

EGLSF Press release:
Acclaimed Welsh Rugby Athlete Comes Out

Former Welsh Rugby International Gareth Thomas followed in the footsteps of Irish Hurling star Donal Óg Cusack this weekend by making the public announcement that he was gay. This makes him the only openly gay professional rugby player still in the game. Thomas, who is Wales' most capped player, still plays at a club level for Cardiff Blues, having retired from International Rugby in 2007.

The story was sympathetically revealed in the English newspaper the Daily Mail, a newspaper which had recently caused outrage amongst the UK and Irish LGBT community for publishing an article which speculated about the death of Stephen Gately, a gay man and member of Irish pop band Boyzone.

What makes Gareth Thomas 'coming out' particularly interesting, is his acknowledgement that being a young person and gay can still be difficult in the UK. "I don't know if my life is going to be easier because I'm out, but if it helps someone else, if it makes one young lad pick up the phone to Childline (the UK's NGO helpline for young people), then it will have been worth it."

As with Donal Og Cusack, Gareth Thomas' announcement has been met with overwhelming support from within his sport. Nic Scott, Rugby Football Union Equity, Inclusion & Safeguarding Manager in England told EGLSF: "Gareth is one of many great ambassadors to the sport of rugby union, his 'coming out' at the weekend seems to have caused a minor sensation in the media but within the sport it really only caused a ripple of interest. Rugby union welcomes everyone, whatever their background and whether they are gay or straight, and I'm sure Gareth will be treated no differently to how he has been for many years on the pitch or the terraces, or in the changing rooms and bars."

In interviews this weekend, however, Gareth Thomas has acknowledged that he was aware of his sexuality as early as 16 or 17 years old, but that he himself could not accept it.

Lou Englefield, EGLSF Board member from the UK sees Gareth Thomas personal revelation and acknowledgement that 'coming out' may still not be easy for young gay men as significant: "We have come a long way in improving the rights and visibility of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the UK, but a recent report by the National Union of Teachers highlights that homophobic abuse is still widespread in UK schools. Meanwhile, young gay men are four times more likely to commit suicide than the population as a whole and as Gareth Thomas himself explains, many young people are still afraid of making their sexuality known. Having great gay sporting heroes is hugely important for all young LGB athletes and even for those of us who don't play or follow sport. Knowing that you can be gay and achieve in all walks of life is invaluable to the self-esteem and personal development of all young LGB people."