Beyond the barriers
Episode 1: Inclusion and sports | English transcript

Karine: Hello everyone.

We are back with a new series of Beyond the Barriers, where we will explore how inclusion can help remove the roadblocks that still limit access to opportunity, not just in the workplace, but also in society.

I am Karine Vasselin, and today, I have the pleasure to host Camille Seneclauze, two-time European and World Champion in paratriathlon. Anne Imbert, who leads brand sport and sponsorship for Orange Group and Mohamed Amine Zariat, founder and CEO of TIBU Africa that uses sport as a platform for education and youth empowerment in Morocco and across Africa.

In this episode, we're talking about inclusion in sports, both on and off the field.

Together, we'll take a look at where we stand today and ask who is still being left on the sidelines, and what can we learn from them and organizations working to move beyond the barriers.

Camille, I'd like to start with you. You've always been very athletic. I believe, uh, you did a lot of gymnastics in particular. So what led you to triathlon, eventually becoming a two-time European champion and even a world champion?

Camille: Hi, Karine. Yes, honestly, I think that, uh, triathlon chose me. My business school was actually organizing one in September every year.

I just bought an old bike on the internet and I just went for it, and decided that I wanted to try the challenge.

But I just fell in love with this sport. And when I did this triathlon, I was just told myself that I wanted to do this my whole life and that this was my sport now.

And what is funny, is that a few months later I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis which is a chronic disease that is impacting neurologic functions. So instead of pulling me away from sport, it did the opposite.

It's what pushed me to even go through the difficulties of the hospitalization and the diagnosis and all.

Karine: Mm-hmm.

Really inspiring. And we really have something in common, I think, because I also took up triathlon after discovering myself that I had a chronic illness, uh, because I wanted to have this you know, well-rounded complete sport that forced me to maintain a regular physical training routine.

And, we know that professional sports today come with many barriers, especially maybe for women and people with disabilities. So can you, share on your own experience, which

barriers you faced while preparing for triathlons and how maybe even more importantly you overcame them? Do you think there are some specific that are really related to gender bias or stereotypes?

Camille: Okay. So I think the first barrier, for men and women both, um, is the financial one, because triathlon is a really expensive sport. And we have to travel a lot and to invest a lot, and in the beginning is when, you don't have any support.

But as a woman, there are also a lot of difficulties because as you know cycling and triathlon are still very men-oriented sports. For example, most training data and coaching method are built for men since the beginning of endurance sport research.

And female physiology wasn't really taken into account for a very long time. For example, the impact of the menstrual cycle on performance. It has only started being recognized very recently.

If we just look at the triathlon's staff in the national team, we mainly have men coaches. So it can impact even if they are not really sexist or, or just fundamentally bad.

Karine: Yeah

Camille: There is a story that I think says a lot about that. During a training camp we were only two women at the time in the team, and we had to do cycling training and it lasted like three or four hours, of training, and it was completely remote in like fields, and there were facilities, but it was l maybe one or two kilometers from the place that we were positioned.

So we were in full triathlon suits, so if we needed to use the restroom, we had to cycle for two kilometers when the men could just go just two step further and do what they have to do.

This time when I raised this with the coach, the answer was, "Two kilometers isn't really a problem. You can just go and go back." And physically, sure, I can do it. I do it every day, and two kilometers is nothing but this time, by the time I got back, training had already started and I was left behind and I had to do a lot of the training this day by myself.

And I think , common misogyny it's still, very common in, uh, in social media, and maybe even more and more. I have a lot of, condescending advice from random men about, uh, like cycling, how I'm pedaling, my position on the bike. And for me, it's funny because I know that they don't know anything and I'm, and that I, I am surrounded by expert and that my position and my pedaling are just, are just fine because I managed to be a world champion with with them,

So it can be really mentally impacting.

And on top of that, as a para athlete with MS, I need significantly more rest and recovery than other athletes. A typical training week for me is around twenty hours of training. I'm training two to three times a day. And between the session, I need to recover, so I need to sleep and one of the barriers to that is that I need time.

Karine: Mm-hmm. I know exactly what you mean in fighting with your swimsuit and sometime waiting for hours to queue for the women toilets when men toilets are so much more, you know, accessible.
But in spite all of these difficulties, I think Camille, this intensive practice of sports have developed your resilience, shaped your confidence and probably leadership.

Let's move to Anne next. Hello, Anne. I'm really pleased to have you here today for our podcast. Are you yourself a sport addict and a sport player?

