

Interview

ROMAN NEUSTÄDTER

Roman, recently somebody called you a „Homo“ on your Instagram account. You made the insult public, commenting: „I'm tired of all that negative shit. It's 2016. If you are racist or homophobe get the fuck off my insta.“ What were the reactions to that and why do you think it's important also for straight players to make a stand against homophobia?

The feedback was mainly positive and I was really surprised of how many people reacted to that. I just made a statement, nothing special in my eyes. As a public person I think you should stand up against any form of discrimination.



Have you come across any comments of homophobic abuse whilst being a professional?

To be honest I've always been asked if I was gay from the very beginning of my career. People see your style of

running or your hair during the game and that's how they define you as a person. I wouldn't say that it always ends in hate but the last few years have been extreme when it comes to homophobic comments. There is actually no week that I haven't been called a "faggot" for the past 3 years. I'm sure that most of these people are so frustrated and don't think about the meaning but that definitely doesn't make it less sad.

While the fight against racism seems to be supported by the whole "football family", it doesn't seem to be the case when it comes to homophobia and sexism as well, why do you think that is the case?

I think it's because soccer is always connected to 100% masculinity and people try to avoid any topic that could challenge „the manhood“.

At your club, Schalke 04, many fans as the "Schalker Fan Ini" have been involved in the fight against discrimination for a long time now. Do you liaise with fans on these topics and are these topics discussed among the players as well?

I have to admit, that we don't talk about it very often. I always try to have a close relationship to our fans, but we hardly talk about discrimination. If I could help and support them in their fight, I would be happy to do that.

How do you think supporters, clubs and players would react to an out gay player in their team or on the opposition? In an interview you recently said on the question what could prevent players from coming-out: "Imagine what would happen at an away game. Fans are always seeking for something to put you off." As a fans organization we often think that fans are being seen as the only problem, preventing a coming-out, don't you think the problem lies a bit deeper also within clubs and associations?

I have never been offended by a club or an association where as some fans seem to be more aggressive. I am totally convinced that if a player from Schalke came out, the club would support that 100%. I can't tell how the relationship with team members or fans would change to be honest though. You don't want to be mainly associated with your sexual orientation as a soccer player, so I think a coming out is still very difficult during your career.

In the past years more and more LGBTIQ fans groups emerged, especially in Germany, organized for example in the "Queer Football Fanclubs"; also Schalke has a LGBTIQ fanclub "Andersrum auf Schalke". There also have been solidarity campaigns by non-LGBTIQ fans as "Football fans against Homophobia". Have you heard of these and do you think they will be able to change the attitudes towards LGBTIQ people in the stands?

Yes I have heard of most of them. I think everything you do will help. You can't change attitudes from one day to another. But they will definitely raise awareness and give hope and I appreciate their work, it's so important.



Roman Neustädter is a USSR-born German professional footballer who plays as a defensive midfielder for FC Schalke 04. He has two friendlies for Germany under his belt, but has been selected for the Russian national team squad for EURO 2016.