

NCAA Convention

Thursday, January 14, 2021

Virtual

Saluting Excellence

2021 Diversity & Inclusion and Ford Awards



MARK EMMERT: Welcome to our Saluting Excellence session featuring the Award for Diversity and Inclusion presented this year to Towson University and the Gerald R. Ford Award, this year honoring the great David Robinson.

Now, ordinarily these awards are given during the Association Luncheon at our annual Convention. But, of course, this is no ordinary year, and we're certainly not having an ordinary Convention. Though we're meeting virtually, our undertakings at the Convention remain as critically important as ever. Indeed, maybe more important. And the values represented by the Award For Diversity and Inclusion and the Ford Award are as significant as ever.

As we salute excellence within our Association, and present the Award for Diversity and Inclusion, I'm absolutely delighted to introduce Dr. Derrick Gragg. Derrick joined the national office in October as senior vice president for inclusion, education and community engagement.

Derrick, as many of you know, is a long-time athletics administrator, who brings exceptional experience to the national office. As senior vice president, he supervises the national office inclusion, education and community engagement programs, and he also serves as the chief national office ambassador to promote the NCAA core values of diversity and inclusion.

Many of you know Derrick from his 27 years of athletics administration experience, most recently as the AD at Tulsa, where he served as vice president, as well as the director of athletics. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Derrick Gragg.

DR. DERRICK GRAGG: Hello, I am delighted and honored to join you today for the presentation of the Award for Diversity and Inclusion. This award celebrates the exceptional diversity efforts and accomplishments at our member schools and conference offices.

It is no secret that 2020 was an extremely challenging year for many reasons, including witnessing the pervasive racial injustices against African-Americans. Many of us have taken what transpired as a higher call to action - to examine ourselves, our processes and to establish positive and equitable ways forward.

As an Association, we are working in collaboration with you, the membership, to take actions that will support a more diverse and inclusive collegiate athletic community. Our equity and our continued support of the student-athlete voice highlight our commitment to leading and shaping minds, environments and policies that advance inclusion as our mission-driven value.

For nine years, the NCAA and the Minority Opportunities Athletic Association, also known as MOAA, have partnered to recognize and celebrate the initiatives, policies and practices of our athletics departments and conference offices that embrace diversity and inclusion across the intercollegiate athletics community.

The NCAA and the Minority Opportunities Athletic Association Award for Diversity and Inclusion is one platform that highlights the innovative and dedicated diversity and inclusion efforts that athletic departments and conference offices are engaged in. It demonstrates the best of who we are and strive to be as an association. Trust that we are grateful to each of you: our student-athletes, university chancellors and presidents, conference commissioners, athletic administrators, coaches, faculty and chief diversity officers, for the purpose-driven work of creating access and opportunities, fairness and equity.

We congratulate this year's winner of the NCAA/MOAA Award for Diversity and Inclusion: Towson University and its president Dr. Kim Schatzel.

At this time, I would like to welcome Dr. China Jude, president of MOAA and senior associate athletics director and SWA at the University of Wyoming.

Dr. Jude, thank you for joining us and to recognize the ninth annual award winner and honorable mentions.



DR. CHINA JUDE: Thank you, Dr. Gragg. The Award for Diversity and Inclusion represents a significant and longstanding partnership between MOAA and the NCAA to recognize the efforts of our membership to make diversity and inclusion a priority.

2020 showed us that it's more vital than ever for colleges, universities and conference offices to embrace diversity and inclusion through various initiatives and experiences for student-athletes, coaches and athletic administrators. Before presenting Towson University with this year's award, we would like to also acknowledge the Award for Diversity and Inclusion 2021 honorable mentions. Please join me in congratulating the University of Arizona, Tiffin University and the United States Coast Guard Academy. We applaud your meaningful work and thank you for all that you have done and continue to do to engage in courageous action and to create cultures of belonging.

