

# Homosexuality in American football

Add languages

Contents

hide

(Top)

Reception

Players coming out

See also

References

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

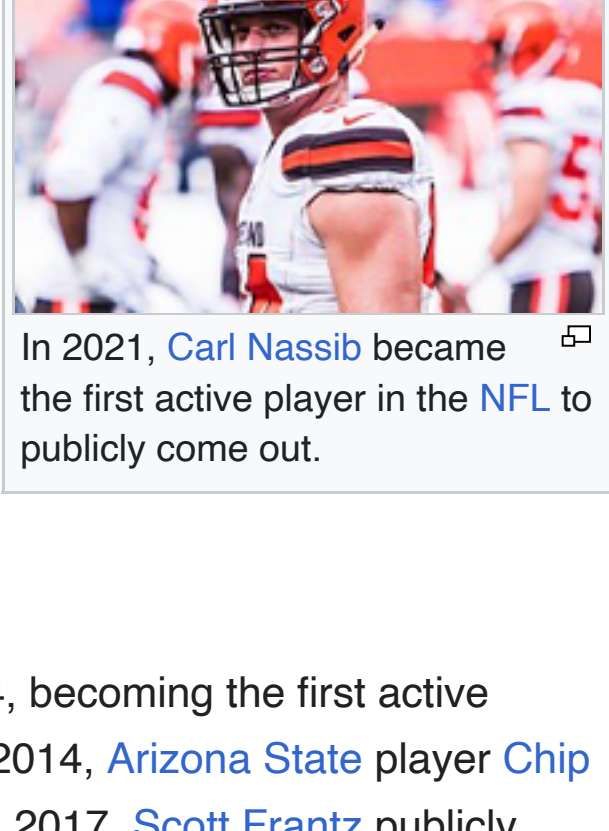
Tools

Appearance

hide

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

There has been only one player who has publicly come out as gay or bisexual while being an active player in the **National Football League** (NFL): **Carl Nassib**, who came out as gay on June 21, 2021, while with the *Las Vegas Raiders*.<sup>[1]</sup> He became the first openly gay player to play in an NFL game on September 13, 2021.<sup>[2]</sup> He later became the first openly gay player in an NFL playoff game on January 15, 2022.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Six former NFL players have come out publicly after they retired.<sup>[5]</sup> In the 2014 NFL draft, the **St. Louis Rams** drafted **Michael Sam** in the seventh round, the 249th of 256 players selected,<sup>[6]</sup> which made him the first openly gay player to be drafted into the NFL.<sup>[7][8]</sup> However, on August 30, St. Louis released Sam as part of a final round of cuts to reduce their roster to the league-mandated 53 players before the start of the regular season.<sup>[9][10]</sup>



In 2021, **Carl Nassib** became the first active player in the NFL to publicly come out.

In college football, **Division III** player **Conner Mertens** came out as bisexual in January 2014, becoming the first active college football player at any level to publicly come out as bisexual or gay.<sup>[11][12]</sup> In August 2014, *Arizona State* player **Chip Sarafin** became the first publicly out active **Division I** player when he came out as gay.<sup>[13]</sup> In 2017, **Scott Frantz** publicly came out as gay, joining **My-King Johnson** as two of the first openly gay college football players in the **NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision**.<sup>[14]</sup> Later that same year, Frantz became the first openly gay college football player to play in a game for an **NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision** school.<sup>[15]</sup> In 2018, Bradley Kim of the **United States Air Force Academy** came out as gay, thus becoming the first openly gay football player to play for any military academy in the United States; open homosexuality was forbidden in the U.S. Armed Forces until 2011.<sup>[16]</sup> Also in 2018, Division II Wyatt Pertuset of **Capital University** became the first openly gay college player to score a touchdown.<sup>[17][18]</sup> In 2022, Byron Perkins of **Hampton University** came out as gay, making him the first openly gay football player at any **historically black college or university**.<sup>[19]</sup><sup>[20]</sup>

Years earlier in *women's football* in 2001, *Philadelphia Liberty Belles* player *Alissa Wykes* of the *National Women's Football Association* (NWFA) came out publicly as lesbian.<sup>[21]</sup>

