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# **“Basketball Diplomacy in Africa: An Oral History from SEED Project to the Basketball Africa League (BAL)”**

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**Transcript: Karabani  
Basketball Enthusiast  
Founder and Coach, B’Ball Kitaa  
NBA Broadcast Commentator  
Former Coach, Tanzania 3X3 National Team**

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**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Karabani, you've had a really fascinating career in the basketball world. I wonder if you could just for the record please state your name, and your age, and what first motivated you to become involved with basketball?

**Karabani**

Okay. I go by the name of Karabani. Just one word, Karabani, one name. What really got me into the game of basketball was Michael Jordan. When I was really young, I got to watch him play and it was just amazing what he was able to do on that basketball court. I was hooked.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Could you unpack that a little bit further for us in terms of: was it common to watch Michael Jordan and the NBA on television where you were growing up? And where exactly were you growing up when you first encountered him?

**Karabani**

At the time I actually got to watch Michael, it never used to be on live TV, it used to be on tapes, VHS tapes. Somebody would record it in the U.S. and at that particular time, my dad was a diplomat. He was in Zimbabwe. Yeah, that's where I was when I first started watching basketball and fell in love with the game.

So, it used to be somebody would travel from the U.S. come to Zimbabwe and tapes would go around and eventually you get to watch the game. Every now and then they had a small little segment on TV where you got to see highlights but not the full game.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

What about Michael Jordan drew you in?

**Karabani**

Everything. He is the ultimate competitor. I've never seen anybody up to date play the game like the way he did. He is the greatest basketball player. It made me want to learn more about the game. I went and tried to dig more into the game, learn the history about it. And I've been watching it ever since.

I did lose a little bit of some of the passion when he stopped playing and eventually Stephan Curry brought me back, but ever since, it's still the standard, the gold standard is Michael Jordan, the ultimate competitor. And I usually use that, I apply that to my everyday life. I truly believe when people say basketball is life, I really truly do believe that.

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**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Okay. Terrific. And so, when you first started watching Jordan, had you already started playing the game or not quite at that time?

**Karabani**

I did, I used to see some of my friends play the game and I tried it. I was terrible at it. At that time, the majority of people played soccer and tennis. Tennis is pretty big in Southern Africa, so I used to play tennis and soccer and just ran track and field. But basketball, I wasn't really good at it and I used to see people play and I was like, "Oh, that's probably just some other game. It's really not for me."

I just never really appreciated it until I saw Michael play, then I was like, "Whoa, you can actually do all that on a basketball court."

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Then with that in mind, could you describe a little bit how basketball, I guess its place in terms of who plays it or who is attracted to it has changed from the era of your childhood to now?

**Karabani**

At the time I was really young, I can't speak from the point of I knew how it was, but how it felt at the time. It was just the kids around me. I didn't think the adults that particular time were really interested in the game and I didn't think the game was that popular like the way it is today. Nowadays, it crosses different status and from the rich to the poor, different races, different everything, everybody's into it.

Everybody can have a common conversation and be like, "Hey, did you watch the game last night though?" "No," "I saw so-and-so." And people could actually engage into it. I didn't feel like it was like that back in the days, but I could be wrong. I was very small at the time.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Right. But that's really interesting, and so basketball is a common unifying connection, it sounds like today. Is it NBA basketball or is it just basketball in general?

**Karabani**

NBA basketball is the gold standard and then you have everything else. I do love just the finding out about different leagues and be the first one to know if a new phenom or the next player, so I tend to look around, try to find the next guy, but my eyes always go back to the game of basketball and back in the U.S. the NBA, that is the gold standard.

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So, everything else is like, “Oh, maybe this play eventually will make it to the NBA.” So, the destination is always the NBA. Everything else is like, “All right, I want to be the first guy to know what’s next.”

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Okay. Terrific. You’ve had a very interesting career in basketball both with the 5X5 side in the Federation as I understand it. You’re running the 3X3 part of the Federation and you’ve also been in broadcast journalism announcing the NBA and more. How has this very deep career in the sport influenced your understanding of the intersection of sports and diplomacy? The communication representation and negotiation that occurs around the court?

**Karabani**

I do believe very much when you talk of sports, it is one of the greatest unifiers. We have so many things that bring people together, but some tend to divide, but sports are one of those [things] that actually bring people together, it crosses borders and everything. It’s just I love this game, I love this game, and the game of basketball has been able to do that.

To me, the way I see it, specifically in Africa, I think the game of basketball brings people together a lot more even than the game of soccer. I know a lot of people look at me like I’m crazy even though soccer is such a big game, but the game of basketball is very different. A lot of influencers tend to love the game of basketball and bring in influencers with some of the regular people to actually play together on a court and just be regular people to share ideas and just share one common goal at that specific time trying to put a basketball through that basket and just... it’s just an amazing thing.

