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

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Transcript: X X

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

With regard to diversity, there are two strands to it, based my experience. First of all, I am a firm believer in meritocracy, so my idea of diversity is focused on equal access to opportunity, across the board, with respect to all factors including gender, race, and other socio-economic factors, spread across the entire sport sector. Second, having worked my way up across the sport law sector, and having developed this platform within the sport sector, the most important thing is having different people across these variety of roles. Everyone should have the ability and, again, the opportunity to follow through on their aspirations without a glass ceiling. That being said, I do consider sport as well as law to be diverse in its truest sense, but we still need to question whether it is diverse *enough*.

Speaking from experience, there aren't enough people from diverse backgrounds, across a number of disciplines that would actually really benefit from having such people involved. But there has to be a balance when you when you look at what we see in sport these days. There probably aren't enough people from certain ethnic backgrounds, there probably aren't enough people in certain disciplines, from certain socio-economic backgrounds, and particularly the sports that cost a lot more to run, like golf, like equine sports, and so on and so forth. There aren't enough women or BAME representatives - even though I'm not a fan of that terminology - on boards, in leadership positions, or even as participants or as part of the peripheral level across sport and law.

On paper this sort of thing might suggest that these people don't have the talent to do that. But there are plenty of people out there that *do* have the talent to be in these positions. From here we go back to the point of access to opportunity. They don't have access to opportunities. So is it diverse? Yes. Is it diverse enough? No. Why is that the case? Probably because they're not getting the access to opportunities that other people might.

I've not seen enough development in terms of access to information and access to opportunity as I would like. I think if it was just one thing that I'd like to see changed or developed it would be widening participation. I've been fortunate enough to work with several universities, particularly

in the UK, where widening participation is probably more of a thing than in other countries. In the UK it appears that we are working on widening participation for kids from different backgrounds. However I still don't think what we're doing overall as a society is enough to redress the balance. I don't suggest that we should see 25%, Caucasian, 25%, Afro Caribbean, 25%, South Asian and so on, at the top of any game, what I want to see is that everyone has got the ability without discrimination to try and get there, and then we'll see what happens, where equal opportunity is afforded to all and enables people to rise to the top in a meritocratic manner. I don't expect the equal numbers at the top of it. But I just want people to know that they've given it their best shot, and they haven't been held back by any other barrier, much like many of the barriers that I might have felt were placed in front of me, or what I have heard many of my peers growing up discussing.

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?

Well interestingly, whilst I was always interested in this space, I was told not to study law! I didn't appreciate it at the time but in hindsight I can understand where that general discouragement was coming from. It was clear to me that given my background, as well as my experience up to that point, it was always going to be a challenging route to pursue. Not that law is an easy road to navigate in any case, but made exceptionally difficult due to a number of factors beyond my control. Me being me, and always engaging in the pursuit of proving a point, I did enrol. Even while I was studying law or training for the bar, it was so clear that I didn't know half the things others did simply based on their experiences and backgrounds. People had more connections, relationships within the sector, someone supporting them through the sector, and suchlike which can really help. This is not, and should not be a determining factor, however it is something I had to work really hard to combat. I was always finding out things quite reactively and then not realising things that I could have done, which could have impacted me later because I had to then sort of backtrack and fortify myself for the next step.

This is something that Simon (Rofe) and I have been involved in, discussions with the wider group at Law In Sport, when we're speaking about scholarships at the bar, and one of the senior barristers in there was leading the group and mentioned a couple of months ago about how many people actually know about scholarships to the bar. I remember saying in the group straightaway then that when I trained as a barrister, I didn't have a clue about any of this sort of stuff. I genuinely didn't. It was only when I got to start the course when people were telling me, 'oh, I got a £30,000 bursary', I started looking into it and saying, well, hold on, how have you got that? When, with the greatest respect, your family might have been able to afford that. I couldn't afford it, and I didn't have a clue about this sort of stuff. Instead I'm working two jobs, working until 3am, waking up at 5am on a daily basis, and taking out a personal loan, just to be able to do this course. You've got someone else paying for it, and it was just these little things. So yes, it was my ignorance as well to a point, but that ignorance was, I dare say, cultivated by the fact that I wouldn't naturally have had access to that information that other people would have, through my school and through my locality.

