



THE BLACK COLLECTIVE OF MEDIA IN SPORT PRESENTS

THE **D** WORD

A GUIDE ON **DIVERSITY** IN THE SPORTS MEDIA



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WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT THEN?

The D Word - diversity. Long ignored by those in the sports media, the inaugural D Word Conference had a mission: to put diversity firmly on the agenda for the industry's key decision makers.

Funded by FARE, European football's anti-discrimination and equality network, over 150 delegates flocked to the London College of Communication - located in one of the most multi cultural areas in the UK - in October 2014, to lend their voices to an inspiring and challenging debate on this issue.

Top of the running order was changing the rhetoric. For too long diversity has been billed as, "doing the right thing". But in the 21st century diversity is really just about being better. In the media that means a better newsroom, more dynamic features, a wider spectrum of opinion, and ultimately a better product.

The argument against diversity has always been that employers want The Best. But The D Word challenged decision makers to focus on redefining what we mean by Best. Because for too long The Best, or those with the potential to be The Best have been sidelined or ignored. If the industry truly wants The Best, they are going to have to invest in new ways of finding talent.

Of course, a talking shop is of limited use. Instead, The D Word sought practical outcomes, positive solutions, advice and recommendations. This guide reflects some of the important ideas generated. We hope it will help the sports media to take bold steps towards becoming a more diverse industry.

It is time for change.

Leon Mann

Founder, BCOMS



WHO ARE BCOMS?

The Black Collective of Media in Sports (BCOMS) was founded in 2009 by like-minded sports media professionals, concerned at the under-representation of black people in their chosen career field, and committed to developing positive change.

Working across the full breadth of the sports media - in TV, radio, online and print - BCOMS members include award-winning journalists, producers, presenters, researchers, production managers and editors. BCOMS members work for the top names in media, including the BBC, Sky, ITV, Channel 4, major independents and across the written press.

BCOMS believes that African and Caribbean people are significantly under-represented in the sports media despite disproportionate interest in, and achievement from, the community on the field of play.

As a network, we feel the lack of diversity across the sports media - both in front of and behind the camera, in the written press, online and in radio - has reached a critical point. And while diversity is a hot topic in most sectors, astonishingly sports media has never been put under the microscope.

An independent group, BCOMS is committed to changing the status quo through:

- Innovative networking, sharing contacts and opportunities.
- Developing relationships with media organisations, educational establishments, existing trade union bodies and key decision-makers.
- Promoting the message that a more diverse workforce is proven to yield better results.
- Creating pathways and mentoring young people seeking a career in sports media.

BCOMS aims to be the first port of call both for black professionals in the sports media and talented newcomers looking to develop their careers.

The group has established great relationships across the sports media and is keen to develop further partnerships across the industry.

While BCOMS has a specific remit in representing the black community, our members feel strongly about all strands of diversity, including gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion.



THE BACKGROUND

How bad are things in the sports media?

Take a moment to reflect on the engagement and participation of black communities in sport. It is estimated that up to 30% of professional footballers in the English professional leagues are black, while professional boxing and athletics boast a high percentage of black athletes. Some of our greatest national sporting heroes, from Jessica Ennis-Hill and Lewis Hamilton to Mo Farah and Daniel Sturridge are from the black community.

It is uncomfortable, then, when we do not see this diversity reflected in the sports media.

While there are no formal statistics available on this issue, and very little proactive monitoring is in place, BCOMS has compiled the following observations:

- 0 NO BLACK FOOTBALL WRITERS WENT TO THE 2014 WORLD CUP IN BRAZIL WITH A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER.**
- 0 THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A BLACK SPORTS EDITOR ON A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER.**
- 0 THERE IS NOT ONE BLACK SPORTS COLUMNIST ACROSS THE NATIONAL PAPERS. THE ONLY BLACK COLUMNISTS ARE ALL CURRENT OR EX PROFESSIONAL SPORTSMEN AND WOMEN, NOT SPORTS JOURNALISTS.**
- 1 JUST ONE BLACK TV SPORTS EDITOR WAS INVOLVED IN COVERAGE ACROSS ALL OF THE SUMMER'S MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS, FROM THE WORLD CUP 2014 TO WIMBLEDON AND THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES.**
- 1 ONLY ONE BLACK SPORTS PRESENTER WAS INVOLVED IN COVERAGE ACROSS ALL OF THE SUMMER'S MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS.**

The good news is there is much better representation from the black community as pundits. Cynics may call this 'window dressing', but it wasn't that long ago that there was an absence of black pundits regularly and prominently involved in coverage. This progress is welcomed, but with a caveat: what message are we sending out to the next generation? That in order to have a chance at a career in the sports media you need to have won an Olympic medal, or played 500 games in the Premier League?