I saw it first-hand with the tournament that we usually have, the annual tournament [B’Ball Kitaa], you have very influential people within the country just come up to work out and play with bus drivers and just regular folks. And they out there and nobody cares who you are, what you are, what you do, is just one common goal and it’s after the game, the things that they share, it’s just a great unifier.

Sports does it, unlike religion or politics, it brings people together and then immediately just defies them, but not sports, not basketball.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

That’s really interesting. Could you tell us a little bit more about B’Ball Kitaa? Do I understand correctly that it’s a summer league? What is it exactly and how long has it been an existence?

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## **Karabani**

B'Ball Kitaa directly translated is street ball. That's what it is. *Kitaa* is a Swahili translation of street and B'Ball, basketball, street basketball. That's what it is. It was at the time when I moved from the U.S. to Tanzania, when I moved back to Tanzania and I was just missing the game of basketball.

I really loved the game of basketball and at that particular time nothing was happening. The league had stopped for whatever reason. It's a long story. The league was off, nothing was happening and I felt like I was yearning for the game. So, whenever I used to go to work and get done, whatever that I'm doing at the time, I always wanted to go somewhere and play and there was nothing.

So, I would bring some of the people from work and we would go out there and play, but it wasn't a lot of people. I work on the media side, so luckily, I'm able to bring things to light a little bit. I can record, I can try to put things together and broadcast or share it with people and that's what I wanted to do. I was like, "All right. Let me try to put a little story about the game of basketball and then try to put it on TV and maybe get people interested, and hey, we can go somewhere and play basketball."

So that was a goal, I tried to do that. I went to the biggest media company in Tanzania and the creative director was like, "This is just terrible. What you put together is just terrible." And I'm like, "All right, I can take criticism. What do you think we need to do?" He was like, "It's a lot of talking. Nobody's really playing basketball." I was like, "There you go. That was my goal. I'm trying to get people to come and play basketball and I just didn't have a lot of people playing basketball, so I ended up doing a lot of talk and just talking about the game."

He was like, "All right, since I'm directly working on this platform right here and I have a lot of followers, maybe I can help you." And I'm like, "Great, that's what I want to hear." So, we teamed together. He would try to bring the people, try to rally the people using his tool, which is the radio and TV and I had the cameras and everything, so we'll go out there, music, try to play basketball. And before we knew it, this thing became the biggest thing in Tanzania.

And we usually have a tournament during the summer, summer in the U.S. People tend to call summer, it's actually the cold season that time [winter].

## **Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

And so, you started this approximately what year? Just so that we can situate this.

## **Karabani**

The actual tournament started 2013, but this started when I first got here around 2010 during the elections, during the presidential elections, 2010.

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**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

And so, I understand that over the years you've taken the tournament winners to neighbouring countries to compete in international tournaments or games and competitions, but also to represent Tanzania as well. Could you tell me a little bit more about that and in terms of what some of your players might have communicated and represented about Tanzania and its basketball or what they might've learned about other game cultures or country cultures through that?

**Karabani**

Those are usually some of the best experiences. A lot of people, they play the game of basketball just so they could be able to do that because it's different. In the U.S., a lot of people could just, "Oh, I'm going on a vacation," and fly where to Cancun, fly away somewhere. Even though, yes, it's true, some people in the U.S. haven't even cross States, but vacation's a lot easier that you could just get up, pickup and go somewhere. A lot of people can do that.

It's not the same and Tanzania and a lot of African nations, so being able to just go somewhere, it is such an experience. I would say about two thirds of the players, the first time we travelled, two thirds of the players had never been out of the country. It was their first time being on a plane and it was such an experience just going out there, meeting different people from another country and just learning new cultures.

It was just an incredible experience for them. For me too, just being around them and just experiencing things through their eyes and how they saw everything. The first trip that we had was to Malawi and a lot of players from Malawi, it was the same thing for them. They enjoyed the experience of new players coming from another country and everybody wanted to be there, everybody wanted to meet them.

That exchange of ideas and people coming together, until today, I would say that was the biggest impact that we had because players from here and players from Malawi are still friends till this day. And this was 2014, that was the very first time we made our first international trip. So, it's been about six years and these guys still communicate till this very day.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

That certainly says a lot about the strength and the power of such endeavours. What's the age range of the players?

**Karabani**

When we first started, we really didn't care. I didn't think a lot of people would turn out. When we started B'Ball Kitaa, we said, "Everybody had to be between the age of 15 all the way to 55."

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We didn't want anybody that's too old. Anything can happen on the court and not too young, but it got really competitive.

Automatically, it just shaped itself into the top athletes. Now, in order for you to be able to play for a team, you have to be a really great player, really fit and in shape. So, it's actually top guys, top athletes in the country that actually participate. But at first it was anybody. We had mixed teams, guys and girls, we didn't care. We just wanted people to play.