Anne: Hello, Karine. I'm very glad to be with you and this is a great opportunity to be here with you and discuss. I run on a regular basis. I do ski. I'm quite passionate about sports because to me it brings positive values, positive energy and yeah, I'm really committed into sports. Doing a bit of sports myself.

Karine: Fantastic. And it seems that both Capgemini and Orange have a passion for sports deeply anchored in their DNA, and they act through their sponsorship in rugby or football to promote sports for all, and notably women in sports as an enabler of empowerment on and off the field. So Anne, what kind of barriers do you see women athletes still facing? And could you tell us how is Orange ensuring sport plays a key role in improving gender equality?

Anne: Well, when we look at what we are doing as an organization. We focus on two core themes. Inclusion of women in football, and how to use sport to educate kids and children.

So when it comes to supporting women athletes, one of the biggest barrier women football face is insufficient access to facilities. Because there are fewer female players than male players, women often do not receive the same access to calendars, playing slots or facilities availabilities. So Orange, as you said, is a major football sponsor, and we are trying to change the way we invest in football sponsorship by working in France with the French Football Federation to ensure that more than half of this investment is especially allocated to developing infrastructure and safe space for women and girls who play football.

Karine: Wow

Anne: So this is not just for professionals, but also on the field at grassroots level by creating a safe space for girls on the field and even having a female referee for them to feel comfortable.

So it's really a game changer to improve gender equality and ensure better representation. And as I am managing sponsorship at the global level, we are trying to put that commitment in place in all our contract when we start to renew the contract locally and to put what we call the fifty-fifty rules in place everywhere.

Karine: Yes. That is an interesting way of conducting partnership and very inspiring for what we do and very similar with what we have developed with World Rugby, notably with our Women in Rugby leadership program in Capgemini to precisely empower more women rugby players on the field and in the federation and to become stronger leaders.

But coming back to you, Camille. You train and practice at a professional level. How did it impact your work-life balance and your capacity maybe, uh, to have a career or a job in parallel?

Camille: So in the beginning, it was really hard to make room for both working as a consultant and with client-facing and training every day.

So my calendar was a bit overwhelming. At the time,I couldn't train more than 15 hours a week because it was just impossible. So a typical day back then for me was swim in the morning, and then go straight to work and maybe eating breakfast and doing my makeup on the subway.

Karine: Wow

Camille: But I was still showing up to work with wet hair because I just swam. And then while my colleague was eating lunch, I tried to manage to stick a training in the middle. And every day was just feeling so much like a marathon. But I think at the time it was okay for me because I really wanted go professional in sport, and I knew that I had to go through this and just to, to have access then to financial support and maybe more time off.

And I was right because after I managed to have flexibility in my agenda to train more and work less.

Karine: Thank you, Camille. I love this image of how triathlon could turn into a life marathon. Let's move to Mohamed next.

So Mohammed, as a former international basketball player yourself, it seems that you saw very quickly the potential of sports as a powerful force for social innovation and change. I must say it's very impressive to see how your non-profit, Tibu Africa, helps thousands of young people build a brighter future through sports.

But can I ask you Mohamed, what is really the spirit of your organization?

Mohamed: Thank you, Karine, for inviting me. So TIBU started with a tournament. And today it's a non-profit NGO established in more than 10 countries in Africa with more than 650 staff working every day with more than 400,000 beneficiaries, kids, women, girls, migrants, refugees, youth with motion disabilities, youth detainees.

Karine: Mm-hmm.

Mohamed: And we offer for them every day programs focused on education through sports, sports employability through our schools of second chance, and sports entrepreneurship through our sports social innovation labs, and also programs focused on girls and women empowerment. So yeah we have a vision by 2030 to become the locomotive of sport for development in Africa.

Karine: Amazing. And you're mentioning that you're passing opportunities to those youth from marginalized backgrounds. Do you think that STEM education plus leadership skills really help them to overcome these barriers they may face to education or to a future professional career?

Mohamed: So we use sports just to attract youth in all the programs of Tibu. It can be in our schools of second chance, our social innovation incubators, our community centers. When they come to our programs, we work to develop their entrepreneurial behavior, technical skills through different methods.

Let me share with you the story of Lahcen Majdoubi. He's one of our best stars. He's twenty-two years old. He dropped out when he was fifteen in middle school, in Tangier. And when you are also in a very difficult situation you can think about, you know, do something not positive.

