



## Let the Games Begin; Kick-off at Soldier Field

By [Kevin Wayne](#)

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The Chicago Gay Games kick off today at 8 p.m.

Chicago, IL - The Gay Games Sports and Cultural Festival opens here in Chicago today, with nearly 12,000 athletes expected from around the world.

The Gay Games VII officially kick off tonight at 8 p.m. when Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, welcomes the world to the Opening Ceremony at Soldier Field.

The evening will feature over 1,400 dancers, acrobats and musicians, an Olympic-style procession of athletes and spectacular fireworks to conclude the show sponsored by ESPN.



Tonight's celebrity-packed event includes Erasure's Andy Bell (pictured at Circuit Nightclub - right), Margaret Cho, Frankie Knuckles, Jody Watley, Megan Mullally, Heather Small, Kate Clinton and more.

Organizers are promising one of the biggest and most diverse sporting events in the city's history.

The weeklong Gay Games VII will include 11,650 athletes from around the world participating in 30 sports. Games will be played at 33 venues throughout Chicago and the suburbs. ([Locate a sporting event](#)) 65 countries will be represented.

The Games – the seventh held since 1982 -- will also feature an arts festival, band and choral performances with more than 150 cultural events including ballroom dancing.

Founded by 1968 Olympic decathlon competitor Dr. Tom Waddell, the Gay Games were conceived so gay people worldwide could demonstrate their skills and competitive spirits in sports.

Earlier in the week at a downtown press conference, Chicago Mayor Daley urged Chicagoans to attend the Gay Games.

"This is a very important event for our great city, and today I'm encouraging all our residents, and in the surrounding communities, to welcome our visitors to our famous Chicago hospitality," Daley said.

Nearly 100,000 spectators and visitors are expected in Chicago creating an estimated \$80 million in local economic impact.

Closing ceremonies will be at 3 p.m. July 22 at Wrigley Field.

ChicagoPride.com is a sponsor of the Gay Games VII.

**Photo:** Erasure's Andy Bell (right) attending GLAAD's Champion Zone at Circuit Nightclub, presented by Absolut. ([View More](#))

*Photo by: Frank Failing*