## Reception

The generally masculine environment that exists in football, along with the **hypermasculinity** promoted by sportscasters, make it difficult for a player to come out.<sup>[22][23]</sup> Homosexuality is flaunted in NFL locker rooms with the passing of *pornographic magazines* and *videos*, and visits to *strip clubs*.<sup>[24]</sup> Anti-gay slurs are sometimes used in the locker room.<sup>[25][26]</sup> Fear of backlash from employers, teammates and fans has stopped players from coming out.<sup>[27]</sup>

While *Green Bay Packers* head coach **Vince Lombardi** was known to treat his players roughly in practices and during games, he insisted on unconditional respect for gay players and front office staff.<sup>[28]</sup> Demanding "Nothing but Acceptance" from players and coaches toward all people, Lombardi would fire a coach or release a player should they insult the sexual orientation of anyone.<sup>[29]</sup> During his time in Washington, Lombardi's assistant general manager, David Slatterly, was gay, as was PR director Joe Blair, who was described as Lombardi's "right-hand man."<sup>[30]</sup> According to son Vince Lombardi Jr., "He saw everyone as equals, and I think having a gay brother (Hal) was a big factor in his approach...I think my father would've felt, 'I hope I've created an atmosphere in the locker room where this would not be an issue at all. And if you do have an issue, the problem will be yours because my locker room will tolerate nothing but acceptance.'" Upon his arrival in Washington, Lombardi was aware of tight end **Jerry Smith's** gay sexual orientation.<sup>[31]</sup> "Lombardi protected and loved Jerry", said former teammate **Dave Kopay**.<sup>[32]</sup> Lombardi brought Smith into his office and told him that his sexual orientation would never be an issue as long as he was coaching the Redskins; Smith would be judged solely on his on-the-field performance and contribution to the team's success.<sup>[33]</sup> Under Lombardi's leadership Smith flourished, becoming an integral part of Lombardi's offense, and was voted a First Team All-Pro for the first time in his career, which was also Lombardi's only season as Redskin head coach.<sup>[34]</sup> Lombardi invited other gay players to *training camp*, and would privately hope they would prove they could earn a spot on the team.<sup>[35]</sup> At the *Washington Redskins* training camp in 1969, **Ray McDonald** was a gay player, with sub-par skills,<sup>[36]</sup> who was trying to maintain his spot on the roster,<sup>[37]</sup> but this time with Lombardi as the Redskins' new head coach. True to his word, Lombardi told running back coach George Dickson,<sup>[38]</sup> "I want you to get on McDonald and work on him and work on him – and if I hear one of you people make reference to his manhood, you'll be out of here before your ass hits the ground."<sup>[39]</sup>

Before *Super Bowl XLVII* in 2013, *San Francisco 49ers* player **Chris Culliver** on media day during an interview with *The Arlie Lange Show*, was asked if he thought any gay players were on his team which he replied "No, we don't got no gay people on the team, they gotta get up out of here if they do...Can't be with that sweet stuff." He also opined that any gay players should wait 10 years after retiring before coming out.<sup>[40]</sup> Culliver received backlash for his comments.<sup>[41]</sup> *Baltimore Ravens* player **Brendon Ayanbadejo**, an advocate for same-sex marriage, estimated that 50 percent of the league agreed with Culliver, 25 percent disagreed, and 25 percent were accepting of everyone even if they were not in complete support of issues such as gay marriage.<sup>[44][42]</sup> Culliver later apologized for his "ugly comments" that were "not what I feel in my heart".<sup>[43][44][45]</sup>

The **NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement** in 2011 contained added protections banning discrimination based on sexual orientation.<sup>[46]</sup> In 2013, the NFL Rookie Symposium planned for the first time to have speakers on the issue of sexual orientation.<sup>[47]</sup> The same year, NFL player **Chris Kluwe** was released by the *Minnesota Vikings*, which he believed was due to his being outspoken in support of same-sex marriage. He said that *special teams* coach **Mike Priefer** in 2012 made homophobic remarks and criticized the player for his views on same-sex marriage, a charge Priefer denied. Kluwe also alleged that head coach **Leslie Frazier** told him to stop speaking about same-sex marriage.<sup>[48]</sup> In December, former teammates on the *1993 Houston Oilers* said that at least two key players on the roster were generally known by the team to be gay and that they were accepted by the team. Teammate **Bubba McDowell** said showering with the gay teammates was "no big deal".<sup>[49]</sup> In 2014, ESPN reported on **Michael Sam's** showering habits in the *St. Louis Rams* locker room, but later apologized that it "failed to meet the standards we have set in reporting on LGBT-related topics in sports."<sup>[50]</sup>