And Lahcen was very passionate about cycling, so he won three times African Championship with Morocco and he had some difficulties and obstacles with the Federation of Cycling and he decided to start a new journey with Tibu and he joined Tibu School of Second Chance, and then he joined our program focused on employability and entrepreneurship.

And now he's a social entrepreneur. And also he's supporting athletes who are preparing themselves for Ironman or big competitions to be better.

And he's promoting also his city, Tangier, through the program focused on cycling and tourism. And for me, it's a big, great success story because he's creating jobs.

Karine: Wow, what a journey! I think that's a powerful example of what inclusion can do in society. What about you, Anne? You shared with us at the beginning that sport is also for you an important channel for youth education. What does it represent precisely for you in Orange?

Anne: I do believe, and we do believe, when we play sports we learn more as well.

This is also our company purpose here to spread awareness about cyberbullying and ways to deal with it. Sport-based learning is more engaging as traditional classroom learning because we learn better when we play.

And our initiative For Good Connections uses this approach to address topics such as cyberbullying, screen time, inappropriate online content, and responsible internet use using sports events to organize workshops for kids. So our program today is really integrating our CSR commitment. And we have this commitment by 2030 to train more than 6 million people worldwide.

So sponsorship and grassroot activation is really used to train on different manners. And for doing that, we are not doing it alone. We are doing it with association, with club and third parties, specialist organization to deliver the initiative.

Karine: It seems that beyond sport investing in these digital inclusion programs are something we do have in common as well. And so it's great to see how organization like ours today feels the responsibility of acting on innovative ways to shape a more inclusive futures for everyone.

Okay. So Camille, if you could pick two things we should focus on in your own experience to make sports more accessible to all, especially maybe for women and people with disabilities, what would they be, Camille?

Camille: For me, the biggest one is more mediatization of parasports. And not just once every four years at the Paralympics because it's great, but we are racing all of the time and training all of the time, and nobody is hearing from us.

We are all doing the same thing. If I just compare my routine, and my day-to-day living with another triathlete but who is valid, there are not so much difference between the both of us.

And I think that they have a really big prize money, and we don't have any.

Karine: Mm-hmm.

Camille: Like, we have zero. Last year I was European champion, world champion. I did only podiums during all the year, and I had zero prize money. But if I were valid, I would have had more than 100,000 of dollars.

So,it is, unfair and it has to change IF people are investing in para sport.

Karine: Yeah**.** So, so sad. But what about you, Mohamed? Would you say that businesses can help really drive inclusion and inclusive education and have a social impact outside of their core business?

Mohamed: I like your question because for us, we are not doing programs, but we are building a system. Advocating every day how we can use sports differently. We started with Capgemini five, six years ago. It's not about money. We receive every week talent from Capgemini to our schools of second chance. And when our youth meet professionals they develop different skills.

I think in this world we need to have more social innovators and also great companies like Capgemini and also other organizations to use sports differently and to use sport for more inclusivity.

Karine: Thank you so much, Mohamed. Your story really shows us the power of inclusion in sports.

Sports being so much more than just a competition, because by creating opportunities for the youth and bringing communities together, we see that we can take the right steps to build a more inclusive futures for all.

Speaking about the future. What about you, Anne? What would you say to other organizations or companies who may be looking to create a positive impact?

Anne: Well, for organizations, sport program should not simply build an image. It should drive change and action to create real world impact.

Karine: Mm-hmm.

Anne: And for doing that, we are really working with our CSR colleague, with marketing, with association, and all the partnership that we have. We redefined two years ago our sponsorship strategy based on football, based on e-sport, based on music in some countries.

So our strategy is now to focus on to move from awareness to action and change behaviors and practice.So it's important to have this collaboration between the different department.

Karine: Yes, it can only work if it is a transversal and engaging initiative, as you say.

Anne: Yeah, It's key. It's key. Not only, you know, communication on one side or sponsorship on the others. It's really, you know, communication, marketing, CSR work hand in hand.

Karine: That brings us to the end of this episode. Thank you Camille from Capgemini, Mohammed from Tibu Africa, and Anne from Orange for joining us today.

So for me to conclude this episode, one thing is clear that sport has the power to really change lives. And when we remove barriers, we unlock talent, confidence, and opportunities that might otherwise remain invisible.

Because inclusion in sport is ultimately about possibilities, giving every person the chance to participate, to grow, and to reveal their full potential.

This is Beyond the Barriers. Stay tuned for the next episode.