



**Citation for the Award of  
Doctor of the University (DUniv) *honoris causa***

**Mr Josh Cavallo**

On 27 October 2021 Josh Cavallo's decision to open up about his sexuality was a hugely significant and very welcomed moment in both men's professional football and sporting history.

At just 21 years of age, overnight, Josh became a symbol of courage, bravery and inspiration in a sport behind the times, especially considering its universal popularity. The worldwide response was immense.

Choosing to speak out while an active player is something that sets Josh apart from other professional players that have come out before him, who have usually done so once retired.

Through publicly announcing that he is gay, Josh showed the world that taking care of one's own mental health and being your true self is more important than any social stigma.

Since his teenage years, Josh had felt he needed to hide a part of himself in order to have a successful career as a footballer. In his announcement, Josh said he had been hiding who he truly was to pursue a dream he always wished for as a kid. All he wanted to do was play football and be treated equally.

Still in the infancy of his career, the young Victorian made his A-League debut for Western United in the 2019-20 season. His off-season move to Adelaide preceded a breakout campaign with the Reds, for whom he made 19 appearances including 15 starts.

In June 2021, he was named the club's rising star, this was the catalyst in feeling like he needed to reconcile what he presented externally with how he felt inside. Saying that he felt numb and couldn't celebrate, Josh realised that having to constantly live in silence and hide his sexuality to the people he cared for wasn't the way he wanted to live and that his double life was having a huge impact on his mental well-being.

After ensuring he had the full support of his coaches, teammates and whole A-League club, he then felt ready to share his truth with the wider public. In doing so, he became the only active player in a top-flight league in the men's professional game anywhere in the world to have come out as gay or bisexual.

The Twitter post and emotive personal video, shared by Adelaide United, made international headlines and Josh Cavallo was top-trending globally across social media. As the news broke across the world, it elicited reactions from all corners of the game, and beyond. Dozens of players, clubs and governing bodies all around the world posted messages of support for Josh.

Australia's professional players union said it was a "wonderful moment" for him, the sport and "the LGBTQI+ community".

Josh's beloved Liverpool FC tweeted a message of support, praising his "strength and bravery". So, too did a number of Manchester United's top players, assuring him the entire football community stood

with him. AC Milan striker Ibrahimović retweeted the 21-year-old's emotional video released by the Reds saying "You are a Champion. Football is for everybody. Big respect."

In the hours following the video, others to retweet in solidarity came from the likes of FIFA, Manchester City, Arsenal, FC Bayer Munich, Juventus FC and even Hollywood stars such as Ricky Martin and Ellen DeGeneres.

Following coming out, Josh had hoped for a positive response, but was blown away at just how much attention the announcement gained. He didn't just want the weight off his own shoulders, but to set an example for others who may be struggling. The aim was to also show that everyone is welcome in the game of football, and deserves the right to be themselves and create future change, Josh stated:

*I hope that in sharing who I am, I can show others who identify as LGBTQI+ that they are welcome in the football community. As the game of football keeps expanding, I want to help evolve the game even further, and let other players in my situation feel that they re not alone."*

The worldwide support that Josh has received can serve as a beacon of hope for the future and equity in men's professional sports and beyond. The day following his public announcement, the first openly gay woman in federal Parliament, South Australia's Senator Penny Wong expressed *Any young person who is struggling with their identity, or feeling excluded or judged, can look today to Josh Cavallo. Thank you for your courage Josh. For reminding all that we are strong and we are here. And we are United."*

With a long career ahead, on and off the pitch, Josh Cavallo is a rarity in men's professional sport. He has earned the respect and gratitude of us all for his courage, authenticity and reminding us that visibility and representation matters. Flinders University celebrates this and are proud that, as an Adelaide United player, Josh currently wears the University's name emblazoned on his strip.

**Like our partner Adelaide United, Flinders University supports the embodiment of an inclusive community and in recognition of Josh's courage and strength, for paving the way for future generations and to stand by him and show our respect and unity for his actions, we are pleased to present Josh Cavallo with an Honorary Award of a Doctor of the University.**

**11 May 2022**