Now it's all about winning, it's all about the money. It's all about what this can actually do for you, maybe travel outside of the country and all that. It's become really competitive, so the age range is probably around, I would say from 18 to 27. That would be the average.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

One of the questions that continuously comes up is in what ways is basketball and its growth and development helping if at all, to provide greater opportunities for girls and women to play and get involved as well as to benefit from the many different kinds of social and economic values that basketball has? What is it like in Tanzania? How has it changed and how is basketball for girls and women viewed?

**Karabani**

Unfortunately, it's still not on the same level as men's and boy's, but in terms of the girl's basketball team is actually performing better than the girls' basketball team. We're talking about under 18.

They're just more skilled. The girls are just more skilled and they're doing a lot better. But once we cross and then just go to the open, the men's over 18, it's all the focus and everything is on the guys and we tend to lose focus. And for whatever reason, a lot of the women tend not to... it's a culture, it is time I guess when they get serious with the lives and that kicks in and the culture here is not for women to go out there and play sports.

It's mainly... I don't want to put it that way, but pretty much falls into that, do something with your life, as in get a job, if you don't have a job, get married or just look beautiful so you can actually get married. That sounds pretty bad, but I would say that's the way it goes. I can't say I have the stats for it, but all I know that's the trend.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Has basketball for women in Tanzania, does it have a stigma or is it seen as more culturally acceptable than other sports like football or rugby for women to play?

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**Karabani**

I think it's culturally acceptable in Tanzania. I think sports in general at the time you become a woman, it's just not a thing, it's just not that big. We're trying to change that stigma, we're trying to change it, but it's really hard and it's as Bill Clinton put it, it's about the economy, stupid. I think it's really about that: why do you out there playing basketball? Why are you out there?

Even if it's accepted as a girl, that's fine, it's great. A lot of parents will allow their daughters to go play basketball, but when they get older, I don't want to say it's frowned upon, but it's not something that is accepted.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Along somewhat similar lines, from your perspective, what is the economic and social value of sport, particularly basketball in Tanzania and Southern Africa?

**Karabani**

Southern Africa, I think they're doing a lot better than Tanzania. Tanzania, they still look at basketball, specifically basketball as it's just the hobby, I don't think there's anything there. It doesn't have the type of influence that soccer/football has, and anything that can actually work for politicians is accepted. Soccer or football truly works for politicians because it has such an influence.

When it's time to get votes, they use that, specifically to bring people together so they can push whatever agenda they want to push. This is like you say, sports are a great unifier. It just brings a lot of different people together, they'll hold a tournament or something like that.

So, if you can do that, if you can use that as a tool or if you can get some of the athletes that are associated with that sport as a tool to push their own agenda, definitely they will look at it differently. In terms of economy, different companies will gladly and easily endorse soccer before they even decide to think about basketball. Basketball, it's when you just want to break a sweat, that's what you do. It's still looked upon that way.

At the time we started with B'Ball Kitaa, it was so forceful and so impactful. In our first year, Sprite joined us [as a sponsor], they were so excited. But it wasn't truly about the exposure, it was just the brand itself always associated itself with basketball, and it was fun, and all that, so they could capture a couple of images here and then try to push it.

But we actually gave them more than what they expected, they're like, "Wow, you guys, actually, this is even bigger than what we thought." That's what happened with them. It was more for CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility], not so much "let's get awareness through this



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specific tournament.” So, the economy is, I would say right now, the way it’s looked upon, we still have a long way to go and actually develop the industry itself. It will take a while, but a few people are starting to understand and with the latest soccer player, I don’t know if you’ve heard of him. He plays in Aston Villa.

He [Mbwana Samatta] plays for Aston Villa and he just got signed this year and everybody loves him. He is the star right now. He is Tanzania’s favourite player. Everybody found out how much money he made, it’s the equivalent of 20 million Tanzania shillings per day. That’s how much he is earning. And the government was like, “Whoa, we can actually... This is how much these guys could make.”

They asked me to sit down with a couple of other people involved with sports so we could figure out different ways to actually promote different sports, different games and see if we can create some more Samattas out there. Actually, right now, I would say the government has realized, there’s actually money in sports, but it’s the early stages.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Okay. And so, with that in mind, from your perspective to what, if any extent, does the government have any kind of sports diplomacy policies or is it still mostly undertaken by individuals and national teams? For example, Rwanda has a very solid sports diplomacy initiative of hosting events and sending partnerships with Paris Saint-Germain and Arsenal. Is Tanzania really doing anything in this space to your knowledge?

