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

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Nancy Brobbey

What is your conception or idea of diversity?

Bradley Pritchard

It's certainly not a straightforward concept, it's not just mixing, but it's the acknowledgement, the recognition and the welcoming of different characteristics, traits and perspectives. It would have to require those three elements for it to be authentic.

My experience of sport is diverse, but purely from the perspective of race, specifically in football. I would say it is diverse in terms of race, not necessarily culturally, and this is only in English football. It's certainly not diverse in terms of sexual preference, for example, there aren't any openly gay players in men's football currently. I think that maybe only a handful have actually come out as being gay after retirement, so that doesn't meet the criteria of being welcoming. It may recognize that there are many, but the culture isn't necessarily, or has not been, welcoming of diversity in that sense, because there's an implication that it's linked to performance - That maybe you're not as strong, or whatever the prejudice behind being gay was, it's been just fuelled and corrupted, and in a way to fit into relating it to performance; I think that's why people then haven't felt able to come out, but also the example of Justin Fashanu. The reaction to someone like Justin Fashanu coming out as gay and how he had to deal with it, and the tragic consequences as a result of that impeded a lot of young players who may have thought of doing the same, and Fashanu's experience has stopped them from wanting to follow. Also, the attention that is going to come off the back of that, because playing in front of 25- 30,000 people, many shouting abuse at you, is daunting. What you don't want to do is then add fuel to the fire, to be different, because that difference gets picked upon. What people try and do is to assimilate to a culture. The problem is for you to do that over 90 minutes. You've got to almost embody that, you've got to wear that body armour as it were, during training and all. The body armour allows you to cope with the rigors of playing professional sport.

In my opinion, with regard to law being diverse, I don't think it is. I went into the Immigration Department at Mishcon de Reya, and our department was extremely diverse. We had paralegals,

who were from the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, myself, from Southern Africa. It was actually quite multicultural. The problem was the law firm as a whole, for instance I was the only male black person who had a legal position. All the other black guys worked in the mail department, they were security guards, they were in the printing rooms; And I would go and have lunch with them, because I felt more comfortable with them. It wasn't very diverse, which is actually quite scary considering Mishcon would celebrate the fact that they were progressive in comparison to other law firms. I don't know if that's true, but I know, as of two weeks ago, when I looked at their websites, they published stats for their lead statistics when it came to gender, but they didn't publish any with regard to race. It kind of makes you think, why would you provide one and not the other? I wouldn't say it's a very diverse environment.

When you're a player, that's all you see, you see the diversity is within the changing rooms, because that's your environment, that's all you know. When you step out of the game, and you start looking ahead, well, what's the next position? Coaching? What else? Boards? Club ownership? So we have positions of authority, and here it's not diverse at all. The FA are trying to change, but I think that there's an acknowledgement of there being a lack of diversity there. I'm saying that as someone who is one of the chairs on the judicial panel, which is the disciplinary process. I can see that there are a lot of attempts to be as diverse as possible with regard to panel members, not just race, but also gender and skill set.

I guess you look at how it was and how it has developed over years, with regard to who were the people who were normally seen as lawyers. These are normally men from typically redbrick institutions that would then be from the middle to upper classes, socio- economically, because they had the opportunity in these professions, to look at professions like accountancy, law, and architecture. There's a certain status that law carries. For anyone who doesn't come from that background, to enter into it, firstly, you've got to have the opportunity, the means, then also, you have to assimilate, which means you've got to kind of see what the culture is, acknowledge that and then decide that you yourself have to change or adapt to fit into that.

Linked to sport, you don't want to be different, because being different leads to unnecessary attention, which can be used against you. I think that the difference between law and sport, is that in sport when you're playing, it's a meritocracy, it's based on skill. So whatever adversity someone faces, if you're good enough, you'll make it. That argument is taken across with regard to sport,

positions of authority, and then in law, again, that same thing, that idea of a culture actually being the meritocracy. But it's not the case that only the smartest go into law. It's who's given the opportunity, who's able to fit into the culture, and be accepted by those who are there. The people who are already there, enjoy that sense of belonging, and they want other people to mirror that.

The other elements of it is that because they then become gatekeepers, it puts a lot of significance and a lot of importance on them and the way they see the world. If they're open, if they're accepting, then it's easier for diversity or different types of people to come through. If not, then who do they choose? They simply choose people who reflect their way of life.

Nancy Brobbey

What are the notable barriers that you can identify or have faced or continue to face individually along the way? Have you sought to respond to any of these barriers?

Bradley Pritchard

Firstly, my reason for going into sports was just enjoyment, financial and because it's a career and also the status. It was the idea of, wanting to do something that other people weren't able to do, and having that opportunity to do that. It's an ego boost, I guess. My reason for going into law was to make a difference. But then also saying that it still plays into the ego boost, doing something that other people maybe haven't done, wanting to be a role model in that sense, and again, financial.

