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Dr. Tim Lightfoot. We are pleased today to bring you a podcast on an interesting and controversial topic that is hitting the news right now in sports medicine. We would warn you that if you are not excited about speaking about sports in the context of sexual identity, then we would suggest that you turn this podcast off and not listen to it. You should be aware that there are no explicit sexual references made, but just the concept of gay, lesbian and transgendered Athletes are talked about quite excessively and while we present this in a non-judgmental way if you have strong opinions and you would prefer not to listen to this podcast we welcome you to turn this off and be with us next week.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Well hello and welcome to the weekly edition of the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance podcast. I am your host, Tim Lightfoot and we are so glad that you took the time to join us, you've downloaded us and you are listening and every week we bring you interesting people the world of Sports Medicine, Human Performance and general health, as it relates to exercise and this week is, of course, no exception. We have Dr. George Cunningham with us today. Welcome to the podcast, George.

Dr. George Cunningham. Thank you, I appreciate you having me.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Yeah well we are glad to have you. It's been a long time coming but we got you here eventually. Let me tell the audience a little bit about Dr. Cunningham, and why we're so pleased to have him with us here. Doc Cunningham has a PhD in sports and exercise management from Ohio State University. He actually has a Master's degree from Texas A&M so he is one of the home guys he has come back. He has currently associate Dean for Graduate Studies at the College of Education and Human Development here at Texas A&M. He is a professor in our Division of Sports Management. He is the Director of the Laboratory for Diversity in Sport and he has received a variety of external funding over the years he has published over a hundred journal articles and book chapters. He has written award winning textbook called "Diversity in Sports Organization" and if you knew how young he really was it makes us all feel like slackers. Thanks George for that

Dr. George Cunningham. My pleasure, you have really helped my self esteem today quite a bit.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. He has got a variety of other honors; he is the editor of a couple of different journals and just all around great scholar. We are glad to have him and Dr. Cunningham also was recently named the Young Alumni of the Year for Ohio State University. Congratulations on that award.

Dr. George Cunningham. Thank you.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So we have asked Dr. Cunningham here to talk to us today about his research, since he runs the laboratory for Diversity of Sports. In particular recently he has been looking more and more at issues that are faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered athletes. So, how did you get into this area?

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah, that's a good question. So, we look at diversity in general and so I have looked at issues related to race and gender, ability, physical or mental ability, weight, discrimination and a lot of it, when I go into different areas, it is based on student interests as well and so I had a student, actually two students, who are interested in LGBT issues and so it started probably I guess 5 or 6 years ago with one of those students who actually just published a book on that topic and I contributed a chapter but I was very pleased that, as the proud advisor, that she published a book in that area.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Our students are very much like our family and when they succeed we are excited for them.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yes, very much so. Relative to other areas in diversity, it is under explored and so because of that and the very real effects that that sort of prejudice and discrimination has we had to keen interest in that area.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Talk to us a little bit about that, and this is a topic that I think many people would prefer not to talk about, but I think it exists. Matter of fact there was a study that shows in the last year 87% of transgendered individuals had been threatened, 53% had been pushed or shoved, 26% had been punched, kicked or injured and 46% reported having missed school...

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Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So there is obviously some physic ramifications.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah and you see that with transgendered, for example, you see that among a broad band of individuals, it is not just people in one area of the country or participating in one activity but the stats you mentioned you see a lot of transgendered individuals in schools experiencing physical danger, they are likely to hear negative comments and it is not just from their classmates, it's from their teachers, it is from administrators, and not that I can excuse classmates, but I think I said silly things when I was in jr. high or high school.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Peers are pretty tough on folks.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah, it doesn't excuse that, but you know when you hear or when you see the data that it is coaches and teachers and administrators I think that is where, that is probably more surprising, more hurtful, because those are people who are responsible in a large part for creating inclusive and safe environments and they really set the tones so when you don't have that then you really see a lot of the damage come about.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So let's I guess maybe back up a step and let's put some operational definitions around some of these terms. Some of our listeners may not be familiar with it. How do you define transgender?

