, and unfortunate. **OUTSPORT TORONTO** appreciates the response to date by The Toronto Blue Jays, and will endeavour to ensure that this negative situation can be turned to positive.

About **OUTSPORT TORONTO**:

OUTSPORT TORONTO is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation that serves and supports LGBT amateur sport and recreation organisations and athletes in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) by:

- encouraging health, healthy living, wellness and well-being through participation in sport and recreation within the LGBT community;
- facilitating interaction and communication amongst member LGBT sport organisations;
- providing opportunities for learning and mentoring; and
- effectively advocating to external parties.

For more information, visit www.OutSportToronto.org or eMail info@OutSportToronto.org .