

LOCAL LIFE



A sporty trip abroad
D.C.'s gay basketball team prepares for tournament in Amsterdam

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Amsterdam is frequently cited as the most gay-friendly destination in Europe and local gay basketball club Team D.C. will soon experience the city first-hand when the group competes in the Mister B Tournament, a gay international basketball tournament, on Aug. 3.

Taking place on the same weekend as the city's Pride celebration, the Mister B Tournament features teams from London, Paris, Germany, the host country and Washington's gay players — the only entry from the U.S.

The Washington team was founded in the late '90s through Results Gym, which sponsored the "D.C. Results Team." That incarnation has since dissolved, so current team

organizer Tim Francis, who played pickup and intramural ball all through high school and college, reorganized the group last year.

He began advertising in local publications and secured the Takoma Park Middle School's gym as a practice space. Though the process was slow, Francis now has an e-mail list of 50 interested players and 22 who show up regularly.

"It's growing pains with everything," Francis says. "At first we got 10 or 12 [participants], but as people know about it, it grows faster. Now I have people calling me from Baltimore and Columbia that come up to play."

FOR ONE PLAYER, in particular, this event is a far cry from his recent life experiences.

Miles Simpson finished a four-year stint in the Air Force in October, including being stationed at the Baghdad International Airport. While Simpson was never shot at, he faced the daily threat of mortar attacks and the constant stress of being at war.

After returning to the U.S. and spending five months in his hometown, Lavonia, Mich., a suburb of Detroit, he received a job offer from the Pentagon and moved to the District, where he heard about the basketball team and joined in the hope of making some new friends.

"It's a really good group of guys, it's fun," says Simpson, who is now the team's point guard. "There's a lot of places [in D.C.] to meet people, but as opposed to meeting people at JR.'s or something like that, it's a positive group of people."

Simpson's introduction to life in the District also coincides with his introduction to life "in the family." Not able to come out while in the Air Force, Simpson has the twin challenges of navigating, for the first time, gay and urban life.

"It's not just an adjustment from military to civilian, it's also me coming out and moving to a city where I didn't know anyone," Simpson says. "That was pretty crazy. It's gone really well as far as the friends I've met. The people of D.C. welcoming me has gone over really well, and my family back at home has been really great."

Although Simpson has traveled the world, often under arduous circumstances, the upcoming trip to Amsterdam will be an entirely new experience for him.

"I haven't done the gay scene in Amsterdam," he says.

Traveling to the city will prove to be a test for Team D.C., as well — the ballers will be seeing their first actual competition at the Mister B Tournament. Skill levels on the squad range from, according to Francis, "low level to college ball."

The team will also be playing a tournament in Memphis, Tenn., this October, but excitement is higher over the Amsterdam trip.

“I’m prepared to take the city by storm,” Simpson says.