This of course is just the black experience. Other communities and groups face different challenges - but what binds us is our under-representation.



No diversity: A snap shot of the sports media at a post match presser in 2014

DEBATING THE ISSUES

The D Word's opening panel centred on debating the barriers to diversity in the sports media.

Ronald McIntosh, BBC Sport and Channel 4 broadcaster, chaired an esteemed panel in:

Niall Sloane, ITV Director of Sport

Reshmin Choudhury, BBC Sports News and BT Sport presenter

Marc Woods, 12 time Paralympic medallist and BBC Sport pundit

Jeanette Kwakye, former GB athlete now sports journalist

Darren Lewis, Football writer at the Daily Mirror

Professor Diane Kemp, Birmingham City University & consultant to the European Council's Mediane.

KEY POINTS

Greater diversity would help the sports media deliver a wider range of stories and interviewees.

As sport increasingly grapples with issues of discrimination and equality, the sports media is more in need than ever of a diverse workforce to engage with these subjects.

The language we use to talk about diversity can act as a barrier. While many balk at the idea of "quotas", targets are often viewed as more acceptable.

While many professionals in the room testified to the invaluable support that mentors within the industry had provided in launching their own careers, it was recognised that too often this process relies on informal connections, reinforcing the same old networks of privilege.

Qualifications are only half the story. Though LCC student intake on its sports journalism degree course is around 40% BAME, it is what happens after gaining the qualification that needs urgent attention.

Aspiring sports journalists are expected to work extended periods without any pay just to gain an entry level job in the industry, creating a very real economic barrier to a more diverse workforce.

Social diversity needs addressing. Sports media is largely middle class, and unrepresentative of the country or the athletes engaged on the field of play. Women are too often pigeon holed into certain roles, and prevented from pursuing others, while the British Asian community is almost nonexistent in sports media.

While coverage of disability sport has improved with the runaway success of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, too often disabled talent is restricted to working on Paralympic sport only. Instead panellists called for a wider sense of inclusivity, arguing that disabled talent can and should contribute across all sports coverage.

Without sanctions will anything ever change? Channel 4 have recently announced senior executives and staff risk losing bonus payments if they miss new diversity targets of 20% by 2020.



IT'S ALL ABOUT SOLUTIONS...

The biggest criticism of most conferences is that they fast become talking shops. But at The D Word, BCOMS said... give us your ideas and we will share them with the industry. So here goes.

1. How to recruit a more diverse workforce

"We don't get the applications"... it's a common complaint from bosses trying to address under-representation - so this session, led by BBC Radio 5 Live Sportsworld producer **Robert Smith**, focused on how to get diverse candidates through the door.

The recommendations:

1. Modernise recruitment:

i. Appeal to a more diverse range of candidates by bringing job applications into the 21st century. Use social media to advertise jobs, allow candidates to be more creative in an electronic application form - attaching YouTube clips or online links. The traditional long application form can marginalise.

ii. Reach out to different communities more effectively. Build partnerships with community media outlets and Universities and Colleges known for a diverse student base; employ an HR expert who understands diversity to advise on how to target underrepresented groups.

iii. Create more opportunities to network with industry recruiters. Face to face contact will help candidates to build relationships and also challenge stereotypes on both sides.

iv. Put an end to policies on internal recruitment. Unions and internal directives need challenging; recruiting from a non diverse pool will only perpetuate the cycle.

v. Cast a critical eye over head hunting for top positions. Can a wider and more diverse pool of potential candidates be encouraged to apply?

2. Investing now will reap rewards for the future:

i. Establish greater diversity among key decision makers, and sports media will gain a better understanding of these issues informing all areas from recruitment to storylines, ultimately benefitting the business all round.

ii. Mentoring is key to success. But assigning appropriate mentors is essential to ensure a process that matches up mentees with the best possible person to help guide them.

iii. Fire the imagination of the next generation by reaching out to schools and younger age groups showcasing career paths in the sports media.

iv. Tell media courses and schemes that your organisation wants a more diverse workforce, encourage them to be more proactive in reaching out to underrepresented groups by setting targets, working to them, and evaluating how they recruit.

v. Some investment in diversity may require funding, make this clear to those holding the purse strings, and help to articulate the argument on why this is money well spent.



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3. Get the message out there:

Being a responsible employer necessitates shouting about your schemes and opportunities. Publicise widely to spread the message to minority candidates that they must apply for jobs.