NFL player **Ryan O'Callaghan** came out publicly as gay in 2017; he came out to Kansas City Chiefs general manager **Scott Pioli** before his NFL career ended in 2011.<sup>[51]</sup> In 2019, O'Callaghan said "I think it's safe to say there's at least one on every team who is either gay or bisexual. A lot of guys still see it as potentially having a negative impact on their career."<sup>[52]</sup>

In June 2021, the NFL tweeted in support of the LGBTQ+ community by advocating for *The Trevor Project*<sup>[53]</sup> and matching player Carl Nassib's donation of \$100,000 while linking the website for fans to donate as well. After Nassib officially came out, Morning Consult conducted a survey gaging the likelihood of watching the NFL. The survey was concluded with the result of 1 out of 3 LGBTQ+ adults are more interested in watching the NFL following Nassib coming out.<sup>[54]</sup> This contributes to the general goal of the LGBTQ+ community of gaining more representation within sports so that more LGBTQ+ athletes feel comfortable to participate.<sup>[55]</sup>

Ahead of *Super Bowl LVI*, the NFL partnered with GLAAD made history by hosting an event where associates of the NFL were able to mingle with supporters and officials of GLAAD. "LGBTQ athletes need to see more stories of athletes like them, who are supported by their teammates, because so many of them are accepted, just as they are," GLAAD Deputy President and COO Darra Gordon said in her remarks. "I hope young LGBTQ athletes see posts from tonight and know that they have a rightful place to be out in the NFL, in football, in sports, and at any cultural milestone they aim for."<sup>[56]</sup>

## Players coming out

After *NWFA* player *Alissa Wykes* came out as lesbian in the December/January 2002 edition of *Sports Illustrated for Women*,<sup>[21]</sup> the league's owner Catherine Masters condemned her for pursuing her own "personal agenda", stating that the league had received "hundreds of phone calls. Gay people were saying it was horrible. Straight people were saying it was great."<sup>[57]</sup> In 2003, as a panel member at the first National Gay/Lesbian Athletics Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Wykes joked that she felt "great empathy for the women on my team who are straight. I mean—a straight female football player?"<sup>[58]</sup>

**Division II** college football player **Brian Sims** came out as gay to his team in 2000 while playing for Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania,<sup>[59]</sup> and publicly told his story in 2008.<sup>[60]</sup> **Alian Gendreau** was openly gay to his *Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders* football team from 2008 through 2011, but the team made no mention of it to the media.<sup>[61]</sup>

Otherwise, he could have been the first publicly out gay active player in **Division I** college football.<sup>[62]</sup> *Outsports*, a website specializing in LGBTQ people in sports, released his story about being a gay football player on April 23, 2013.<sup>[61][62]</sup> In January 2014, **Conner Mertens** of the **Division III** *Willamette Bearcats* publicly came out as bisexual, becoming the first active college football player at any level to publicly come out as bisexual.<sup>[63][64]</sup>

After he retired, NFL player **David Kopay** in 1975 was the first major professional team-sport athlete to come out as gay.<sup>[65]</sup> Before **Carl Nassib's** coming out, many experts believed that the first openly gay active NFL player would not be a current athlete, but instead an already out high school or college player who ends up in the NFL.<sup>[6][66]</sup> CBSSports.com reported in April 2013 that one NFL team had a player that was not openly gay, but his teammates were aware that he was gay and did not care.<sup>[67]</sup> That same month, Ayanbadejo said there were up to four NFL players who were considering coming out as gay on the same day with the hope that any backlash would be shared and the pressure on one person reduced.<sup>[68]</sup> NFL commissioner **Roger Goodell** emphasized that discrimination based on sexual orientation was unacceptable in the NFL. His statement came after players said they were asked during the **NFL Scouting Combine** if they liked girls.<sup>[69]</sup> In November 2018, former player **Jeff Rohrer** became the first known current or former NFL player to be in a same-sex marriage.<sup>[70]</sup>

