

'Drop Dead Diva' Producer Josh Berman and Star Margaret Cho on New Episode About Gay Pro-Athlete



Interviewed by [Lori Bizzoco](#); Editorial by [Whitney Baker Johnson](#)

Drop Dead Diva, the relaunched Lifetime hit television show, will be showing their support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community on tonight's episode. In an exciting storyline, the cast will welcome Derek Smith, who is playing a gay professional baseball player. Josh Berman, the show's openly gay producer, stated that this issue was vital for him to tackle because being a gay athlete is becoming a

rising issue. "Sports is one of the last frontiers where men and women feel they unfortunately need to be closeted," he explains.

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This statement rings true in today's world, as most pro-athletes only decide to be openly gay once they retire from the professional sports lifestyle. In April 2013, the first male pro-athlete in the four major North American professional team sports, Jason Collins, came out of the closet. This series is the first television show to take on the matter in this specific way; the *Drop Dead Diva* cast had been working on this episode before Collins made history, though. "Oddly enough, only one line had to change," the producer tells us.

Margaret Cho, who plays Teri Lee, a paralegal assistant to main character Jane Bingham (Brooke Elliot), is also one of *Drop Dead Diva's* LGBT community members. Cho identifies herself as a bisexual and married husband Al Ridenour in 2003, with whom she has an open relationship. It's no surprise, then, that she's especially proud of this episode. "It goes into how we look at men in sports. We have an idea of who they are and what they're supposed to be."

Finding the ideal actor for this part was one of the most important parts of the episode. Berman shares that he was "obsessed" with casting the perfect man to play the fictional Major League Baseball player. Derek Smith was taken into very careful consideration for this role and was spoken to numerous times about the importance of his character. "Baseball is the most traditional, all-American sport. It gives us the opportunity to show a character who really needs to feel closeted or uphold the idea of heterosexuality," says Cho.

Both Berman and Cho want this episode to be viewed by the younger LGBT community, especially those who feel

uncomfortable with being athletic and out of the closet. “The importance of sports and the athleticism in the LGBT community can’t be underestimated,” believes Cho, “and I think that this episode really does a good job in promoting it for all of us.”

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The series makes sure to include the LGBT community as a focal point in other episodes as well. In 2011, *Drop Dead Diva* won the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Individual Episode for “The Prom,” which was about two gay students going to prom together. It was only right, then, for this cast to tackle LGBT athletes. “I’m thrilled that we are hitting this zeitgeist shed again with gay and lesbian issues,” exclaims Berman.

Be sure to catch this exciting episode of Drop Dead Diva tonight at 9/8c on Lifetime!