The reason I stepped out of it was because I didn't have that enjoyment. One of the reasons for that was the lack of diversity. How did I respond to that? I left. Some people may say, why didn't you try and stay in there to change the culture? But I thought that I could make a bigger change by addressing issues that prevented people even considering that as a profession. It's all well and good, is that I'm working in law, but if I'm never ever going to reach or talk to young people who, for a brief moment considered law, then realize that they haven't got the socio-economic means to do that? Or that they haven't got the background? The family stability to do that? What was the point of me doing that? I was just doing that for the sake of my own ego. I left and then wanted to

actually work directly with children and young people. I felt that this isn't just the law, but a psychological barrier that was preventing people from aspiring. The barrier was so great, that it was important for me to address that rather than staying in law.

To me anyway, anyone who is a minority, and is looking at law, and they're applying for training contracts, they're already the ones who don't need to be helped, in the sense that they're not the priority, they've already faced discrimination. They've already jumped through untold months of hoops that have been obstacles for them, just like you say, firstly, academically, get the grades, then financially raise up the income to go somewhere, then after that, apply to magic circle firms, put in the commitment and the hours required for that, then get an interview. They've done all that they've done all the hard work. Their level of resilience isn't just developing, it's calcified, it's become stronger and stronger. Whatever happens after that, that's their own decision that they're making. But at least they've built up a certain level of resilience that makes you think you know what, whatever you decide to go into, I think you're going to be successful because you've had to really go through all those barriers.

When I was a paralegal, it was a Friday night and the head of the department was just doing a little feedback session over how the quarter had been. I had a book in my pocket, because I was about to go and one of the partners looked at it and saw what book it was - *The Master and Margarita* by Bulgakov, it's a Russian novel. The partner said to me, 'Oh, I didn't know, is that the book you're reading?' 'Yes, a very good book.' The partner then replies 'I didn't know Zimbabweans read that type of book.' I was like, ah, it's a Friday night, I can't. I chose not to address that. Maybe it was this backhanded compliment because it's not exactly a very popular culture type of book. It was literally like the Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie interview where she was interviewed by a French journalist. The journalist said, how would you describe your books? Are you happy that Nigerians are reading your books? And then after that, she said, Are there other bookshops in Nigeria? Adichie said the fact that you actually had to ask that, speaks so lowly about French people. It turns out that this journalist was just trying to be ironic, but she wasn't very good at it. She got a lot of backlash for that. There was racism implied there and I think that there was that kind of a similar thing where whether this woman or the partner was trying to be ironic, or whether it was like a backhanded compliment, or he or she was just trying to be funny. But it was these types of things that made me think, I don't really need to be here, I'm going to go elsewhere. But going

back to my original point, because I had the resilience in me after having gone through all the different things, I was able to be self-confident enough to know that it wasn't a ladder that I was willing to climb. It's important then to instil these building blocks. It's just creating that framework on which to build resilience. That helps children, young people build up their own self confidence.

Nancy Brobbey

Are there any particular barriers or examples that you want to share in terms of the work that you're currently doing, that you think you could share in terms of how you're mitigating those issues to help young people go into the next stages of life?

Bradley Pritchard

The initial thing is, raising awareness and offering opportunities. The classes that I run aren't just for children in mainstream education or alternative provisions; I run a program at a professional football academy for 16- to 18-year-olds, and these will be academies that are disproportionately full of black 16- to 18-year-old young people. Just because they're in a professional football setting doesn't mean that they're privileged. It means that they've got a particular skill set, but their home life, their upbringing still remains. Unfortunately, what does take a hit is their academic career because they're sold the dream of becoming a professional footballer, so you don't need to worry about your academics as such. If you're fed that diet enough times, you'll start to believe that. Then you focus on the football element and not necessarily on education. The problem is when 18 comes and only 1 out of 15 boys is offered a professional contract, the other 14 have to go home, 10 of which are black young men from different backgrounds, but they now have to try to reassess their identity. I haven't got a club. Who am I now? They can't hang their identity on being a footballer, they now look for what fills that gap. It's things that lead to short term gratification like gambling or substance abuse. A lot of young players actually end up getting into trouble with police and the incarceration levels are quite high.