If there's one thing I could do, it would be making sure that access to information is completely open, and that it blankets the entire country, or rather the entirety of society. That leads into access to opportunity. From there, we've got a whole really different landscape, if people have got the ability to understand what they need to do to get to where they want to go. At times, I'd say I didn't really see the barriers that were there! Maybe out of ignorance or even a sense of bravado. Or maybe out of a bold perspective that I can overcome anything having watched too much Rocky and Karate Kid when I was growing up, and far too many Bollywood movies! So maybe, maybe there was a combination of that. The fact that my parents were always inspirational, and, and have been inspirational in that, they would always use the approach that you shouldn't let anything stop you, but my overtly optimistic approach was probably not the most efficient approach because I didn't know all of the pitfalls to avoid. In hindsight though, I could have done many things I did - in half the time it took to do them, with half the effort it required, and in many cases even half the finances! But time, effort and finances on their own aren't the barriers I'd highlight here. My view is that all of this is coming from a lack of information. I just didn't naturally have access to a lot of important information that others might have done, and this is something that we can improve as a society, in micro-cultures, within schools, within communities, within regions..

Now however - I know what I'm doing, and nothing and no one is going to stop me. I hope I don't come across as arrogant but I am aware that I am often regarded as a leader in this industry. I'm grateful that I'm regarded and respected as a leader in the industry and people contact me for that. We have a number of clients around the world, that trust in our services and myself as the leader of my organisation, both from private practice and as the leader of ISDE as an academic institution for sports law. I'm open to criticism, I will commit, I'm adaptable and willing to change and evolve. But do I see barriers? Not really, because if someone placed the barrier in front of me now, I would know precisely how to navigate it.

While coming up through the sector it wasn't always straightforward in terms of roles that I'd apply to, because there was always something or the other that I was supposed to have done but apparently hadn't - so I would take that feedback. I got into a bit of a tick box exercise, and then make sure I'd do it as I went on - so as to ensure that there was no scope for me being told that I didn't have some particular qualification or experience - because I would just go out and do it.

So when I was in law school, the one thing I was really good at was advocacy. A lot of people made a joke about it, and people I went to law school with they used to call me the Devil's Advocate, because there's a book called The Devil's Advocate written by Iain Morley. I remember my advocacy tutor recommended it to me, I think in the first week, so I went and bought it and I absolutely lived by it. I used to do a lot of advocacy training, like you hear about Cristiano Ronaldo doing free kick training and shooting training after the main training session for hours. That was me, at bar school, we'd finished classes and we had video recording rooms, and I'll just sit there watching, recording DVDs of myself advocating something to myself, and then watching it over and over until they locked the building up. That was me on almost a daily basis. So I smashed all of the advocacy courses, I got some of the highest grades there. Initially, some people at Bar school might have disregarded me a little, but I think they realised towards the end of the year that I knew exactly what I was doing in terms of appearing as an advocate. So I knew that I could out-compete everyone, nationally, at that level and I was able to prove it. But then I'm seeing other people getting through applications and reaching interviews when I'm not doing the same, so I started doing a bit of a study saying, 'Okay, you've picked him but not me. You've picked her but not me.

Why?' I would dissect everything that they would have, and everything I didn't have. So I sort of drew up a little bit of a checklist such as things like the fact that I didn't receive a financial scholarship. I don't know why that should make a difference as to whether I'm strong enough to perform or not but nonetheless it was something that others had, which I didn't. Then there's another thing I didn't have at that time, a master's degree. So I went and got two of them. Through this process, consequently, I became undeniable. I did not give anyone an opportunity to give me a reason why I could not be selected. I believe that my drive in being able to reinforce myself in this way has helped make a name and space for myself at the top of this sector.

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

Reiterating what I mentioned before, I've always been a proponent for access to opportunity, and I like to think I've had some degree of success in trying to propagate this, through every single stage of academic formation and further career progression that I've been involved in. However, I would say that I still have not seen enough development in terms of access to information or access to opportunity, and definitely not as much as I would like to see.

One thing, which I feel can help address that, I would say it is definitely to widen participation. I don't think what we're doing overall as a society to this point is enough to address that gap. So what I would want to see is for everyone to have that opportunity, without discrimination. So to emphasise what I mentioned before, if there is only one thing I could do – it's to enhance access to information, which will hopefully help generate that access to opportunity. There is a need to get down to the grassroots and build the foundations in this regard, to make sure the system itself is well structured and supportive of this objective. There are people, institutions, working groups out there, who are all interested in the same thing. Often these movements are lacking in funding, and might also be fragmented. I would love to see the mobilisation of like-minded people working together to spread information about careers in sport (and consequently sports law) to people at all levels, in order to ensure that everyone has some exposure to knowledge that there are pathways in this sector that are accessible to everyone. Whether they decide to pursue it thereafter is down to them, but at least they were aware of it, and knew that if they wanted to pursue it, there is a

pathway out there for them, with plenty of people that will support them along the way. That is something that many people in my generation, and those who helped lay the ground before me, didn't have. If our collective efforts can ensure that the future generations do have this access, it would be a beautiful thing, as well as being a reflection of a more inclusive, diverse and better informed society overall.

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