**Karabani**

To my knowledge, no, but I think, like I said, we are in the early stages. The government has been put on notice and they understand that something can be done here, but we are in the early stages. We are advocating or pushing for a lot of changes. I am really not sure if they’re really going to be implemented or not.

And in addition to that we have the elections coming up. I don’t know what’s going to happen, I don’t know if some of these people be back or not, but I believe in Africa in terms of sports and all that, nothing will really change unless the government is part of it. The government has a lot to do with it, so no matter how much we try as citizens, just the private sector, the government has to step in.

That’s what we’re trying to advocate, we’re trying to get them involved, like you say [Rwandan President Paul] Kagame is doing and what’s happening in Senegal in different ways. But in Tanzania up to now, we have not seen any major initiatives, but I think with this call that I recently got from the government, I think they’re definitely leaning towards that side, seeing that, oh, there’s definitely a possibility here.

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**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Okay. That leads a little bit into one of my other questions about who is playing roles in helping to develop or conduct basketball diplomacy in Tanzania and in Africa more generally. And so, it sounds like, at least for Tanzania right now, it's community leaders such as yourself and perhaps Federations who are starting to do this also backed by some of the NBA programs like and Junior NBA.

**Karabani**

That is very true, but funny you mentioned Federations. Apart from Rwanda and Egypt, the two functioning Federations in Africa, every other Federation is terrible. That's what I'm hearing from all the trips that we've had different matches with different countries and all that, every country is complaining about their Federation.

The problem is in majority of these Federations, people do not get paid and what really moves people out here is getting paid. Now, as long as it's a game where I go out there, break a sweat and I don't have to do so much, it's okay, but when I have to sweat, think, and just follow up on issues, and try to make things happen, and at the very same time I can barely make enough money to support myself it's a tall order and that's what we've come to find out.

So, there's a lot of corruption because there are possibilities of making money when you deal with international tournaments, when you deal with what sports in general. Every now and then something will happen that requires teams to travel or every now and then a company would want to put money, some special events, so there's money every now and then that comes in. So, you have people within Federation that use the Federation for whatever they might want.

It could be just a rally the youth, be seen as in you're real close to the youth, so when you want to run for something, for a government position or something like that, you're popular or something like that. So, I would say Federations, no. No in terms of that, the community, yes, and just individuals from the private sector, yes. They're the ones who are really driving this thing right now.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Okay. So very much a grassroots level-

**Karabani**

Yes.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

If these are the people who are helping to conduct and develop the game and basketball diplomacy such as it were, who inspires the kids to play?

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**Karabani**

It's the same people, the same influences, the same whoever's actually trying to make that movement, trying to rally people will try to inspire. And we do have the NBA, we do have highlights, we do have Stephen Curry out there shooting threes from everywhere. Every now and then when you have a clip just going viral, sharing on WhatsApp or something, it works.

People want to come out there and just try to be like their heroes or their favourite players from the NBA, and that's... Earlier, I said, the NBA is the gold standard, it's the standard out there and it plays a major role. I think the NBA is a great influencer and a great inspiration, so we use it. We try to effectively use it every time there's a huge match or something like that.

For instance, every now and then I'll have watch parties or something like that just to get the kids to come and watch and just rally people. So, it's the very same people that are trying to make a change or just promote the sport are the same people that are trying to inspire using the NBA one way or the other.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

What do you think some of these kids are learning from watching their heroes or being inspired by their heroes to the game?

**Karabani**

Now the coach in me is going to come out. All right. When I look at it from that standpoint, it's actually pretty bad because what's happening is a lot of these kids will watch highlights and the game of basketball is very different, that's why they call those highlights. You see them here and there and that is the problem. So, we have a bunch of kids going out there, trying to be individual players, trying to do exactly what they saw on TV, highlights and that's a problem.

So, really understanding the game and just having that basketball IQ is an issue out here because we truly do not have people that truly do understand the basics. That's the biggest problem as we go off. Even though the NBA does great for us in terms of influencing, at the same time, it really takes away from the game of basketball, like that beautiful game of basketball where people actually played together, team sport. That is as a problem.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

So, it sounds like it's a little bit different in that way. For example, when you were a kid, you watched entire games on VHS and so you did not have the same kind of highlights only exposure and intro into the game versus my understanding today, a lot of kids, they'll watch those highlight clips on their phones or through social media and it's a very different entry into the game.

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**Karabani**

Yes. That's a very good point that you bring up. Yes. That's a fact. I think back in the days, you just got a tape, the full thing. So, you sat there, you're like, "Wow." And there wasn't really a whole lot on TV. You didn't have a phone, you didn't have anything, it's old school. Wow. I'm honestly saying that I'm old school.

Nowadays, they just have so much, they have access to so much and just having a phone, a computer on the palm of your hand. They just want to see a whole lot, so it's not just Stephen Curry, it's not just LeBron James, it's not just Kyrie, it's not Kevin Durant. It's from one highlight to the next, to the next.

