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Speakers: Karine Vasselín, Rahul Ramugade, & Franciele Da Silva

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Karine: At Capgemini, everyone is in the game. We shape a common passion for sports, and we build inclusive futures for all, on and off the field. In this series, we will be hearing from amazing athletes and inspiring role models, how they break stereotypes and overcome challenges in sports and in the workplace.

I am Karine Vasselín. I am leading the Group Diversity and Inclusion agenda. I do para triathlon myself, and I will be your host.

Welcome to Beyond the Scoreboard. I'm Karine and I am your host for this series, and I'm very delighted to have with me today two amazing athletes. We've got Rahul, who is a para swimmer and wheelchair cricketer from India.

And Franciele, who is an international football player from Brazil. As Franciele has a hearing disability, we have Hanna today with us to help us interpreting what Franciele will be sharing with us.

In this episode, we'll hear from both of them how they went beyond their ability status to grow their passion for sports and overcome all kinds of obstacles.

So, hello Rahul. You started as a para swimmer, and now, you are doing cricket at a professional level. I even heard you started scuba diving. So, where did you find this strength and motivation to try out so many sports?

Rahul: So, as a child, I used to swim for my exercise. So, as I have polio on both legs, I can't walk. I have to use a wheelchair or some skateboard I have designed to move around here. And then after few years, I realized I'm good at it. So, let's try as a competition.

So, I went to the district and state and national level competition. And there we met some people who play cricket on a wheelchair. So, as you know, India is a really crazy nation for cricket.

So, as a person with disability, I used to see on television that able-bodied players are playing, representing their country and fulfilling their dream to play cricket for India or other countries.

And when I realized there is an opportunity that I can play cricket on a wheelchair and that too also represent my city, my state, and my country also. So, I grabbed it, and I started that.

Karine: Amazing! And hello, Fran. So, just as Rahul said and did, you never let your disability status get in the way of your love for sports. However, how was it challenging for you to play football, especially at this international level?

Franciele: So, from my end, actually all of my family members are hearing, I am the only deaf person within my family. I was born this way, and when my family realized that I was deaf, they didn't know how they would be able to communicate with me and what they would be able to do.

So, my family was worried that in the future, I would not be able to develop socially and to develop any other skills. However, I grew up not speaking Portuguese, but I learned many things through a visual experience. And my family would give me inputs, they would give me dolls, they would give me some sorts of toys that I wasn't very fond of.

And I used to go out a lot with my cousins and to hang out with them. And I remember that when I was a child, I used to see them playing soccer, playing football, and I had this desire of joining them, but I couldn't do so because I was a woman. That's what I was always told.

However, as a very stubborn person, I jumped in and they accepted having me within the group, and I actually felt very passionate about sports involving balls. And I was able to develop very fastly, and people were surprised that I was a woman, a deaf woman, and able to play with people older than me.

I decided to join them. I showed them some medals I had got, and then I took them also to my family. My family members were very surprised that as a deaf person, as a woman, I was able to join a hearing soccer team and develop with them as well.

And since then, I've been participating in many championships, state championships, and also other championships as well.

Back then, when I finished high school, I decided to join, I tried to join an official football team, but I wasn't allowed because I was deaf. But then I thought of some other strategies, what I could do. In the meantime, I was 18 years old, around 18 and I moved out of my house. I moved to Brasilia, and I decided to look for job opportunities and job openings.

I remember that a deaf person asked me if I still liked sports and I said yes, that my dream was actually to continue playing sports, but I had to find a job. But this person told me that in Brasilia, there was a deaf society of sports.

They had many different sports such as swimming, soccer, handball, and I immediately felt like joining. I joined the team, I bought everything I needed to buy – equipments and everything. And differently from before, having only hearing participants within the team – in this new setting, I had only deaf sign language users that played soccer with me.

And it was very interesting in the sense that it gave me a sense of belonging and it gave me the opportunity also of developing my skills and participating of championships and competitions that I never thought I would be able to join.

In one of these championships, there was this person that was paying attention to me and was paying attention to what I was doing, and the scores I was doing within the match. And at the end of the soccer match at the state competition, this person called me in private and asked me if – well, she congratulated me at first and invited me to join the Brazilian team of soccer.

And that was very... I couldn't believe it was real actually. And because of that, I went to Thailand. I had the opportunity to go to a championship in Thailand that made me very, very happy.

At the end of this competition, I remember that I told my family I would talk to them via chat, via message, and they were very proud of everything that I was doing. They were actually surprised. They couldn't believe that I was in that I was in that position, in that place with deaf people like traveling around the world. They were very impressed. But at the same time, they were very proud of me as well.

I also participated of the deaf Olympics, the 24th edition in Caxias do Sul, and Brazil got third place in that championship as well.

Karine: I'm so impressed and so grateful Fran, for you to share your experience. This is amazing and it seems that really, nothing couldn't stop you from doing soccer.

Rahul, so Fran had to face a double challenge, being deaf and being a woman to play football. What about you? Did you meet some specific challenges in your practice and training in getting ready for tournaments?

Rahul: Yes. So, although cricket is very popular in India, but for person with disability, there are no big facilities or anything. So, if a person, any able-bodied person want to join cricket in India, he can go to the local academies and he can start playing and participate in tournaments.

But for us, no one is actually organizing. So, we have only formed one Wheelchair Cricket Association in 2016. Under that, all Pan India, we are organizing many tournaments like national tournaments, other tournaments like this.

And for practice also, it's very difficult because of when we go to cricket academies to ask their ground or their nets for practice, so they first refuse us. They say because of your wheelchair you might damage our ground or the turf where the cricket, they play.

So, we have to then show them by playing for a few minutes, a few hours there that our wheelchair is not damaging your ground or anything. So, while now we are playing it from the last seven years, it's not easy. There are some barriers, but it's our passion and we want to do it. So, we are doing it.

Karine: I have one more question for both of you: what can our audience learn from your journeys that we can apply to our lives? Maybe Rahul we start with you?

Rahul: Yes. So, on our wheelchair cricket team, there are many disability players. So, because of that, we get many roles to play. Just like an amputee player is quite a

strong player. So, he has a role to score runs very quickly. Then a player like me, both legs polio or some spinal players, they'll have lesser power. So, they can stay on the wicket and play longer innings and build the inning according to the need of the team.

So, in similar way in corporate life or anywhere, we need many people to represent the specific role. It's like we need more varieties of people to do work. So, inclusion, it's very important in every field. So, everybody should get equal opportunity and inclusion is very important in every aspect of life.

Karine: Thanks, Rahul. And Fran, do you experience the same in Capgemini, Brazil?

Franciele: The main challenge as being a deaf person is language. So, is having a language barrier. So, what happens mostly is that sometimes when people learn sign language, they can communicate better with me.

So, what I do, what I mainly support in terms of promoting inclusion is to teach certain signs to certain best practices for communication. For instance, giving me a tap on the shoulder or using a specific sign, or saying that if the person yells, it will not make any difference.

So, it's a matter of getting used to a different form of communication. And that in any environment, being a sports team or a company is what makes the difference.

Karine: Thank you so much to both of you. I think we learned today that whatever our ability status, we have the strength, we have the power to play sports at even international level and to enjoy it.

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