Now we will focus our attention on the video that highlights Towson University's exceptional example that we should all strive to replicate.

DR. LEAH COX: Diversity and inclusion is important to all of us. We live in a diverse and global society. And it's a part of making everyone successful.

ANTWAINE SMITH: So the Total Tiger Program essentially is our student development program. And what the goal was, it was really designed to be a 360-approach where you're developing not just the student-athletes academically for sports, but really prepare them for life after, but also, kind of, creating a positive culture for their student-athlete experience.

It's really about investing in the student-athletes which are the most valued assets that we have, right, and kind of just engaging them but really empowering them.

TRICIA BRANDENBURG: The foundation of the program is based in community service. We do over 10,000 hours of community service annually in the greater Baltimore community. And it's become really the lifeblood of our athletic department, where our student-athletes really enjoy the community service aspect of it. I think it's become part of our recruiting pitch.

Antwaine's done a really great job of building in diversity and inclusion and equity programming into that program, as well as building in mentoring for our first-generation college students who are student-athletes here at Towson. And Antwaine's impact on that particularly for our first-generation college students has been really profound in helping us improve our graduation rates and APR,

particularly for men's basketball, football, women's track are programs that tend to have more first-generation college students.

JUWAN GRAY: I feel like, to the community of like the Baltimore area, it's good to see a Black student-athlete like myself and a Black administrator. I feel like that's important for the younger community to see because maybe within their environment they're not used to seeing, like, people who look like them in these types of situations. So I feel like we're pretty good role models in that aspect of just showing kids that they can be much more than what people tell them. Or they can be anything they want to be as long as they work hard and just take the right path.

TIM LEONARD: You get four to five years in your life where you come in, you have an opportunity to experience and learn things that you're probably not going to get to do again. When they leave here and their days of competition at Towson University are over, and they leave here with that degree in hand, they're prepared for life.

And these are the things that are important in life: The community service, diversity, inclusion. We feel like if you can learn to love your fellow human beings, you're going to be a better teammate. And if you're a better teammate, chances are we're going to be more successful as a program. And if you take those same principles and apply them to life, you're going to be a much better employee. You're going to be a much better leader. You're going to be a much better teacher, doctor, lawyer, whatever it is that you're going to be.

So that's really what we're trying to do is infuse all of this with what we're trying to do in competition. You combine competition with a new way of thinking and opening your lens of how you view the world. I think that's going to be a very powerful thing.

DR. LEAH COX: Thank you, and I love the thought that we were voted and nominated and then awarded this prestigious award that everyone has the ability to make a difference. Right? All of our students, all of our faculty, staff, coaches, everyone has the ability to do that.

And I would encourage others to, you know, connect with Towson. See what we're doing. And then make the same kinds of changes on your campus. It can only benefit your students, your faculty and staff, and ultimately benefit all of those who have contact outside of the university so that we can make some real changes in the world.

MARK EMMERT: Thank you, Derrick, China, and especially Dr. Cox, for those closing words. And congratulations again to Towson University.



We now turn to the NCAA President's Gerald R. Ford Award. The Ford Award was created to honor an individual who has provided significant leadership as an advocate for college sports. The 2021 Ford Award is presented to David Robinson.

David Robinson is a U.S. Naval Academy graduate who won the 1987 Wooden Award for College Player of the Year and was the first pick in the 1987 NBA Draft.

Recognized as one of the NBA's 50 Greatest Players of All Time, he was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2009. David is also really well known in his community for his philanthropy and commitment to education.

He currently serves on the Knight Commission for Intercollegiate Athletics and previously served on the NCAA Commission on College Basketball. Let's hear from David.

DAVID ROBINSON: I picked the Naval Academy because my father was in the military. He was in the Navy for 20 years. So I grew up around the military. My grandfather was in the Army. So I was open to the idea of service. I just thought it was a great thing. Plus, the Academy was a great school.