Dr. George Cunningham. So I am gonna not directly answer that. we usually use the word "trans" because that would be a very inclusive term for transgender, people who have maybe identify from their gender identity in ways that don't necessarily match your biological sex, people who have gone through surgery or those who have not. All of those would have specific terms but trans really encompasses that. I think we could probably think of it as ones gender identity or expression not really matching their biologic sex and as one scholar noted that people really like to put others in categories, we like to classify things, nature does not, and so often times you just don't have that match and that is the way nature made you.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Yeah there is one of the things when you read this, and one of the links we'll put on our website is to an article that you and I have chatted about and we are going to chat about a little bit more that was in sports illustrated this past may about the transgendered athletes and some of the issues that they face and some of the folks that come out actually in the article talked about their own journey , so the word courageous is often used but they do face an uphill battle in society nowadays. You know one of the questions we had is "does keeping that kind of sexual orientation under wraps, is that harmful to people, do you think? Or stressful as they try to compete as an athlete or otherwise in life?"

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah and so if you think about just in your daily life If you hold onto something that you can't tell everybody else and that kind of, at least it weighs on me. If I have a big secret and I can't tell others then I think about it , it takes me away from being able to come straight on my writing or other activities so that secret may be about whatever at school or in life but if we amplify that and think about our sexual orientation where the really key part to who we are as a person , or our gender identity expression, another key part of who we are, and if we have to hold onto that where we think we cannot tell others, we cannot tell our friends, we can't tell our family, you know I think it weighs on you and it weighs on you and you start to think about how others would respond and often times those are not concurrent. You can look at outsports.com which is a website devoted to LGBT issues and they have a lot of evidence showing that when people actually do disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity that the responses are very positive but, you know, unless you have done that, I think often times you fear the worst, it is a very scary thing and you don't know if you are gonna get an outcast or beat up or discriminated against, I mean there is a lot of negative that can come about. It is understandable, the anxiety and the stress that comes about from holding onto that.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. There were a couple recent I think pretty high profile soccer players in particular I know this past week, Robbie Rogers played MLS, played in the English Premier League.

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Dr. Tim Lightfoot. On the National team. He came out and said he was gay and that he was, as a result of that and holding it in, he was gonna probably step away from soccer. I know that Megan Rapinoe, who is on the women's national team as well, has come out as gay and I think overall they have been fairly supported.

Dr. George Cunningham. They have, you know the big difference between Robbie and Megan is Megan is still playing and Robbie didn't feel like he could continue. Some people saw that overall scenario is advancement because you had very high overall players and teams come out and say "its okay we welcome you back on the team ECT..." and those are certainly very positive steps and I understand that. I still think that we have quite a ways to go that he was 25, still quite skilled and felt like he couldn't have those two identities, one as a soccer player and one as a gay man, be compatible, so feel the need to step away from soccer, shows that we still have quite a ways to go on the men's side. I mean there is no active professional athletes in the U.S, the big four, hockey, football, baseball, basketball there we go.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. One of those big fours.

Dr. George Cunningham. Who have come out and identified as gay or bisexual while they are playing. A lot of them do after but not while they're playing. So I think suggests a whole lot, that it may not be a welcome environment, you see that during superbowl week some of the players have indicated that they wouldn't accept a gay teammate on their team in their locker room, and others provided a counter narrative to that but it's not, I mean that's a real thing that is happening.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Were you talking about some of the real ramifications of course the first thing I go to is what do you do about locker rooms?

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah, so that is a good question. I don't know, there is not a lot of evidence when people come out in the high school level, in the college level, in fact I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that is a locker room issue in terms of people making passes or advances one another. Again, those are things that we probably think about as worst-case scenarios but the actual empirical or anecdotal evidence doesn't support, so it's just, I think those are non-issues.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. I think, in NCAA, doesn't it basically say it is whatever the athlete feels comfortable with?

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah there are a lot of policies; Erin Buzuvis has done a lot of work. She is a lawyer and professor at Western New England College and talked about from least inclusive to most inclusive policies. So the IOC for a long time didn't have any policies and then had, what she describes as the least inclusive so for a player, or an athlete, to participate in

Olympics, they have to have undergone sex reassignment surgery, had hormone treatment for at least two years, and received legal recognition of their transitioned sex in order to participate. That's a whole lot to take place and if you think about the short shelf life of an athlete to participate at that high of a level to go through at least two years, and that is not necessarily during the training either, that's a lot to do, so in the NCAA it's a little bit more inclusive but it's still not most inclusive and at that you will have to go through hormone treatment and so if you are a male and you are expressing as such a woman, then you have to have undergone at least a year of hormone treatment to participate.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. And that is testosterone suppression in that case?

