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# Toronto Blue Jays Promote, Commit to Starting Minor-League Catcher Who Identifies as Nonbinary



Toronto Blue Jays players celebrate a win against the Minnesota Twins at Rogers Centre in Toronto, Canada, June 11, 2023. (Nick Turchiaro-USA TODAY Sports)

By **RICH LOWRY**

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It's a historic first for Major League Baseball.

*Toronto* — In a surprise move, the Toronto Blue Jays have called up minor-league catcher Brady Deeker shortly after the backstop became the first professional baseball player to identify as nonbinary.

Deeker's promotion comes after only seven games at Triple-A and two frustrating seasons at Double-A when the catcher struggled to hit, batting a collective .207.

At a press conference, Blue Jays general manager Ross Atkins said, "The Blue Jays organization is delighted to make baseball history and be at the forefront of LGBTQ2S+ progress. Now every day can be Pride Day at the ballpark."

The move was met with near-universal acclaim. The Human Rights Campaign issued a statement saying that Deeker is "the Jackie Robinson of the LGBTQ+ community. We are proud of them."

Atkins pledged to put Deeker in the starting lineup immediately, batting fourth.

That will displace the current starting catcher, Alejandro Kirk, the dynamic player beloved by Blue Jays fans who last year hit .285 with 14 homers.

Blue Jays manager John Schneider said, "Alejandro is a key guy for us, but, of course, he is totally committed to supporting the LGBT+ community by DHing now and occasionally backing up Deeker — assuming Brady is okay with that."

A scout for a rival organization who asked for anonymity to protect his livelihood said of Deeker, "I don't care what gender he [sic] is, he's [sic] never been able to handle a fastball or identify a slider. To say he's [sic] not going to provide protection to anyone in front of him [sic] is an understatement. I mean, Vlad Guerrero is not going to see another strike all year. I hope the Blue Jays plan to merchandise a lot of rainbow jerseys because otherwise this makes no sense."

Asked about such skepticism, Atkins said, "This organization doesn't have time for hate."

Deeker was drafted out of the University of Miami as a highly touted prospect who has struggled to live up to the initial billing. Some doubted that, at age 27, Deeker would ever make the big leagues. Then, everything changed this season with the New Hampshire Fisher Cats, Toronto's AA affiliate. Deeker began, according to the catcher's account, to doubt the gender binary after watching TikTok videos on long road trips back and forth to Eastern League cities. Before an away game against the Binghamton Rumble Ponies about two weeks ago, Deeker came out as nonbinary in a viral Instagram post.

The reaction was instantaneous. Deeker immediately scored an endorsement deal with the equipment-maker Rawlings for a branded catcher's mitt. Other offers have flooded in.

(In a recent podcast interview, Deeker said, "I don't want to create any misunderstandings — I'm, you know, still attracted to

At the team's press conference, Atkins said that Deeker's locker in the Blue Jays locker room will be designated as gender-neutral, and one urinal and stall in the men's room will be marked off as "all-gender," explaining, "We just think that's the right thing to do."

The current Blue Jays backup catcher, Tyler Heineman, will be designated for assignment. "It is what it is," Heineman said. "I

wouldn't want my roster spot to stand in the way of history.”

An ESPN *30 for 30* documentary tentatively titled *The Catcher Who Was Neither: The Brady Deeker Story* is scheduled for release in the fall.

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