The patience to actually watch the whole game and seeing other players, role players play the game, it just doesn't have that time. And at the same time, they just don't have the internet bundles to watch the full game because that's going to cost them money. So, what they see is just the highlights. You're very right.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

From your perspective, what would be some possible solutions to this to try to get the kids beyond just the highlights and into the larger exposure of the game there in Tanzania?

**Karabani**

It's a tricky scenario because you've got to get them interested, and getting them interested is by watching those highlights, it's how beautiful the game could be. But at the same time, we need coaches. We need coaches that actually understand the game. The problem is: some of those coaches were also introduced to the game through highlights or they love the game from way back and did watch the games, but they didn't have proper coaching. So, their understanding of the game, also, is not all that great.

So, we tend to lack that, we tend to lack that in our style of basketball in Africa. You find a lot of teams are very athletic, they focus more on just being fit, the conditioning, but the IQ aspect of it, the sports and just really understanding the fundamentals, the majority of the time it is lacking.

So, the only way we can do that, the way I see it, is to teach coaches. That way, the game will change, that way the game will develop in Africa. We're talking about referees also, better referees will be able to officiate the game a lot better and players will understand the game a lot better and also eventually become coaches, and eventually be become part of the industry as it grows.

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If they're going to be doctors, or just broadcasters, or agents or something like that, they will also understand the game a lot better. That's the way I see it. So, it starts off with coaches, the way I see it. We've got to focus on coaches.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

That knowledge exchange. This ties into one other question I had: how do you hope to use basketball to help kids in Tanzania, or Africa more widely, to dream and work to make their dreams come into reality, even if that is not becoming the next LeBron James?

**Karabani**

The reason I really got into it, being part of this basketball community here, was to specifically do what you just asked me, is to help them, because not every kid will become a doctor, not every kid will have the book smarts, but a lot of kids here are very athletic and physically, they're gifted.

So, I realize I'm in a position where I can actually help them up and make them understand what they can do. Just being very athletic, you can make a lot of money out there. So, what I tend to do is not only just try to coach, or just try to hold tournaments, or do stuff like that, I spend a lot of time talking to them. Just try to get them to read, or understand, or follow different people's path to how they got to where they got.

So, we can actually have an industry, not just the game of basketball, I'm talking about you could go play the game of basketball, I could bring you out here and play the game of basketball. You might not be the LeBron James or you might not be the Michael Jordan or Stephen Curry, but guess what? You could be the team doctor.

You could be a trainer, you could be the owner of the team. There's just so many possibilities around the game of basketball itself. It's just a lot of people are not aware of that. They were thinking that, "all right, if I'm going to go out there, it's just playing basketball., then people look at basketball like there's no money."

But if we create this game and to what it could become, that one sport that people really love where we're not inventing it. We've seen it happen elsewhere, just not here. But if we can get it to that position, they can also make money, they can also make a lot of money and help the families. And by us having those tournaments, and people coming in, they'll make a little money.

Instead of them paying to participate in the tournament, the way we did it was that we have people come in and we give them transportation money and a little money probably to buy something to eat while they are there competing. And this had never been done before, so they're

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like, “Oh wow. At least now my parents allow me to come out here because I never spend my money.” And this is what I was hearing from some of the players.

We gave them like 5,000 [shillings] that’s equivalent to like I would say about USD \$2.50, something like that. Right. So, they will spend about 1,000 [shillings], that’s like around USD \$0.50, for transportation, and the rest probably they take it back home and buy a couple of things here and there.

One told me, “Yeah, I give some of the money to my mom.” And I didn’t know that. At first, I was shocked. I was like, “What?” This is what they’re doing. I didn’t know that. So, they really enjoy that and talking to them about the possibilities and all that. Players were always excited to hear about the possibilities, what could happen.

But the only issue is that the possibilities will never happen in a short span of time. So, some of them would come and get excited for a year or two and if things don’t [materialize] then they’re like, “Oh no, this is not happening.” My goal is to just educate them, if we go at it, if we try to keep doing this thing that we can help ourselves, we don’t really need other people to come and help us.

We can actually do it ourselves if we get people to appreciate this game, like the way we appreciate this game. So, I try so much to do that is just through talking to them so they can actually spread the word.

### **Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

That leads into another area I’d wanted to ask you about, the NBA and FIBA’s Basketball Africa League, which is billed as helping to build a basketball ecosystem across Africa. It’s obviously too early to really assess, but from your perspective, what are the potential opportunities and challenges of the BAL and how might that directly impact your work or basketball more generally in Tanzania?