In February 2014, Sam publicly came out as gay after his college career had ended, and he became the first publicly gay player drafted in the NFL when he was selected in the seventh round of the **2014 draft**.<sup>[64][7]</sup> Six months later, **Chip Sarafin** came out as gay, becoming the first active Division I player to come out as gay.<sup>[71]</sup> The following season, in 2015, another **Division I** offensive lineman, Mason Darrow of *Princeton University*, also came out as gay publicly.<sup>[72]</sup>

In 2017, **Scott Frantz** publicly came out as gay, joining My-King Johnson as two of the first openly gay players in the **NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision**.<sup>[14]</sup> Later that same year, Frantz became the first openly gay college football player to play in a game for an **NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision** school.<sup>[15]</sup>

In 2018, Bradley Kim of the Air Force Academy came out as gay, thus becoming the first openly gay football player to play for any military academy in the United States; open homosexuality was forbidden in the U.S. Armed Forces until 2012.<sup>[16]</sup>

In August 2019, free agent **Ryan Russell** came out publicly as bisexual in an essay he penned for *ESPN*.<sup>[73]</sup>

In June 2021, Raiders defensive end **Carl Nassib** came out as gay via Instagram. He announced a \$100,000 donation to *The Trevor Project* as part of the post.<sup>[74]</sup> Nassib was entering his sixth NFL season and the second year of his three-year contract with the *Las Vegas Raiders*.<sup>[75]</sup> He became the first openly gay player to play in an NFL game on September 13, 2021.<sup>[2]</sup> He later became the first openly gay player in an NFL playoff game on January 15, 2022.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

Players who came out				
Name	♣ Highest level	♣ Position	♣ Ref	
<b>Mason Darrow</b>	NCAA Division I	Offensive lineman	<sup>[76]</sup>	
<b>Wade Davis</b>	NFL	Cornerback	<sup>[77]</sup>	
<b>Scott Frantz</b>	NCAA Division I	Offensive tackle	<sup>[78]</sup>	
<b>Ed Gallagher</b>	NCAA Division I	Offensive tackle	<sup>[79]</sup>	
<b>Alian Gendreau</b>	NCAA Division I	Placekicker	<sup>[80]</sup>	
<b>Kwame Harris</b>	NFL	Defensive tackle	<sup>[81]</sup>	
<b>Bradley Kim</b>	NCAA Division I	Defensive back	<sup>[16]</sup>	
<b>David Kopay</b>	NFL	Running back	<sup>[82]</sup>	
<b>Ray McDonald</b>	NFL	Running back	<sup>[83]</sup>	
<b>Conner Mertens</b>	NCAA Division III	Placekicker	<sup>[83]</sup>	
<b>Carl Nassib</b>	NFL	Defensive end	<sup>[84]</sup>	
<b>Ryan O'Callaghan</b>	NFL	Offensive tackle	<sup>[85]</sup>	
<b>Wyatt Pertuset</b>	NCAA Division III	Wide receiver	<sup>[17][18]</sup>	
<b>Jeff Rohrer</b>	NFL	Linebacker	<sup>[70]</sup>	
<b>Ryan Russell</b>	NFL	Defensive end	<sup>[73]</sup>	
<b>Michael Sam</b>	NFL <sup>‡</sup>	Defensive end	<sup>[86]</sup>	
<b>Chip Sarafin</b>	NCAA Division I	Offensive lineman	<sup>[71]</sup>	
<b>Roy Simmons</b>	NFL	Guard	<sup>[87]</sup>	
<b>Brian Sims</b>	NCAA Division II	Defensive tackle	<sup>[88]</sup>	
<b>Jerry Smith</b> *	NFL	Tight end	<sup>[89]</sup>	
<b>Brad Thorson</b>	NFL <sup>‡</sup>	Offensive lineman	<sup>[90]</sup>	
<b>Esera Tuaoilo</b>	NFL	Defensive tackle	<sup>[91]</sup>	
<b>Colton Underwood</b>	NFL <sup>§</sup>	Tight end	<sup>[92]</sup>	
<b>Jacob Van Iersum</b>	NCAA Division II	Offensive lineman	<sup>[93]</sup>	
<b>Alissa Wykes</b>	NWFA	Running back	<sup>[21]</sup>	
<b>Theodore Lisoski</b>	AFBN	Linebacker	<sup>[94][95]</sup>	

