

Malik Osborne Is Looking To Create Change On FSU's Anti-Racism Task Force

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Tallahassee Democrat

March 10 2021

The intersection between sports and political issues is not a brand new landscape.

In the past, sports figures such as Muhammad Ali, Bill Russell, Jim Brown made their voices heard in the 1960s with the hopes of bringing change to a variety of different social issues.

Recently, Lakers star LeBron James has become an activist on police brutality and racial injustice after the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin last summer.

Florida State junior forward Malik Osborne is looking to follow in Ali, Russell, Brown, and James' footsteps as he is already bringing change to the school's campus.

Osborne is one of the 30 members on FSU's Anti-Racism, Diversity & Inclusion Task Force, which engages the faculty, staff, and student communities to have open dialogues about racism, diversity, and inclusion at the university. The purpose of the Anti-Racism, Diversity & Inclusion Task Force is to identify sources of systemic racism and other areas of need and ways to improve the diversity climate around the campus.

FSU President John Thrasher asked Osborne if he wanted to be part of the committee, and he quickly accepted the prestigious honor.

"It was an extreme honor, and I told my parents about it, and my parents were so happy and proud of me," Osborne told the *Democrat*. "I told Coach Ham how thankful I was and President Thrasher to be a part of such an exclusive committee and be a part of a group of members who can insight change around the campus that's been around since before I've been around. So it was such a special honor to be a part of, and it is special to be around a group that has such a strong voice around campus."

FSU's Anti-Racism, Diversity & Inclusion Task Force usually has Zoom meetings a few times each month. The main objectives of the task force are to have an open forum where they hear from the student body or just locals around Tallahassee who have issues or complaints or just concerns about things on campus that might be racially insensitive.

One of the controversial decisions made in the task force meetings was removing Francis W. Eppes' name from the College of Criminology building and permanently removing the Eppes statue from campus. They also recommended the removal of B.K. Roberts' name from a College of Law building.

While some maybe have questioned why FSU would remove old names and statues from buildings, Osborne said it is important to make the campus as safe and comfortable as possible for the students.

"I believe it's critical because you don't want people to come to your school and feel like it's an uncomfortable learning environment because it shoves them away and limits their potential as well," Osborne said. I feel like listening to everyone's concerns, no matter if we agree with it or not is vital because you don't know if someone has the same viewpoint or the same perceive because they're not speaking up.

"So with the removal of the Eppes statue and the name on the building, that's a big step just to show how serious this task is and how serious we are about making change. We want people to know when they come to us; it is going to be a meaningful interaction. When they say something, they're going to be heard, and we are the voice of the student body and bring this to President Thrasher, who has a lot of other responsibilities, but this is just another responsibility that we bring to him.

"This is where a lot of people in the student body have been saying, and we should probably look into it because we are a top 20 university in the nation, so we want to uphold this reputation and continue to strive to be higher because we want to create a comfortable work environment and we want to have a great student life as well because that's what makes Florida State, Florida State."

Osborne started becoming aware of the social issues around him back when he was going up in Matteson, Illinois. He would listen to stories from not only his parents but his grandparents about all of the racial issues surrounding them from when they were kids. After listening to those stories, Osborne wanted to be part of the change. Even on a gameday, Osborne took part in an anti-racism task force conference call just hours before the Seminoles played Miami on Feb. 24.

Not only does Osborne have the support of his teammates, but also the FSU coaches.

"Malik is an extremely intelligent youngster, extremely competitive," FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He has a deep respect for doing what's right. He's the kind of guy that does well in the classroom and is also a leader on the team.

"He has that ability to make the right decisions about things. And he stands for the things that are right. I'm very proud of the fact that he's matured enough to want to be a part of the solution and not one of those guys interested in being part of the problem. He knows if he isn't doing anything, then he's not contributing."

Not only does Osborne want to walk in James' footsteps as a basketball player, but he also admires what the NBA All-Star does off the court.

That's why Osborne has been meeting with Thrasher on his own time about social issues that are bothering Osborne and other students around campus. Thrasher hopes he and Osborne can continue to create change for the diverse student body at FSU.

"It's been a pleasure to get to know Malik over the past couple of years," Thrasher said in a statement. "While Malik may be well-known for his basketball talents, he's also an outstanding young man.

"I'm so proud of his commitment to tackle issues of racial inequity and injustice. His service on Florida State's anti-racism task force will help ensure a more diverse and inclusive campus for future generations."

While Osborne wants to continue to play basketball at a high level as long as he can, he also wants to continue to bring about change to the FSU campus even after he leaves Tallahassee. He plans on not only influencing the students there at FSU now but into the future.

The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, had a major effect on Osborne. While some have told athletes to "shut up and dribble," Osborne hopes he continues to make his mark as a student-athlete on and off of the court.

"I want to be able to voice these opinions because I know it is my opinion, but these are the opinions of others as well. I just wanted to share my opinion and other's opinions of how demoralizing, hurtful, and how shocking it is to continue to see this as it almost seems like a trend of police brutality, especially when minorities and African-Americans.

"These stories of racial inequality and police brutality have affected me but has motivated me to go harder for the task force and not be afraid to speak up. If I don't speak up about social issues, then no one is going to know."

"The campus has been around for so long it is not going to be a percent, and it is going to be some changes that need to be made along the way. If this group stays around, who knows, there might be some more changes that may be implemented even after I leave from Florida State."