### **Karabani**

I actually love what’s happening. I love what’s happening, I’m really glad this is happening because it’s going to bring a lot of challenges. And I believe through challenges, that’s when good things happen just like what’s going through what I was just saying earlier, things don’t happen in one year, or two years, or something like that. It’s going to be a lot of challenges and those challenges will be number one, I actually do not like that they’re going through FIBA.

I don’t like the way FIBA is set up in Africa. I feel like it’s totally based in the West, West Africa, it’s really, they’ve like turned their shoulders towards Eastern Africa and a little bit in Southern Africa, but I don’t feel FIBA’s presence is really high in an Eastern Africa for whatever

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reason. I don't blame them, but for whatever reason that's the case and if they're going through FIBA, it's going to be the same way.

The challenges are a lot of teams in East Africa and Southern Africa, it's tough for them to travel going West because a lot of those tournaments are held West. So, the participation or even thinking about making it out there, it's tough, it's really tough for them. And until you actually make it past the qualifying and all that, it's on you, it's really on you. Financially, it's on you.

So, the financial toll of just preparations and everything trying to make it to become one of the teams that actually get to play in Bowl, it's a little much too much for a lot of different teams, so it's going to be the usual suspects or certain teams will do better, certain countries will do better because everything is somewhat already in their favour.

I don't blame the NBA, it's all about who is able. It's not a charity case, they're not coming out here to save Africa or anything like that, so it makes perfect sense what they're doing. Take Kagame, he understood what was going on, he built something. At least they have an arena out there, it's attractive.

Even if their team is not the best, but they will make the effort to actually get something going out there because there's already that infrastructure. Now, a lot of these other countries do not have the infrastructure in addition to that. So those are some of the challenges that will face a lot of countries, a lot of teams on the early stage.

But at the same time, let's say everything works out for the BAL and everything leading to the competitions, to the teams that are going to be competing. Let's say everything works out, what's that going to happen is I look at Africa only... The Africa trade is what, like 16% within [the continent]. It's pretty bad. The trade within Africa is just terrible.

The tourism within Africa, it's terrible. Earlier we talked about some of these kids just going out there and competing in the next country. It was like their first time getting on a plane and just going out, so this will open a lot of doors. This will force a lot of governments to evaluate their immigration systems because now you have certain players who are going to get picked from one country to go play in another country and then eventually, let's say this country makes it, then maybe they build some kind of arena, so players are coming this side.

It's a lot of different challenges. For instance, in Tanzania, people that deal with naturalization, I think it's like two or three people, the whole country, not a lot of people get naturalized. And in terms of taxes, just having different people come get work permits or stuff like that within the country is also not an emphasis for the government, but then when you have something that's actually working, and it's pretty big, and constantly people traveling back and forth, it's just

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going to wake up different governments that, “Hey, this is happening, this is big. We cannot deny it. We have new challenges and we have to figure this out.”

And that is going to also help people who are not playing the game of basketball. It’s just that will shed light into something greater and that’s what I’m excited about. Even if basketball does not work, it’s going to force our countries to trade, it’s going to force our countries to fix some of the continental issues.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

So, do you have any kind of crystal ball in terms of where you would ideally see the BAL in five years? Particularly in terms of how it might help to open up opportunities for other teams, or other countries, or player development, or to your earlier point coaching development?

**Karabani**

In five years, what I’m seeing something the BAL is going to be doing that I don’t really see a lot of different companies or investors coming to Africa doing well. I’m sure there’s some that are doing that, I’m just probably not aware of them is actually coming to Africa and getting raw material as in product and these will be players in this case and actually polishing them or putting them in their final state still within Africa, instead of coming to Africa, extracting gold, or diamond, or whatever and going to cut it elsewhere and then adding value elsewhere and then selling it there.

So now what the BAL is going to be doing, what the NBA is going to be doing is they have these different academies and everything, so develop talent in Africa for Africa until you get a finished product in Africa. That means a lot to me. Just the value that will be created within Africa. That’s what I’m seeing in five years.

I’m seeing a lot of great players being exported as players, not, “Oh this is a great project here. We’re going to develop this player. Let’s get this play and then develop this player.” And then whoever develops that player eventually makes all the money and they get all the credit. So that’s what I’m seeing. It’s just an opportunity for Africa to actually create value from scratch and I think Bowl is going to be doing that, they’re going to be responsible for that.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

From your perspective, how do you view the BAL in terms of how you think it might impact the way that Africa communicates and represents about itself to the wider world?

**Karabani**

Oh. Its kind of relates to the last answer that I gave you. Now instead of us just exporting raw materials like I said, we can’t cut diamonds to as perfection and all that. Like, no, no, no, no. I



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don't trust them to do that. Let us do that. The BAL, I think the NBA allows Africans to actually do that and I think that narrative will change.

