

# “TONIGHT’S REF IS GAY.”

October 2, 2010

by Red Card Homophobia



That was what The Daily Mirror had to say about John Blankenstein, right before he refereed an England – Denmark match in 1992. John laughed it off with the words, “Actually that’s not entirely wrong.”

John Blankenstein, born and raised in The Netherlands, failed as an amateur footballer in 1966. He subsequently worked his way up, and went from being an amateur referee to presiding over important international football matches.

After being denied as a referee for the 1994 Champions League finale between AC Milan and FC Barcelona, he joked, “Sepp Blatter thought my pants were too short.” The actual reason behind his denial remains vague.

He did not make his homosexuality a secret. In fact, he remained publically committed to supporting gay rights, especially in sports. After his active career, Blankenstein worked for the

Royal Netherlands Football Association and several sports organizations, and a number of gay rights organizations including the [Homo Lesbische Federatie Nederland](#), which he co-founded, and also [COC Haaglanden](#), The Netherlands’ premier LGBT rights organization.

In 2003, COC Haaglanden awarded him the Bob Angelo Penning, for breaking the taboo on homosexuality in football. He was given the Harry Stapel Prijs in for his efforts in support of the emancipation of gay athletes in 2005.

A year later, at the age of 57, John Blankenstein passed away after fighting a rare kidney disease. To continue his mission, his sister Karin founded the [John Blankenstein Foundation](#). The John Blankenstein Foundation encourages people to talk openly about homosexuality in sports in order to further its social acceptance at both the professional and amateur levels. It is good to know his life brought forth such positive and inspiring activities that are still going strong and are, unfortunately, still necessary. Our gratitude, John.