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Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Basketball Officiating: A Need to Create a Sense of Belonging and Equitable Access to Opportunities for Members

The death of George Floyd, the recovery of the remains of approximately 5000 and counting Indigenous children buried at various residential schools across Canada, and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of who is disadvantaged and in what ways reminds us that systemic racism remains an issue that requires a collective proactive response rather than individual, reactionary responses. Similar to what a great official would do to succeed at all levels, we must be prepared and proactive in mitigating problems, challenges, and barriers instead of waiting for incidents to occur and then responding. FIBA expects that officials control the game and not manage it and “be in charge with a service attitude.” This is accomplished by being strong, decisive, and approachable.

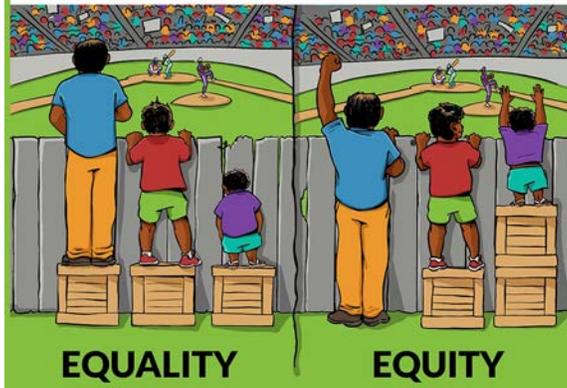
We need to apply these characteristics to the day-to-day functioning of basketball officiating organizations to create a sense of belonging for members. Furthermore, basketball officiating organizations at all levels, including local boards, need to create policies, practices, and intentional programs that facilitate equitable access to opportunities for its members. Institutions across different sectors have historically been resistant to transformative work, often wanting to maintain the status quo. Yet, the status quo often historically favors those who have been in power and benefited from this process.

It is important to think about, reflect, and take action as a collective with respect to the following questions to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in basketball officiating:

- Who is involved in the decision-makings within your basketball organization?
- Who is represented or not represented within leadership positions?
- Why?
- What criteria are decisions based on?
- Are the criteria used for decision-making outcomes communicated to members in advance, and clearly?
- How are incidents related to racism and discrimination been reported and handled? Is there a procedure in place for reporting?
- Are we being complicit as an organization and contributing to the problem? If so, how?

Institutions, including basketball officiating organizations, can no

How can organizations ensure each person is supported fairly, where they are provided the resources to meet their needs and access opportunities to achieve their full potential ?



longer resort to ignorance or silence. Phrases such as “sports are neutral” and “leave politics out of sports” contribute to the problem by refusing to admit sports as a platform plays an integral part in whether someone has a positive or negative experience whether playing, coaching, or officiating. This impacts who decides to stay in the game and who decides to leave, often having to do with whether the person feels like they belong in such spaces. This also impacts inequality of access to opportunities -- no matter how hard someone tries, they feel like they are overlooked and not given an opportunity to show their true potential.

Don't get me wrong. Referee associations are doing amazing work in partnership with local communities, but

there is room for improvement, and the difference between good and great is in the small details.

Being an immigrant, a racialized person, English as a Second Language learner, and an official at all levels in Canada ranging from elementary and high school to prep, college, university, and semi-pro level (NBLC), I have directly experienced microaggressions, in many cases by supervisors, assignors, or others in leadership positions. There are many other officials who are experiencing similar incidences, many being racialized and minoritized with respect to age, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or mannerism. Yet, they have shared with me that they did not report it due to fear of impeding their career progress. This is a symptom of a systemic problem rooted in what is normalized as part of culture of organizations.

I feel there was a need to amplify such voices to bring the truth out, so collectively we can work towards bettering officiating organizations so this does not continue. As a result, I founded an organization called EDucation Consulting (www.education.org) which focuses on offering Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) programming and services to individuals and organizations. A branch of the organization focuses on EDI in sports.

Recently, I organized and moderated an equity basketball series titled, Breaking Barriers through Brave Conversations, which focused on perspective and lived experiences of players, coaches, and officials who are racialized and minoritized. The philosophy behind the series is that there is no such thing as a safe space. Within brave (continued on page 3)

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spaces, one ventures out of their comfort zone and shares vulnerabilities and traumatic experiences as a means of healing and working towards change for the better. Within brave spaces, authentic raw conversations can take place from multiple perspectives and lived experiences for greater understanding to advance equity and social justice

Part of this series and initiative included capacity-building amongst various stakeholders, such as fans, players, coaches, and officials. The events were done in partnership and collaboration with Canada Basketball, Basketball Ontario, Wheelchair Basketball Canada, Canadian Basketball Officials Commission (CBOC), Toronto Association of Basketball Officials, and Hijabi Ballers. Sessions were 90 minutes and hosted via Zoom to make it accessible. The first 20 minutes of each session was dedicated to discussing EDI concepts in sports followed with a 70-minute discussion where lived experiences from a panel of guest speakers were heard.