And I think basketball allowed me to grow into myself and express myself, you know, outside of the military side. So, you know, I survived more than anything else. It's a really -- it's a great school, but it's challenging. And playing basketball at the Naval Academy is an extra challenge, particularly when you're playing in the NCAA Tournament and that second semester you're missing every weekend for a couple of weekends. But our junior year, in particular, we were ranked very high in the country and I got a chance to play in the NCAA Tournament all the way up to the regional finals where we played Duke. And that was probably the highlight, being able to play the number one team in the country and be competitive.

You know, typically football was kind of the big sport at Navy. But we turned basketball into a very popular sport there. I was anxious a bit physically. You know, you're 21 years old. And you're ready to go out there and be at the peak of your athletic ability physically. And I had to wait two years.

I felt like I was always behind, you know, because I did have to sit out those two years. I started basketball late. But the maturity that I gained going to work every day in the Navy and doing my job was really valuable.

And I didn't appreciate it, I think, as much until I got to my, you know, got to San Antonio and I started playing for the Spurs. And I had a different maturity level than, I think, a lot of the rookies coming in.

It has been an incredible journey learning to be a businessman. I have a partner, Dan Bassichis, who came out of Goldman Sachs. We started it about 14 years ago. It's largely focused in real estate, value-add real estate. So we've bought assets all over the country, about a billion-and-a-half dollars worth of assets, and we give 10 percent of our returns to community efforts where we've been investing in. So, you know, being able to build something pretty special from scratch. So that organization has been another platform for us to impact our communities, both on the investment and real estate side, but also on the community side.

My passion is learning. I love learning. I'm a lifelong learner. And we started building the Carver Academy here, I don't know, 20 years ago or so. And we made it as a private school, put it in a low-income area here in San Antonio and we wanted to help those kids get to college. And now we have 26 schools.

It was eight years ago we partnered with IDEA Public Schools, a charter school organization. And now we're the fastest charter school, growing charter school organization in the country. And it's been an amazing experience watching the growth and the impact because for the last, you know, 13 or 14 years, we had -- we've basically had 100 percent matriculation to college. Building schools in low-income areas and sending 100 percent of our kids to college has just been an incredible journey.

Well, to whom much is given, much is required. If I've been given something, I don't think I've been given it just to, you know, kind of make me happy. I think I've been given it because it's supposed to be used to encourage other people. So we try to be faithful to that as much as we can.

MARK EMMERT: Well, what a wonderful video that is with some great footage and some great clips. And David, it's so great to have you with us. I hope this finds you well and, like all of us, delighted that 2020 is behind us, and ready to face a new year with all new reinvigorated energy. And thanks so much for being with us today.

DAVID ROBINSON: Aw, thanks, Mark. This is my pleasure. It's a true blessing. And you're right, it's an exciting opportunity now for us all to press on.

MARK EMMERT: Yeah, that's exactly right. Learn from our lessons and our mistakes and get better for it and

move on, and thank everybody for helping us get through this.

So, let's just go ahead and jump into some questions. You know, you had an amazing career in higher education. You, of course, were a cadet. You played basketball. You went through all of those experiences. But, I'm told you didn't initially expect that you were going to be in the NBA. And many elements of your career have had probably unexpected turns one way or the other on them. You know, how did sports help you figure out how to adapt and how to deal with what comes next and be ready for it?

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah, sports played a huge role. Coming into college, I was fairly shy. And as you probably know, I came into college, I was about 6'7" and about 172 pounds. So I was not a physically imposing picture of a man either.

So, yeah, I grew into my body. I kind of grew into my mind a little bit. And, yeah, college really got me, and particularly the Academy, really taught me how to lead and how to be the man that I was supposed to be, not make excuses, press on. And that just has served me well throughout basketball and everything beyond.

MARK EMMERT: Yeah, though I have to tell you, I'm having a little trouble of thinking you as ever being shy. But I'll take your word for it.