I am looking at the junior NBA global championship, the African team has made it to the finals each year. And we're talking about Africa right now. You look at the NBA right now, you don't see a lot of guards. Guards tend to be the skilled players. Centers, I'm not saying they're not skilled, but they're not as skilled as guards.

You don't see a lot of guards coming from Africa. You see a lot of guards from the U.S. and some from Europe, but not Africa because that's a high IQ position. So now when we talk of Africans being able to actually do something and finish it to the point where the world appreciates, that's a totally different narrative now. That's a totally different narrative and I like that.

I always feel like Africans don't get a lot of credit. Nobody comes out saying that Africans are this way, but there's always this joke out there you hear African presidents talk and they're talking a foreign language and they're not that articulate or it just doesn't flow out all that well. They just don't sound as smart and there's this narrative that Africans are just a little... they're like two steps behind.

So, I think this is going to change that narrative in a way. I'm not saying it's going to erase it, but it's the way forward that yes, we can.

### **Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

And so, the BAL is an African initiative. So many of the major, the operators, it's visionary Amadou Fall, they're all African. But yet the NBA is very clearly a North American entity. In your mind, from your perspective, do you see the BAL as more African, more global? Is it kind of neo-colonial because of the NBA connection?

### **Karabani**

The way I look at things nowadays, you just got to deal with something that's actually going to work for you and it's going to help you to a certain degree. I still look at BAL as a foreign entity coming to Africa and actually exploiting it in one way or the other to meet its goals. But as long as you're also getting something back, I'm okay with it. As long as you understand exactly what they're doing.

And I still look at it the same way, I see it as, yeah, neo-colonialism, you could look at it that way. It was kind of the same way, you come here, you get the chiefs, get the chiefs to do the dirty work, but it's different now. Communication is different and like the way I see different

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people as I go across Africa, they're a lot smarter now and I hope that will be the case that people will understand exactly what's happening here, it's a business transaction.

This is not the NBA coming to Africa to save Africa. That is not the case. This is business at the end of the day. And as long as that is very clear, it's fine with me. Businesses are there to make profits, to make money whichever way they can. And that's the way I still see it. So, you can call it whatever it is because it is a Western entity.

No matter how you dress it, who you put there, at the end of the day, people that do make those decisions are still from the West. That's the way I see it and I think, I'm not going to say everybody else sees it that way, but majority of the people that I do talk to understand that. And that's why I am okay, I'm happy. As long as you know who you're dealing with, you will know how to deal with them.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

And that speaks to a related point. The NBA has this very American identity even as it's over the past 20 years become a very global and international league where one in four players is born and trained overseas, including evermore African players. Do you still see the NBA as American or do you see it more global in its identity?

**Karabani**

The NBA's still American, is still very much American. There's something about the NBA, there's something about the game of basketball is just American. America is the best promoter, the best at selling itself and it's done it in such a way, I don't know, maybe it'll take years until that changes, I think.

A lot of people look at the game of basketball and then directly you think America. You look at the game of basketball, you think Michael Jordan, Michael Jordan is American. You just think America. It doesn't matter how many people play it. And unlike soccer right now, football, you'd be like, "Wait a minute, who started? I'm not sure. I'm not sure."

But when you think of basketball, when you think of the NBA, I would say it could be 90% of the players come from the rest of the world, but I think it will still be American. There's just something about it.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

And extrapolating on that, do you view the game of basketball itself to be an American sport or is it just a global sport at this point regardless of its original roots, although it was invented by a Canadian?

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**Karabani**

It is an American sport that is global. That's the way I view it right now. Even though, yeah [basketball creator James] Naismith, but it is an American sport.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

Okay. And then I also wanted to ask you a question about the role of 3-on-3 basketball in Tanzania, which I understand you're heavily involved in. The 3X3 game has been billed as a way to open up greater opportunities not just for players but also for other teams or countries that might not historically have the same sorts of resources and opportunities to excel in the 5-on-5 game. So, could you just talk a little bit to the question of what is the role and impact of 3-on-3 basketball in Tanzania? What specifically is your role in that? And How do you think that might help to open up opportunities for the sport more generally in Tanzania?

**Karabani**

At the time we're talking right now, I've been the very first 3-on-3 coordinator, the time it started here until now, even though I was suspended for a little bit. Again, it's the Federation. I don't really want to get into it so much, though we could get into it, but it's a long conversation.

And currently right now they're trying to get me back and we've been having these talks, so I'm still considered to be the coordinator. Now, going into that, they asked me to be the coordinator because I've been running the tournament, the B'Ball Kitaa tournament and I've been able to find funds to actually do things, be able to have teams travel internationally and all that is going out there getting those funds.

So that's one of the reasons, and I'm also coach, is just I love the game of basketball now I will do anything and everything. In a way I know the Federation is using me. It's like I was saying, you get the people as long as you know what you're doing. So, they gave me that position specifically because of that. They know that this guy loves the game so much, he's going to do everything to make sure this works.