<sup>♣</sup> Posthumously outed

<sup>‡</sup> Selected in the **NFL Draft**, never played in the league

<sup>‡</sup> Placed on *injured reserve*, never played in the league

<sup>§</sup> *Practice squad* member, never played in the league

## See also

- Homosexuality in college sports
- Homosexuality in modern sports
- Homosexuality in sports in the United States
- Homosexuality in association football
- Homosexuality in Australian rules football
- Homosexuality in modern sports
- List of LGBT sportspeople
- List of LGBTQ+ American football players



## References

- ↑ Middlehurst-Schwartz, Michael. "Raiders' Carl Nassib comes out as first openly gay active NFL player" *USA TODAY*. Retrieved 2021-06-21.
- ↑  *a b* Smith, Michael David (September 14, 2021). "Carl Nassib becomes first openly gay player to play in NFL game" *Pro Football Talk*. Retrieved September 14, 2021.
- ↑  *a b* "Carl Nassib becomes the first openly gay player to play in a NFL postseason game" *GAY TIMES*. January 16, 2022.
- ↑  *a b* "Carl Nassib Makes History: First Openly Gay Player To Play In NFL Postseason Game" *ESPN*. January 16, 2022.
- ↑  *a b* Zeigler, Cyd (April 23, 2013). "Coming out kicking: Openly gay former college kicker tries for the NFL" *c. Outsports*. Retrieved April 24, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* "Rams reportedly took Michael Sam in 2014 draft in deal with NFL" *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 2016-03-24. Retrieved 2023-02-07.
- ↑  *a b* Belson, Ken (May 10, 2014). "In Historic Pick, Rams Take Michael Sam in Final Round of Draft" *The New York Times*. Archived from the original on November 1, 2014.
- ↑  *a b* Carter, Chelsea J. (May 10, 2014). "Michael Sam makes history: First openly gay player drafted in the NFL" *c. CNN*. Retrieved May 10, 2014.
- ↑  *a b* Farmer, Sam (August 30, 2014). "Michael Sam, NFL's first openly gay player, is out by St. Louis Rams" *c. Los Angeles Times*. Archived from the original on August 31, 2014.
- ↑  *a b* Wagoner, Nick (August 30, 2014). "Michael Sam out by Rams" *c. ESPN*. Retrieved August 30, 2014.
- ↑  *a b* Corcoran, Tully (January 28, 2014). "I'm bisexual: Kicker becomes first OFB player to publicly come out publicly" *c. FoxSports.com*. Archived from the original *c. on March 2, 2014*. Retrieved February 16, 2014.
- ↑  *a b* "College football player Conner Mertens comes out" *c. Outsports*. Retrieved 2016-06-15.
- ↑  *a b* Zeigler, Cyd (August 13, 2014). "Arizona State football offensive lineman Chip Sarafin comes out as gay" *c. Outsports*. Retrieved August 18, 2014.
- ↑  *a b* "Scott Frantz of Kansas State Wildcats details telling teammates he is gay" *c. ESPN.com*. 2017-07-13. Retrieved 2017-08-22.
- ↑  *a b* Zeigler, Cyd (2017-09-04). "Big XII football team with openly gay player wins by 36 points. So much for distractions" *c. Outsports*. Retrieved 2017-09-08.
- ↑  *a b c* "Air Force defensive back Bradley Kim is first openly gay service academy player" *c. Los Angeles Times*. Associated Press. 28 July 2018. Retrieved 2018-07-29.
- ↑  *a b* Buzinski, Jim (September 27, 2018). "Gay college football player now an Ohio high school coach" *c. MSN.com*.
- ↑  *a b* Buzinski, Jim (August 29, 2019). "There are 7 openly gay or bi college high schools this season" *c. Outsports*. Retrieved March 25, 2021.
- ↑  *a b* Selbe, Nick (19 October 2022). "Hampton DB Becomes First HBCU Football Player to Come Out as Gay" *c. Sports Illustrated*.
- ↑  *a b* "Byron Perkins Makes History As First Out Football Player at HBCU" *c. www.advocate.com*. October 20, 2022.
- ↑  *a b* DuLingo, Jessica (19 February 2002). "Out in the field: pro footballer Alissa Wykes talks about breaking new ground for out lesbian athletes--and the flak she's gotten along the way" *c. The Advocate*. pp. 32–35. Retrieved 12 May 2021.
