
Facing the System on all Fronts: The Story of the First French NBA Player's Resistance to Discrimination

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Résumé

Calling on cultural studies, critical race theory and media studies, this paper explores the life, career and media representation of basketball player Tariq Abdul-Wahad – the first French player to play in the National Basketball Association. Indeed, in spite of his athletic success, Abdul-Wahad faced multiple forms of discriminations throughout his career in the 1990s and early 2000s, developing multiple forms of resistance to them along the way.

Based on a series of interviews, and a qualitative analysis of Abdul-Wahad's media representation and his own use of social media, this presentation questions the extent to which his story reflects the tension between a discriminatory system and the limited forms of agency and empowerment available to athletes of the period. First, it will discuss the anti-American speeches he faced in France in regards to a genealogy of Anti-American discourses, and how he positioned himself in-between those two nations and models. Second, it will tackle the systemic racism he uncovered in the French Basketball Federation and the ways he fought against it. Third, it will evoke Islamophobia, and how he decided to embody the figure of the Muslim Athlete to fight it. Fourth, it will analyze his media representation and self-representation, and the constant fight he has led with the media to uncover their discriminatory practices, from facing them on their own turf to shun them and use self-representation as a political tool. Last, it will discuss the intricate body politics of his case.

In other words, this presentation considers Tariq Abdul-Wahad as a case study in resistance on the part of athletes trying to fight discriminations in the world of sport in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and thus exposing the politics of a so-called apolitical sport spectacle and system.

Mots-Clés: National Basketball Association, Discrimination, Anti, Americanism, Race, Religion, Media, Self, Representation, Resistance

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