2. Can diversity raise the standards of sports journalism?

Samantha Johnson, Arise News presenter and producer, chaired a fascinating session with **Clive Tyldesley**, ITV Sport Commentator, **Warren Houghton**, TalkSport reporter and **Martin Lipton**, The Sun, deputy sports editor (formerly The Daily Mirror's Chief Football Writer).

The recommendations:

A monocultural workforce stifles debate and discussion in the newsroom. How might major sports stories, from Roy Hodgson and the space monkey "joke" to Ched Evans' controversial return, have been covered with a more diverse workforce?

A paucity of views around the table may result in further isolating a minority employee. A lone voice from a protected characteristic background could feel inhibited arguing a different perspective to everyone else.

Good intentions can go wrong: beware the stereotypes. When sourcing an expert view from a diverse background think outside of the box or risk ending up with a never ending carousel of caricature vox pops, further entrenching stereotypes.

Many have argued that the banking crisis might have been avoided if a greater diversity of views had sat around the decision making tables. Group think is common across all industries - the sports media must recognise this and address it.

As newspapers and media outlets attempt to keep up in an ever changing world, there is increasing pressure to discover and exploit new streams of revenue, attract more readers or hit better viewing figures. Similarly, new technology has brought a global audience demanding more news than ever, and across more subjects. In such competitive times, the industry cannot afford to ignore diverse voices and expertise.

Entrepreneur Jamal Edwards MBE understood a younger and more diverse audience. He did not see an outlet serving this group effectively, so he set up his own YouTube channel, SB.TV, and became a millionaire. How many young people from diverse backgrounds with similarly forward thinking ideas has our industry ignored?

Sportsmen and women are from diverse backgrounds. There is a whole terminology out there, from "weave" to "prosthetic", that sports media cannot afford to get wrong. A more diverse workforce brings this expertise.



CONCLUSIONS

In the final session of the day, **Jessica Creighton**, BBC Sport reporter, chaired a panel of some of the industry's key decision makers, sharing their thoughts on diversity.

Simon Green, Head of BT Sport

Philip Bernie, BBC Head of TV Sport

Andy Cairns, Executive Editor of Sky Sports News

Rodney Hinds, Sport and Features Editor at The Voice Newspaper

CALL FOR ACTION

Traditional recruitment methods are not working and the sports media must become more creative in how it reaches out to communities, and advertises opportunities.

We need to redefine what "best" looks and sounds like. At the moment The Best is not diverse - it is overwhelmingly white, male, able bodied, heterosexual and middle class. It is the embodiment of employers recruiting in their own image.

As football debates whether to adopt the Rooney Rule, it is time for sports media to have the very same discussion in its own backyard. The Rooney Rule provokes strong views on both sides, but our conference concluded that the concept of using positive action for senior executive roles was worth exploring further.

A Parliamentary committee, specifically designed to drive change in this area, is needed. A round table on diversity in the sports media would be a helpful starting point.

Entry level recruitment is only one part of the story; once the talent is through the door it needs to be nurtured and developed. Within a workforce minority employees may face additional challenges.

Who is recruiting? A diverse panel with help to identify the strongest candidates, by challenging a monocultural interpretation of what 'Best' looks and sounds like.

Developing key partnerships, such as using The Voice Newspaper - the country's leading black community paper - as a place to advertise and headhunt promising talent, could act as a blueprint for success.

All of the panellists offered a commitment to the conference to take on board the points raised and return to their own organisations with new ideas about improving diversity.



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WORKING TOGETHER

The conference, and this guide, were designed to improve dialogue and discussion around diversity in the sports media. Now that diversity in the sports media is on the table as an issue BCOMS believes it is time to focus on working collaboratively to address under representation.

BCOMS is not a funded network, but we are committed to helping the sports industry evolve. So with this in mind please do not hesitate to get in touch with us for a confidential chat or to see how we can work together.

Where we do not have expertise, for example in a different strand of diversity, we will refer you onto individuals and organisations.

CONTACT

Leon Mann

BCOMS founding member

Email: Leon@LeonMann.co.uk

LOYAL SUPPORTERS

BCOMS would like to thank FARE for their support and funding which enabled our network to stage The D Word and produce this guide. The conference was part of the FARE Action Weeks. Check out their website for further information on the network - www.FAREnet.org

We would also like to thank the London College of Communication for hosting our conference.

Our final thanks goes to all the panellists and delegates that attended the conference and contributed on the day. We hope The D Word will help to drive change in the sports media, and offer proactive solutions to address sensitive issues.



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