(Laughter)

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah, well, it's true. You know, I came in there and I was -- you know, I was just hoping to make the team and hoping to contribute. And truthfully, I didn't even think I'd -- my first week there, I was so -- I was so overwhelmed. I saw all these guys who were valedictorians in their class, and I thought, man, I'm going to flunk out of this place. I'm not even going to make it. But I did okay.

MARK EMMERT: Well, I visited the Academy before, and it's an impressive, and I'm sure for the guys coming, and gals coming, it's an intimidating place, to be sure.

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah, it's a lot of structure.

MARK EMMERT: Yeah, a lot of structure, for sure. So, let me shift gears. You have done some amazing things, in your philanthropy, in your giving back to your community. It's not just money. It's time and energy and brainpower and enthusiasm. And it's remarkable. But why do you do that? Why is that legacy important to you of what you're doing with your community? What drives that?

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah, I think I'm a teacher at heart. You know, I -- as we grow older, we kind of begin to realize where our talents lie. And I think after having three boys, and I was always kind of teaching them and coaching them and saying, okay, you guys understand why this happened? You know, I'm an academic by nature.

So, yeah, I think it was a natural gravity towards helping kids get through school. And not only get through it, but really enjoy the process of it. I think that's the greatest thing I like about what we've done through IDEA Public Schools, is that we've created a culture where these kids really look forward to graduating. They look forward to going to college. It's such a great atmosphere for learning and for growth. So that's been my passion. I think my talents have lent themselves towards what we've been able to do.

MARK EMMERT: Yeah, well, it's obviously been incredibly impactful already, and it's going to continue to do so. That's just wonderful for all of us to see.

And, you know, that brings me to my third question, and that is: You're a busy guy. You had a collegiate athletic career. And you've had an NBA career. You've got a family and these wonderful sons in college sports. Nonetheless, you've stepped up to be involved, continue to be involved in intercollegiate athletics, not just through your sons, but working with the Knight Commission.

I called you up one day and asked you to serve on the Rice Commission, and I figured I would have to talk this very busy businessman into doing it. And you were like, "No, man, I'm in." You've always stepped up to stay involved in college sports.

And what have you seen? I mean, you went to college. You were at the Academy a couple years ago.

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah.

MARK EMMERT: And college has changed a little bit. And what are the lessons you're learning about how we need to go forward and what college sports, what you've taken away from what we need to be doing around college sports?

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah, for me personally, it helped me grow into, you know, the man that I am. I think with resilience -- sports teaches us some things that you can never learn in the classroom. I mean, when you get knocked down on the court or on the football field and you have to keep getting up - and when you lose a game and you have to face the media and face the fans, those are lessons that -- they're immediate lessons. And that's

probably the thing I loved the most about sports, is that I got that immediate feedback. And I got a chance to make adjustments and press on.

Where, in business, I might make a decision and not know for six months or a year how that decision turned out. So, so there are things that we learn in sports that I think translate incredibly well to business.

And so, for me, I've always been a proponent of getting kids to play sports as much as you can. We're not -- we're not all going to be professional athletes, but you're going to learn things on that field or on that court that are going to translate and just make you a much more well-rounded person.

MARK EMMERT: Yeah, and when something goes wrong, it's not like a video game, you just hit reset and start again.

(Laughter)

DAVID ROBINSON: That's true. I mean, you know, in the NBA, there were many years where we lost. And you know, for the first 10 years of my career, you're losing at the end of the season and it's like falling off the edge of a cliff. And you just have to figure out, how do I get back on the horse? And how do I start this over again?

And it's devastating each time. But you learn to have character, and you learn to deal with those things and not point figures and just figure out how to make it better.

MARK EMMERT: Well, you know, related to that, you've already -- and you're still a young man, in my book -- you've had a career that very, very few, maybe nobody else has done. I'm not sure. You know, you went through the Academy, an unbelievably rigorous experience.