- ↑  *a b* Stockwell, Anne; McAuley, J. V. (December 24, 1996). "Tackling the NFL closet" *c. The Advocate* (723): 51–55. ISSN 0001-8996 *c.*
- ↑  *a b* Diaz, George (April 27, 2013). "Orlando gay kicker wants to put boot to NFL stereotypes" *c. Orlando Sentinel*. Archived from the original on June 1, 2013. Retrieved April 29, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Morton, Danelle (June 10, 2013). "Out on the edge" *c. ESPN The Magazine*. Archived from the original on June 1, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Covitz, Randy (November 2, 2009). "Gay athletes don't fit in what is perceived as a homophobic NFL" *c. VictoriaAdvocate.com*. Archived from the original on July 6, 2015. Retrieved April 29, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Holmes, Linda (February 10, 2014). "Why The 'Man's-Man Game' Is An Insult To Men" *c. NPR*. Retrieved May 7, 2024.
- ↑ "Furthermore, the faux-bummed suggestion that because [gay slurs] are common, gay dudes can't be in the locker room essentially suggests that until people stop denigrating you, you have to kind of leave them their space, because what's the other option?"
- ↑  *a b* Lutz, Tom (June 22, 2021). " "Proud of you': NFL players welcome Carl Nassib's decision to come out" *c. The Guardian*. Retrieved June 23, 2021.
- ↑  *a b* "Vince Lombardi Was Ahead of His Time" *c. Acme Packing Company*. 7 May 2013. Retrieved 16 May 2017.
- ↑  *a b* "Former Pro Football Player Reflects on Brokeback Romance with Teammate" *c. gawker.com*. Archived from the original *c. on 23 January 2014*. Retrieved 13 January 2022.
- ↑  *a b* "The NFL Beat: Lombardi and Kopay" *c.*
- ↑  *a b* "45 years ago, Lombardi accepted a gay player" *c.*
- ↑  *a b* "Vince Lombardi accepted gay players on his team" *c. 3 May 2013*. Retrieved 16 May 2017.
- ↑  *a b* Bader, Jerry (February 12, 2014). "Would Vince Lombardi Gave Drafted a Gay Player" *c. Right Wisconsin*. Archived from the original *c. on December 25, 2015*. Retrieved June 8, 2023.
- ↑  *a b* "Jerry Smith Stats - Pro-Football-Reference.com" *c. Pro-Football-Reference.com*. Retrieved 16 May 2017.
- ↑  *a b* Maranias, David (1999). *When Pride Still Mattered, A Life of Vince Lombardi* *g.* Simon & Schuster. p. 344. ISBN 978-0-618-90499-0. Retrieved 2016-06-11.
- ↑  *a b* Maranias 1999, p. 469.
- ↑  *a b* Klemko, Robert (23 June 2017). "What happened to Ray McDonald, Washington's first-round draft pick in 1967?" *c. Sports Illustrated*. Retrieved 2022-04-20.
- ↑  *a b* Maranias 1999, p. 468.
- ↑  *a b* Maranias 1999, p. 471.
- ↑  *a b* Rogers, Martin (April 18, 2012). "Report: Niners CB says openly gay players would not be welcomed on the team" *c. yahoo.com*. Retrieved January 30, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Burke, Chris (April 23, 2013). "Alian Gendreau trying to make NFL as openly gay kicker" *c. SI.com*. Archived from the original on April 25, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Wetzel, Dan (January 31, 2013). "Chris Culliver's remarks, Manti Te'o episode make it hard for active gay athlete to go public" *c. yahoo.com*. Archived from the original on May 12, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* "Chris Culliver sorry for ugly remarks" *c. ESPN.com*. January 31, 2013. Retrieved January 31, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Wesseling, Chris (January 30, 2013). "Chris Culliver apologizes for anti-gay comments" *c. National Football League*. Retrieved January 30, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* Breech, John (January 30, 2013). "49ers' Chris Culliver: Openly gay player not welcome" *c.* CBSSports.com. Retrieved January 30, 2013.
- ↑  *a b* "NFL in New CBA Bans Discrimination Based On Sexual Orientation" *c. Sports Business Daily*. September 27, 2011. Archived from the original on