RACISM IN SPORTS

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“The only disease right now is racism that we are fighting” – Raheem Sterling. The # BlackLivesMatterMovement has been raging all around the world, and has also brought about some noise from the sporting community. Many sportspersons have taken to the international community to voice their opinion regarding the situation. Though not evident from outside, racism is an issue that has dug its roots deep into almost all sports – including “the Beautiful Game” and “the Gentleman’s Game”. Former West Indies captain Daren Sammy and senior batsman Chris Gayle became the first active cricketers to join a growing number of sports personalities worldwide in publicly raising their voice against the scourge of racism. Along with his former teammate Thishara Perrera, Sammy was called out for his skin colour using words such as “Kallu” by some of his teammates during his stay in SRH (Sunrisers Hyderabad) in IPL 2014.

The England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) expressed their strong stance against racism by tweeting a picture of Jos Buttler, Jofra Archer and Adil Rashid hugging, captioned: "We stand for diversity. We stand against racism."

The ICC (International Cricket Council) has always condemned racism and has "zero tolerance policy" towards it. As part of the Code of Conduct, the players not only get punished but also have to go through an education programme to promote a better understanding and awareness of issues directly relevant to the offence that he has committed. There is also a conciliation element to the proceedings. However, despite these strong policies against racism by the ICC, we can situation involving racism popping up every once in a while. However, the situation seems to be even worse for football (or soccer for the Americans). In 2019, according to TIDES, a large amount, 62% to be precise, of all international documented racist acts occurred during professional football games.

The best example for this was the match between England and Bulgaria in October, which saw Bulgaria supporters allegedly directing Nazi salutes and monkey chants at England's black players, forcing the game to stop twice. Bulgaria already was halfway through a partial stadium ban for previous racist incidents, which saw 5,000 fans blocked from entering a 46,000-seat stadium in October. After the match, the president of the Bulgaria Football Union resigned "as a consequence" of the "tensions" surrounding the match, although the organization did not specifically mention racism in its statement. UEFA fined the Bulgarian soccer association $83,000, and hit the team with a two-game stadium closure, meaning no fans were allowed in to watch those matches.

This is just one of many examples which have spoiled the beauty of “the Beautiful Game” In wake of the present situations, the Premier League launched a No Room For Racism Campaign, to demonstrates the sport’s continued commitment to equality and diversity, and its strong stand against issues such as racism. According to this campaign, if anyone witnesses racist or other discriminatory behaviour at a match or around a stadium, they should report it to the police or a steward. They can also report racism using the Kick It Out app. The issue is prevalent in Badminton as well. Indian Badminton player Jwala Gutta retaliated against social media trolls who had trolled and racially attacked, because of her Chinese origin. The NBA is dealing with its own problems of racial equity. Even superstars like LeBron James are unable to escape from the grunt of the racial slurs. The league seems to have an apparent duality; it is open to change for a wide range of issues in today’s society, yet it hasn’t found a solution to racism, an issue that has plagued African-Americans for centuries in this country, and the ethnic group that makes up the majority of its league. And there are tons and tons of more examples from other sports as well which show - Racism in sports is a serious issue – the more we ignore its presence, the more severe it becomes. It is imperative for the entire sporting community to take a united front against such actions which ruin the dignity of these sports.