Like the fool that I am, of course, that is what I'm doing because I love it. But I truly do believe the game 3-on-3, it's a lot cheaper and it's easier to have an impact right now. It's wide open, it's for the taking. The game of 5-on-5, it's actually based off 3-on-3. Whenever somebody has the ball, that's actually three players are playing at that particular time until he swings to the strong side again, whichever side is on is three players.

I look at the game of 3-on-3 as a great game where it could be a way to jump into the 5-on-5, but the way the Olympics right now look at it as a standalone game. So, either way you look at it, it's something that needs to be there, it's something that needs to be there. But then it's flashier and

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it just opens the door a lot quicker for this country, meaning that you can actually break out and have success almost immediately if you're serious with it.

And when I saw that, I liked that, I was like, "Oh, okay. So now I don't really need to go out there and try to get a whole lot of money for us to actually do stuff." And I jumped into it, when they asked me, I jumped into it. We had some great success our first year. We got to travel, we got to go to different tournaments, and actually our under 18 boys for the very first time, I'm talking about 5-on-5 or whatever, just any team, they made it to AfroBasket at the top.

We made it our first year. Tanzania doesn't make it anyway. We're just not big on sports, we just don't invest a lot in sports. So, seeing that, that was just huge, and we got invited to different things, go here, go there, and actually even got equipment just because of that. And that's when everything just got messed up again with corruption, with everything. Once there's money involved and things are happening, that's where I was suspended because money came into the country and I didn't know through the Federation, people did some stuff and all that.

Okay, now I'm talking about this story, which I said I wasn't going to talk about, but I see 3-on-3 years away to actually get this nation, get this country going. I feel like it could be that inspiration because we do a chance, we do have a chance to have an impact, instant impact if we act upon it, the possibilities are great because nobody is really dominated or cornered 3-on-3 yet.

So, it's easy to crack, and to the global picture, and to the biggest platform out there and actually compete. That's the way I see it. So, this is our way to sneak in there and make a name for ourselves.

### **Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

In what ways does 3-on-3 offer Tanzania the opportunity to really engage in sports diplomacy in a way that 5-on-5 has just been more difficult? Here, I'm thinking more in terms of the way that your success at the international level has been able to put Tanzania on the map in a way that it hasn't been in the sport before. How does that communicate or represent about Tanzania and its basketball with the 3-on-3?

### **Karabani**

Success attracts and people love to be successful. People listen to you when you're successful. You have a chance to be heard and I think that is why in sports, or basketball, or anything out there is just a great way to open up dialogues and own that because you'll have attention, the attention that you need to actually have that or the platform that you need.

And 3-on-3 being that vessel that could actually put us on that position to actually have conversations or to actually have... there about what? 56 million people in Tanzania? Whenever

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anybody makes it in Tanzania, meaning a boxer, a soccer player, football players say, or basketball team, or basketball player makes it, the whole nation kind of like turns around because we don't have that kind of success a whole lot. It's always new.

When we had Hasheem Thabeet make it to the NBA as number two draft pick, the whole nation was talking about it. So, if he wanted to have a conversation with Tanzania or if he wanted to have a conversation with another country, Tanzania will be more than willing to actually listen to them or the attention will shift go that side or whatever he did. You could use that to engage in to conversations and all that.

So, I think 3-on-3, if we're serious about it and... we could actually use it just for that. Like what you're saying, it's a lot easier because it's just not as tough as 5-on-5 right now.

**Dr Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff**

So, bringing this all together, in your mind, what is the benefit of basketball and diplomacy in Africa or in Tanzania? You can answer either part of that.

**Karabani**

I want to jump to Africa. I am very excited with Bowl just like what I was saying just now, any time you have something big that a lot of people love or a lot of people attracted to, it just brings a lot of tension. Like I said earlier, nothing is going to happen unless the government is involved.

And the NBA is big enough to be able to engage with the government. Us as the community or just the private sector, we're not as big. Whenever we talk, the government doesn't really listen. At times, they pretend like they're listening, but they're not listening. But when you have an entity that can actually have different leaders, or listening, or just pay attention to it, whether they like it or not, it's going to spark conversations and people are going to be aware of something that's happening and that's going to trigger something.

And this is what I am really excited about with BAL coming to Africa, coming to the continent. This is what's going to happen. I feel like we are going to be engaged at so many levels, it's just going to do wonders and it's just not the game of basketball. I'm talking about trade, I'm talking about just immigration, being able to move and just the movement of money and all that. It's just the possibilities are endless and it begins with the game of basketball.

END

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## **Interview with Karabani, February 2020**

*Basketball Enthusiast & Founder, B'Ball Kitaa*

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