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Law in Sport Diversity and Inclusion Working Group  
Race and Ethnicity in Sport Oral History Project

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**Transcript: Abdul Buhari**

**Conducted by Saurabh Mishra**  
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## **Saurabh Mishra**

What is your conception or idea of diversity? To what extent do you consider sport and/or law to be diverse?

## **Abdul Buhari**

I think sport is very diverse, But I do think it depends on what sport you look at. For instance, if you look at football in the UK, I think it is incredibly diverse, however it is diverse only to the extent where you get a lot of black athletes. I don't think you get enough representation of the subcontinent in football, and certainly not in the Premiership. You have plenty of football in the subcontinent itself, but this is not currently represented in the Premiership. If you look at other sports, like swimming, there are hardly any black swimmers. That's not because black men can't swim, it's just because at this point we don't even consider it to be our sport. Broadly speaking, also from all hierarchy points of view, I think diversity could certainly be better, because the management isn't representative of the sport.

What does diversity look like? For me, the best way to describe it is that it looks colourful. I think the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) needs to embody everything, all colours, all race, a representation of our environment and our communities. I think opportunity is fundamentally key to this. I think sadly, it's a bit of a postcode lottery at times in terms of accessibility to sports. I think social mobility plays a significant part in that. Certainly, access to opportunity is probably one of the key things; you could argue that not just in sports but generally any industry, that this opportunity itself is not fairly distributed - as it should be. We need for the senior decision makers in sport to actually want to do this. If you look at football, for example, most of the senior individuals within the FA, within my own sport, athletics, whatever the sport may be actually, the CEOs are white, the Chairmen are white, most of the executive board is white. As you go across these sports and look at the communities involved throughout the sport, the boards are not actually representative of the sport.

## **Saurabh Mishra**

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What motivated you to choose a career in the realms of sport and law? What are the notable barriers you can identify or have faced/continue to face individually, along the way? How have you sought to respond to these barriers?

**Abdul Buhari**

I chose athletics because I really enjoyed it. I chose my event, the discus, because I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed watching it fly, as simple as that! But I also like the fact that I got the opportunity to travel, meet new people all the time, and that really was a big appeal for me. To be able to build relationships up and down the country initially, and then eventually, more locally in Europe and then even further across the world. I also enjoyed the competitive nature of it. I love the adrenaline in competition. I even love the adrenaline after losing, and wanting to learn, improve, and go and win again.

I think what I've learned in terms of my sport was, I was acutely aware of the barriers because I was a black athlete doing the discus throw, an event predominantly ever done by white individuals. So most black athletes would do the sprints. You look back in British history, even in world history; you don't find many discus throwers who are black. It is typically the Europeans and the Americans, and mostly the Eastern Bloc. So I was acutely aware of that. I was also acutely aware of this when I competed in Europe, as I encountered racism because of the events I did. Was it a barrier? It was and it was not. It was more of a constant frustration than a barrier. The barrier I think I encountered was the fact that I didn't have enough role models. I couldn't see anyone like me that did my event, there was no one I could see in terms of aspiration, so I almost had to go searching for something. I don't honestly think it was a massive thing, but I do think it was something that I was again acutely aware of. I don't think I've faced big barriers beyond the fact that I didn't have the support as a young child coming through, because of the event I chose. In terms of sponsorship, you get lots more support if it's an event that we're well versed with, and know lots about it, an event in which we've had many successes in it historically. In the event I did, there was less of that so I would say getting that support was a barrier, because then you have to go hunting for that information in order to get better. So for me, the biggest barrier was not having the support as a child and not having the support as I was coming through as an athlete to the international ranks, and not having as much guidance, as I would have liked and hoped for.

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I wanted to be the change. Of course I wanted to do well for myself, but I wanted to be the change not to spite somebody, but because the people have got to see it. I wanted to be the person that was going to be seen, because while I've moaned about it, at the same time, I wanted to change it. So by actually representing myself or my country, hopefully, I'm inspiring more and more athletes, irrespective of colour, particularly the ones from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, to at least take up the sport, or at least have a go!

**Saurabh Mishra**

If you could do just one thing in this realm in order to make sport more inclusive and more diverse, what would that be?

**Abdul Buhari**

I would do something where I would change the leadership setup such that it's more diverse. I think by making it more diverse, what the people will then be able to see perhaps is how the sport could be. So by encouraging more people from a BAME background to take up more leadership roles, I think what you're doing is inadvertently, creating an atmosphere that is more diverse. You're showing to the wider community that the representation is accurate of what's going on in this sport. So yes, I think that is the one thing I will change, because that's the only way you're going to move things forward. You have to have more diverse people working at the senior level, you're going to have more diverse thoughts, more diverse ideas, and hopefully more diverse solutions that incorporate and represent the community in an all-encompassing manner.

**END**

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**Interview with Abdul Buhari**

**Conducted by Saurabh Mishra**

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