You were a very successful college athlete. NBA player. NBA star. You've been really successful in business. Your philanthropic work, as you just said, is extraordinary. Father, husband, all of these things. I get exhausted just running down that list.

You could be on a beach somewhere if you wanted to be. What drives David Robinson today? What keeps you, you know, so engaged in all this stuff?

DAVID ROBINSON: Just responsibility. Right? When you look out and you see the challenges that are in our society and I mean -- my parents grew up in, you know, Little Rock, Arkansas, my dad, in the 1950s. So you're talking segregation. We're talking Central High School there in Arkansas and that whole experience.

My mom grew up in Columbia, South Carolina, not a whole lot better. So I think, you know, watching that, growing up around that, and then seeing, you know, I have to do better. Right? Like, I have to move the needle. I just felt that responsibility.

And, you know, as great as America is, we still do have our issues, as we found out in 2020. Right? A lot of racial issues that are still there. A lot of challenges that we haven't quite faced up to yet.

And I think, you know, part of our challenge as a country is to be who we say we are. Right? We're the melting pot. The land of the free. So that's where I get my motivation, to say let's keep being the country we say we are. We're this great land of opportunity and we welcome people of all colors and sizes to come on in. And let's just keep being better at that even than we have been.

MARK EMMERT: Wow, that's a spectacular statement, I think, about who we are as a nation and where we need to be. And you're moving the needle, there's no question about that. And for that, we're all really pleased. But, you know, let me ask one last thing, because you've been really generous with your time through all of this.

You know, when you look back, at sport in general, but your college athletic experience, in particular, because as you were saying, that's a moment where you really blossomed, right? Probably as a man, as well as an athlete.

If you had to pick like one thing out of that experience and say, this is the one that really sticks, the one thing that I really learned from that -- and it's hard to distill, I'm sure to one thing -- but if you had to pick, I'm asking you to make a choice, which one thing would you say really mattered the most to you and you want this audience to know is something that really comes from that background?

DAVID ROBINSON: Yeah, I would say, you know, for me the one thing that it taught me was discipline. You know, I think I didn't understand that coming into college. You know, a lot of things that come easily to me. My dad, you know, my dad did a good job of prepping me. My mom and dad both did a good job of prepping me for the academic side. So the academic side was, I won't say it was easy, but it wasn't the most challenging part. It was about me figuring out how to be a man, make decisions and be on top of my game.

So I think that was probably the best thing I learned in school, is how do I manage all of these things swirling around my head? And so, I mean, as you know, as you get older, it seems like there's more and more things

swirling. Right? Whether you're doing philanthropy or business or whatever. There's just a lot swirling.

I'm on several boards now. And you always feel like there's things out there. But you've got to be disciplined. And you've got to have goals and make them happen. And so I think those are the things that I learned the most from my college experience.

MARK EMMERT: Well, David, look, I just want to thank you very much for letting us honor you. And to hold, if you don't mind, for us to just hold you up as an exemplar of what comes out of college sports, people that support intercollegiate athletics and what they mean to us.

And I think I speak for everybody that's involved in our annual meeting here of saying you've done a good job of representing those views. The lessons of college sports have stuck. The lessons from your mom and dad stuck.

DAVID ROBINSON: Thanks.

MARK EMMERT: And you make us all really, really proud. So congratulations. And thank you so much for joining us. And we look forward to seeing all of your endeavors going forward, because you've got a lot of runway yet.

DAVID ROBINSON: Well, thank you, Mark. I'm honored. I appreciate you all.

MARK EMMERT: Congratulations, David. Good to see you.

As this session comes to a close, I want to thank all of you for joining our Salute to Excellence. The accomplishments of Towson University and David Robinson are inspiring. And they demonstrate a deep commitment to improving the lives of our students.

Congratulations to all of our awardees and enjoy the rest of the virtual NCAA Convention.