Dr. George Cunningham. Yes and so if you think about it again you have four years you could have a medical red shirt that that could count, but that is still quite expensive as well. It requires people to go through things that will impact their body later on in life as well, and so there really are other systems in place which is in Washington or in Massachusetts where it is simply how you identify, how do you express yourself in terms of your gender identity and if you can demonstrate that that is a sincere expression so everybody at court or testifies that says yes, George identifies that way or Sarah identifies that way, whoever, then you can participate, so it doesn't matter, your sex on your birth certificate, you don't have to go through treatments, you don't have to go through different reassignment surgeries. That is really the most inclusive way to do things and you know people have concerns about competitive advantages and things like that, but..

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. There would be a bit of a physiological advantage of someone with biological male sex was allowed to compete with females,

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Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Just testosterone leads to body mass and there are examples where there had been some documented cases on where you go and testosterone suppression and your running time has gone down, a variety of physiological things happen, really make the genders equal.

Dr. George Cunningham. But that is really, I mean I understand that the very elite level. I think most people don't participate at the very elite level.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So you are just talking about the almost recreational or up to high school?

Dr. George Cunningham. I think through high school and it is a system in place I mean my daughter is 7 years old, is in a soccer league now, they're already segregate, boys soccer and girls soccer. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me, especially when you look at the bodies and abilities of 7 year old boys and girls. But I mentioned that because from a very young age we segregate based on biological sex. And so when we think about other ways of thinking about how we would participate in sports whether it is on a high school teams, rec league,

whatever, it is just different than how we have done it. It doesn't mean that it is wrong. It doesn't mean that there are advantages or disadvantages to other people and again, you know, we're not talking about the top 1% athlete or even beyond that. And the very elite athlete, most people don't really participate at that level so I think if we took a step back and really thought about what the purpose of this, what the purpose of this work participation and what are the benefits of it and the outcomes of denying people that participation and opportunity we may think about things differently.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. And I don't want to belittle the point but if I had a daughter, let's say who was playing basketball in high school, and there was an individual who had been born as a male and wanted to play basketball with the females I think I would have concerns about that. Maybe they're not an elite team level but still there is a competition involved. You still want to be able to play on a level playing field, so to speak, so isn't that still unfair if we don't ask people who want to, that maybe trans do something that will equalize them physiologically.

Dr. George Cunningham. So you would be in favor of having that player go through a year of hormone treatment before she is 18 years old?

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Well, I don't know that I will come out and say if I am for it or not but,

Dr. George Cunningham. It raises a question.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Yeah I am just raising the question about competitive fairness because there is the underlined thought that, and we can talk about fairness all day long, but there is a thought about that there is, by segregation especially, after puberty that there is some level playing field to some extent, and if you, now I can't see a female that was a lady, a trans who was born female wanting to participate in male sports, I mean they might but they would be at a huge physiological disadvantage.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah so that is, I think there is a lot to weigh there.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Yeah, we have a lot to unpack here.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah, so I appreciate your comments about competitive fairness. I would probably...

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Very nice way to say you disagree.

Dr. George Cunningham. No, I would just think about one how frequently is somebody gonna have that; let's say that we adopt that Washington Standard for High Schools where you have that sincere gender identity expression. So that is gonna be relatively rare and so, but if that is the case and let's say somebody born biologically a male identifies as a female and wants to participate I would say that the benefits of allowing that person to participate for the individual

and for ideas of inclusiveness would outweigh potential physiological differences and potential competitive advantage differences

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So you know you're gonna get a lot of pushback on that don't you?

Dr. George Cunningham. That's fine. I get pushed back all the time.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. You raised a point that we haven't talked about and that is prevalence. What is the prevalence of this in society?

Dr. George Cunningham. So if we think about people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, it's a wide range. I think that probably the best number is about 11% and so how you measure that, how you, how people identify, you know that's gonna be quite varied but generally 11%. The number of transgendered individuals is obviously quite a bit lower and one of the figures

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Dr. George Cunningham. That I saw was 700,000 in the U.S and so if we think of 700,000 out of what 350,000,000 or so, that is...

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. It's growing all the time.

Dr. George Cunningham. That is a very, very, small percent and that is from people aged 7 through 97.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So you're saying the probability of these things happened maybe pretty low.

Dr. George Cunningham. Pretty low

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So we're talking about possibilities and possible ramifications but probability may be a little low. Okay? And as academics that is what we weigh all the time right, possibilities vs. probabilities.