Below are the video recordings of the events:

**Being Muslim in the World of Basketball in Canada (April 2021),
Being Black in the World of Basketball in Canada (May 2021), and
Being Female in the World of Basketball in Canada (June 2021).**

I highly encourage you to watch these and listen to the experiences shared from racialized and minoritized perspectives without justifying or being oppositional to the narratives shared. Stop using your position in society and the trajectory of your own officiating career as the baseline measure to judge and criticize others. I also want to provide a trigger warning, that the conversations and experiences shared by the panelists has the potential to trigger negative emotions and past traumas and microaggressions experienced in the realm of being involved with basketball in different roles.

Overall, the insight shared from the panelists as part of these events clearly outlined that we can and need to do better as basketball organizations. We need to center equity, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of officiating as a priority for as many people as possible, including players, coaches, and officials, who are having traumatic experiences where human rights are violated through microaggressions or silencing of reported incidents by others in leadership positions.

If reading this makes you uncomfortable or angry, it should! The key question is what are you, and we as a collective and as a basketball officiating organization, going to do to ensure this does not continue to happen and there are policies, procedures, and processes in place to have an equitable, diverse and inclusive organization?

Here are a series of questions to help us reflect and grow as basketball organizations:

- *What data are you collecting? Demographical data? Race-based data? How is it collected? How is it interpreted?*
- *What roles do racialized and minoritized identities occupy in your organizations? Are they part of the decision-making at all levels?*
- *How do you celebrate members' achievements? How do you share failures and learn from it?*
- *How do you build community and relationships amongst your members? Who is under-represented and in what ways? How can you change with intentionality and proactively?*
- *Does your organization seek diversity with intentionality? When and where are you recruiting new members? In what ways using what platforms?*
- *Are interviews for leadership positions done by one person or a committee to mitigate bias? Are decision-making for opportunities made by one assignor or a collective committee?*
- *Who is evaluated and how often? Is there a system in place for how feedback is provided so it is constructive rather than personal?*
- *Who is promoted and for what reasons?*
- *Are there accountability and reporting procedures built into your organizational policies and practices to be equitable?*
- *How are complaints reported and who does it go to? Are the procedures outlined clearly to the membership?*

Equity - is practices, processes and policies that ensure and promote fair access to opportunities and outcomes for diverse identities within an

organization.

Diversity - representation in terms of difference (e.g. race, nationality, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, religion, language, etc.) that resembles the identity of the people and the larger community.

Inclusion - a sustained welcoming and safe/protected environment for all people that prioritizes diversity and equity as foundations for creating spaces where people feel valued and respected for their identity and contributions.

Microaggression - indirect, subtle put downs and insults minoritized identities experience via statements/comments, actions/inactions/reactions, or incidents in their day-to-day interactions.

Recently, Canada Basketball has launched Unified 2024 Advisory Council which is an 18-member committee ranging from players and coaches to officials and Provincial/Territorial Sport Organization representatives. Unified 2024 is a "a multi-year program designed to lead the organization's equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives and establish the organization as a leader within the Canadian sports industry by 2024." An organizational Diversity Statement has been established to demonstrate the intentions of this important initiative:

"Canada Basketball is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and firmly stands against any form of racism, discrimination, or harassment. As an organization, we are dedicated to ensuring that basketball is used to unify people and our communities from coast-to-coast-to-coast. We will demonstrate this commitment by maximizing education and awareness opportunities, ensuring balanced representation, developing equitable policies and procedures, and by diversifying our suppliers and strategic partnerships. As we continue to examine our corporate culture and reflect on the history of our organization, we recognize our room for growth and pledge to ensure that moving forward Canada Basketball fosters free, fair, inclusive, and equitable environments, both on and off the court. We want our athletes, coaches, officials, staff, volunteers, fans, and supporters across the country, on every basketball court in Canada, to feel accepted and valued." Learn more about this at: <https://www.basketball.ca/news/canada-basketball-launches-unified-2024-announces-new-diversity-statement-and-equity-commitments>

This diversity statement has been publicized to everyone to make Canada Basketball as an organization accountable for their actions and/or inactions as they move forward towards becoming a more equitable organization through various initiatives and policy changes. This is a proactive stance in centering EDI, acknowledging past shortcomings, and working strategically and with intentionality towards mitigating such factors.

Nadine Crowley and I represent the needs officials as members of the Unified 2024 Advisory Council. Recently, we presented a workshop titled **From Equality to Equity: Navigating Power & Privilege as Referees at Canada Basketball Super Clinic in May 2021.**

Overall, doing the work of equity, diversity, and inclusion is a life-long process. It is not a checklist or a performative act that is done via one decision or initiative. It starts with what we decide to do on a daily basis via our actions, inactions, or reactions. Challenging barriers such as discrimination within organizations starts with you but the goal is systemic change embedded in the culture of organizations and the values it stands for. The goal is for all members to feel like they belong, valued for who they are, and who can get a fair equitable access to opportunities through their officiating careers. Investing in equitable, diverse, and inclusive policies, practices, and processes that facilitate this outcome will help officiating organizations grow and thrive.



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