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The Undefeated: Diverse Journalism Gives Proof of Life

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) March 20, 2018



There is a misconception that diversity is not important when reporting the news. That news is a set of facts that exist in a linear timeframe. That anyone can do it.

“Once you’re here for 10 minutes, you realize that it is not the case,” says Raina Kelley, managing editor of *The Undefeated*. “Two people can see two separate tracks and come away with very different stories.”

As a black woman in sports journalism, she’s here to set the record straight. Across the industry, Hispanic, black and Asian women make up less than 5 percent of newsroom personnel at traditional print and online news publications.

Raina grew up loving to unwind things. “I love playing with words, I love to edit,” she says. But she especially loves the story meetings, where they decide what ideas are “*Undefeated*” ideas. The mark of an *Undefeated* story? A thought-provoking piece focusing on the intersections of sports, race and culture.

“Diversity results in diversity of story, and storytelling methods,” she says. “Multiculturalism should be really good news to storytelling.”

She brings up “Bubble Tea-gate,” the backlash of a *New York Times* piece, extolling the popularity of the hip and new bubble tea trend. However, bubble tea has been around for decades and is well-known to many Asians and Asian Americans.

“You just revealed who you are writing for,” Raina said. “It is a microaggression, this thing that is not in any way new to you, in fact, it’s a part of everyday life. It is exotic-ized in a major newspaper as if it’s wild and outrageous. It makes you feel alienated and isolated.”

Bubble Tea could have been a successful piece if there had been a robust and diverse staff, to point out the popularity of bubble tea, and frame it differently. “Diversity gives readers proof of life. All of your readers,” she said. “Correct framing would have inspired some readers to say ‘I want to try it!’ and others to realize ‘Oh my god, the New York Times appreciates part of my culture.’”

The Undefeated is continuing to grow as more people become interested in the idea of intersectionality. “Our stories have gotten richer and more intersectional,” she says. For additional depth, she pushes her team to write untold stories or angles—reminding them that there are more to people than

stereotypes.

“We learned from athletes themselves. They are tired of being asked the same questions about the same set of stats over and over again,” she says. “Kevin Durant is feeling all the things from the world that we’re feeling; he has thoughts about it.”

Durant wrote [a letter to his hometown](#), an impoverished, predominantly black community, for the publication, explaining that he didn’t want to abandon them. “It is about humanity, about seeing athletes as humans, not just an amazing collection of highlights,” Raina says. “[Reading his story], you’re less capable of calling him a spoiled millionaire athlete who should just ‘stick to sports.’”

She admits race and gender can push some big buttons in the current climate, but the *Undefeated* uses sports as a vessel to have these difficult conversations.

“If you think about African American history in the 20th century, great notes are sports moments,” she says, going on to mention the integration of baseball and football, and Jesse Owens winning four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics. “Each of these are important moments. It is not unusual before this moment with [Colin Kaepernick] that issues of race and culture exist sports that you see...Not only do sports tell those stories [of race and gender] beautifully, but you begin to see successful black men and women,” she says, acknowledging while she was growing up the portrayal of African Americans on TV were The Jefferson’s, or Cops.

Providing representation for her readers is one of Raina’s missions as managing editor. “[*The Undefeated*] was not born to simply serve African American sports fans, though that’s very much our focus. We are presenting facts in sports, intersections especially... we are over-serving an underserved community. You want a piece of what we’re slicing? We want to give it to you and more. Huge visuals, all the bang for your buck. YOU are an audience we value and that we feel have been underserved forever.”



Kirsten Ballard



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