Dr. George Cunningham. Sure, and it is good discussions to have about, I mean the SI article brought up a ton of those points and what is fair, you know some of the athletes mentioned that they were at the division three level so I would think that division three is more participatory level than division one but even at that level there are issues, I mean I understand those concerns, but I think those need to be weighed against the other benefits of that. The benefits for that individual competing, the benefits for her teammates and seeing that inclusive environment for the Athletic Department of Universities, I have done research at one of those universities mentioned in the SI article and you see a lot of broader benefits, beyond just to the individual athlete so what we do for the individual directly impacts everybody else indirectly.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So one of the issues that is brought up is sex verification testing, I mean there is , the world record holder in the 800 meters in the females the caster, I can't think of her last name, from South Africa was caught up in this over the last two or three years. Do you think that is a violation of peoples' privacy, the sex verification testing? I mean I can think off the top of my head about six female athletes that you would go are they really female?

Dr. George Cunningham. I think that sex verification testing, a couple of things. One says a lot about what we think a male and a female should be? And who should be considered a male or a female? And again I go back to why we, as scientists or as people in society, like to place things in neat little categories, nature does not. And so the South African runner was able to keep all her awards and then had to go through a fairly invasive, very public testing that we don't necessarily put on others and so if somebody has XYX chromosomes.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Which they have no choice in

Dr. George Cunningham. Correct

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. We should put that right up front that is something they have no choice in.

Dr. George Cunningham. In fact that is the dad and his contribution or the biological father's contributions. I don't know that the benefits outweigh the very real cost for that athlete. There are other, some college athletes not who people discuss, oh I'd love to do or I wonder what the gender test on that sex verification for that person would be and that is because some of those athletes don't look like what we think maybe female athletes should look like, I would suspect, again that it is not just those athletes that have maybe different chromosomes, it's a whole lot.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Well we really suddenly changed shift of the topic from a societal based concept of gender to the biological because these sex verification tests are biological nature and they are about biologically about what we are supposed to have as males and females, supposedly, but in so much of what has been written about and what you have written about is about a societal definition of what someone believes they are and what they feel like they should be.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yes and that is what, I think that is an excellent point. They should be should be in air quotes because it doesn't really transfer around our podcast.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Just imagine us all doing air quotes right now,

Dr. George Cunningham. But I think that is a good point it is classifications that we have developed and you know if you think about the South African runner, she lived her whole life as a woman, never thought otherwise. According to at least sports illustrated articles, other articles written about her.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. With no issues, until she started blitzing the world records, then everybody was like what, what is going on here.

[25:00]

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. George, it has been a great time, we're running out of time unfortunately today, and as we do with all of our guests, I would give you an opportunity to give us a take home message.

Dr. George Cunningham. A take-home message. I think the take-home message is that we, as support administrators, as instructors in classes, as people who run sport leagues, can make a difference. Just because we haven't done things traditionally doesn't mean that we shouldn't think about redoing those and again I am a big believer that an inclusive policy or an inclusive action toward one individual certainly benefits that individual, but there is just a mountain of evidence showing that impacts others indirectly as well. And so I would be hard pressed to find the time when inclusive policies or procedures have really a negative outcome and unfortunately there is very few sport leagues, sports organizations that have these inclusive policies. But the more we add, the more benefits we can see of being active in sport or exercise through different forms of activity.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. And sport leagues aren't usually proactive on that sort of stuff.

Dr. George Cunningham. No they're not.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. It is usually after something happens. Well great take home message and thank you so much for being here with us today.

Dr. George Cunningham. I appreciate the opportunity.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. You're more than welcome, and we'll bring you back sometime. This is gonna be a fun podcast. And for all of you that are listening I know that you have been waiting, it has been about a month or so since you have had a podcast t-shirt question and so we have our producer Sheryl here with the podcast question of the day .

Sheryl. According to the NCAA, how many years of hormone therapy treatment does a transgender athlete have to go through until they can participate in sport competition.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Be the first one to send us the correct answer to that question and you will win one of those nifty podcast T-shirts, so we look forward to seeing those answers. Flood our email boxes. You can send it to HuffinesPodcast@HLCN.TAMU.EDU . Again thank you for being with us, George, I enjoyed it.

Dr. George Cunningham. Yeah, thank you, I look forward to hearing it.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Yeah, and again thank you, all of you, that are listening, for taking the time to download us, to take the time to listen and take the time to comment on our website. You will also see that we got a new website up so you will enjoy looking at that as well. And so until next week when we have another interesting individual in the world of sports medicine and human performance. We hope that you have an active and healthy week.