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Gardner-Webb Student-Athletes Share Their Perspectives as Minorities in Sports and Academics

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MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

Gardner-Webb Student-Athletes Share Their Perspectives as Minorities in Sports and Academics

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON MARCH 9, 2021



Conversation Seeks to Encourage and Promote Understanding

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—JeNai Davis, director of Gardner-Webb University Diversity and Intercultural Initiatives, recently sat down with a group of Black student-athletes to discuss the experiences they've gone through being a minority in their sport as well as in their academic setting. The full conversation was recorded and is available [here](#). “The purpose of this event is to talk about their struggles, but also to really encourage others on their experiences and what they go through,” Davis explained.

The discussion, “From our perspective,” featured:

- Talen Francis – Kennesaw, Ga., senior, political science and psychology major, lacrosse team.
- Tremayne Booker – Gastonia, N.C., senior, political science major, football team.
- Kobe Rodgers – Gaffney, S.C., senior, sport management major, communications minor, football team.
- Ja’Kira Parks – Fayetteville, N.C., sophomore, biomedical sciences major, cheerleading team.
- Brooke Fryar – Hillsborough, N.C., freshman, sport management major, volleyball team.



Talen Francis

The student-athletics talked about code-switching—consciously or unconsciously acting or talking more like the people around you. They also discussed racial barriers, having Black role models in leadership positions, and their willingness to have uncomfortable conversations about race.

Although code-switching is mentally draining, it’s a lot easier than constantly explaining lingo or jokes and culture, Francis remarked. “I code-switch around 80 percent of the time,” she said. “Code-switching has become a necessity in order to connect with people and my teammates around me.”

During the recruitment process, the student-athletes feel they have to perform at a higher level to get

noticed. Fryar said her sport and the position she plays is predominantly played by White athletes. “I had to stand out a lot more on the court, be a lot more talkative, help my teammates out more, and reach out to coaches more to stand out from the other girls in my position,” she asserted.

Booker said it’s very important to have people who look like him in positions of leadership. “I’ve had White and Black coaches that are both great,” he affirmed, “But just to have that background (with a black coach) and be able to have conversations that you wouldn’t be able to have with another coach, it definitely does matter to have that representation within a program.”



Brooke Fryar

They talked about being encouraged when LeBron James and other NBA players refused to play in the playoffs, taking a stand for criminal justice reform. “I felt empowered to express how I am in public,” Rodgers said. “I’m pretty sure a lot of kids were inspired by that. They were like, ‘I don’t have to just be an athlete, I can be more.’”

Parks said that people have to be OK with being uncomfortable. “Be aware of what’s around you and when you ask a question be mindful of how you ask your question,” she explained. “You will never be able to understand what we go through, but try to be more understanding and empathic. Be more open to new things.”



Kobe Rodgers



Ja’Kira Parks



Tremayne Booker

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.

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We welcome your suggestions and feedback, contact:

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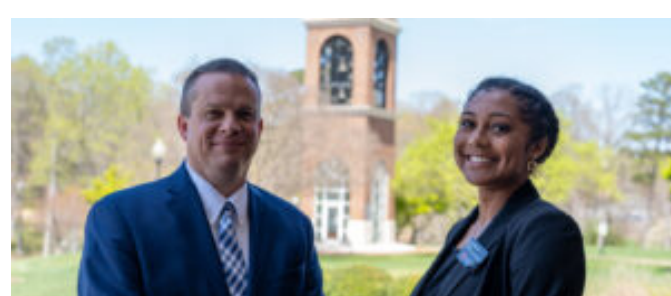


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