I have a session with them once a week and we look at different soft skills, different elements, whether it's your self-awareness. So where do you fit in? And where do you fit in with this big machine that is professional football, professional sport? And how do you think a football club

sees you? Are you an asset? Are you? Do you deserve loyalty? Do you deserve to offer loyalty to the club? What is it? I tell them it's a mutual relationship, there is no loyalty, as long as you're providing them with three things, which is a return on investment, financially, them selling you on for millions, or whatever it is; success from the pitch; and then also a good reputation. As long as you're fulfilling all those three criteria, then they'll keep you on. If you're not, then you'll go. You need to build up your coping mechanisms around that as well. Because you need to use them in the same way that they're trying to use you; for example, use the fact that they will pay for certain courses. You don't need to have your own private medical care. You have access to a very powerful trade union in the PFA. You have to try and use the club and professional football as much as it's trying to use you. I'll bring in speakers, ex-professionals who have been in similar situations, both successful as a professional footballer, but also unsuccessful, so they've gone into different areas, but still successes in other fields. They'd have been released at 18, but they became an entrepreneur and set up something, or they would have gone to university, or they would have gone into a trade. It's opening the doors to consider other professions. I think when you're in football there's a worry that the status stops you from doing anything that's kind of beneath you, I'm going to be a professional footballer, I don't need to know the groundsman's name, I'm not going to go into that, because you feel like you're better than that. It's about trying to break down these psychological barriers.

I'll take them on like day trips, whether it's to the BT Sport studios, we'll look at where they film the Champions League games, or the commentary and things like that. They can see other professions or other jobs within the sport bubble, so you're still looking at being a TV editor, producer, writing content, sport content, so not just journalism, not just being a coach, actually trying to raise awareness of other areas to focus on. There's a real positive because they've really got the competitive edge, but it's about harnessing that. It's about trying to unlink their identity from only playing football, because then it means that if their identity isn't linked to football, nor is their emotional wellbeing; so when they then face adversity, or they get released or injured, their emotional wellbeing isn't impacted. Other business interests, family, hobbies, those still remain, but it also gets easier. It's a better coping mechanism to deal with the challenges that you have to face in professional football. I give them opportunities to see and speak to people in different professions. The speakers who come in aren't just speakers, they'll offer their number and contact

details, which builds up the network. I tell these guys you have total freedom to contact them to build up your network, because this is what you're going to need. If you're going to start anything, if you're going to do anything or if you need advice. This is your network of positive role models. This is available, what you do with it is totally up to you. I think it gives them a bit of a sense of autonomy as well.

Nancy Brobbey

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

Bradley Pritchard

A revolution, not evolution! In the sense that people have been waiting for a change and they've been hoping that it will just evolve, there'll be this change, but the environment that we're in, isn't a natural environment. It's a man-made environment, there's no evolution away from it, it is what it is right now, the only thing it does is become outdated. With that you need to actually artificially change it. Hence the revolution, the environment needs to be modernised. And how do you modernise something? The problem is the people in power have been reluctant to do that, because they would then work against their self-interest. They're aware of it, because they've been convincing other people to work against their self-interest to keep them there. They already know the game; they are two steps ahead. The one thing I would do is reframe the conversation, which means you've got to reframe the criteria. To do that, you've got to acknowledge what we lack - it's about accountability. By being more accountable and acknowledging where we lack as an organization as a sport, as a trade union; it then shows where the weaknesses are and how the sport and organization has to change. If you consider the Dick, Kerr Ladies in the in the 1920s, the amount of work they did for raising funds for the mining communities, for wounded soldiers after World War One and the impact that they had not just on football, but England, the culture of England, when women were actually taking over the roles that men would do. Then in 1921, the FA decided to scrap this because our boys are back from the war. It was all well and good when they were raising money for us and things like that. But now, the men are back, so let's focus on

that. What? Talking about that and acknowledging again, that it wasn't right, and that we need to change. Then the ban was lifted in 1970, But by that time, the momentum was lost. That's generations worth of thinking, of brainwashing, of creating heroes and creating football as a man's game. When you're now looking to read it, to try and win, you're not trying to promote women's football, why do we not talk about the impact that the Dick, Kerr Ladies had? It should be one of the things that you speak about.

So again, reframing the conversation, means acknowledging the weaknesses, but also, by reframing the conversation means that you then celebrate the positives of diversity. The positive impact that diversity can have, look at the impact that it had like Apartheid, the international pressure that was put on South Africa by banning them from participating in all international games, Olympics, people not going over to play cricket against them, or rugby, all these sorts of things. The pressure of forcing them to change. So again, acknowledge that, but then also acknowledge the positives that come off the back of that. There were a lot of people in South Africa who moved to England to play cricket. People like Kevin Peterson, we need to celebrate the diversity in line with competence. It is diversity and competence, as opposed to diversity versus competence. It is very difficult to reframe the argument because it means acknowledging weakness, and for men who are used to being in power and used to having a certain status; there's no surprise why they don't want to be seen as insecure. You have all these books on the power handshake and how to be dominant and how to assert yourself in a boardroom. All right, well, just acknowledge your wrongs. It means that you end up building this culture of the alpha male, which is so antiquated and that's one of the biggest weaknesses, because you then make decisions based on self-interest and insecurity. By acknowledging the past and acknowledging points of weakness, we would certainly go a long way to pushing diversity.

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Interview with Bradley Pritchard

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