

ACCELERATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN GOLF

WE ARE GOLF Diversity Task Force Making a Difference

By Dr. Michael Cooper

May 1, 2019, was one of the most memorable days in my professional career. It was National Golf Day, in Washington, D.C., and our WE ARE GOLF Diversity Task Force had a packed schedule of activities. Among them were opening comments at the morning welcome, where diversity was theme for the day, and an afternoon meeting with representatives from the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

At the time, the Diversity Task Force consisted of 35 members, including representatives from golf's leading organizations, along with community-based program leaders and diversity advocates. Steve Mona created the task force in 2010, when he was president & CEO of the World Golf Foundation. In April 2017, Mona selected me as chairman.

The Four Pillars

Our task force has four working subcommittees, focused on increasing diversity and inclusion in recreational play, competitive play, workforce and supplier diversity. The primary objectives of the task force are to serve as “linking agents,” identifying, communicating with, and connecting hundreds of minority-led, community-based programs and golf industry leaders. In addition, we work closely with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), hoping to create strategies to better include their networks in golf’s \$84 billion industry.

As National Golf Day approached, I was anxious to share our story with interested members of Congress. What an opportunity, and what an honor!

The morning welcome was held in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill. The room was packed with political delegates and National Golf Day participants. I was honored to say a few words on behalf of our Diversity Task Force. Opening ceremonies were followed by mingling, sharing business cards and picture taking. After 45 minutes, it was time to get on with the day.

Our pre-assigned groups headed to the series of morning meetings on the top floors of the Rayburn Building. In between meetings, I roamed the hallways with James Beatty, executive editor, *African American Golfer’s Digest*, who also serves on the WE ARE GOLF Diversity Task Force. Beatty is also the founder of the African American Golf Expo & Forum. By chance, we shared an elevator ride with Congressman Elijah Cummings and his aide.

I was a longtime fan of Congressman Elijah Cummings. I admired him for rising through the political ranks, despite humble beginnings. He displayed integrity, courage and conviction, yet advocated for civil disobedience and nonviolence, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Beatty and I met Congressman Cummings unexpectedly, yet he was courteous and patient enough to hold a brief conversation with us, wish us well, and pose for a picture.

Speaking of Jim Beatty, it was his idea to meet with the CBC. He birthed the CBC concept during the WE ARE GOLF annual breakfast earlier that year at the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando.

Beatty insisted that we needed a bigger, louder megaphone to bring attention to our diversity and inclusion movement. We hoped that would be the outcome of the CBC meeting on National Golf Day. The meeting was scheduled to happen just after the lunch break.

Advocating to the CBC

At the meeting, the CBC was represented by four members, including its chair, Congressman Cedric Richmond from Louisiana. Other congressional members were James Clyburn (South Carolina), Marc Veasey (Texas) and Marcia Fudge (Ohio). A Congressional aide accompanied each CBC member.

Mona, then the Executive Director of WE ARE GOLF, led us into the CBC meeting. We were also joined by Dr. Lezli Baskerville, president & CEO for the National Association of Equal Opportunity

in Higher Education, the advocacy association for HBCUs.

Central to the conversation was golf’s \$84 billion economic impact and more than 2 million jobs. But African Americans comprised less than 3% of golf’s workforce, and there was little to no evidence of golf industry leaders doing business with Black and Brown business owners. That meant that Black and Brown people were all but excluded from golf’s \$84 billion economic impact, except as consumers. That does not speak to inclusion.

Rather than present the lack of representation as a deficit, our group chose to present it as an opportunity to increase diversity and inclusion in the game and industry. We referenced the rapidly changing demographics in America, which were forecasted to exceed 40% within the next decade. Therefore, we believed it would be impossible for golf to remain homogenous as a sport and thriving industry. From a business sense, it would be foolish too.

We informed CBC members of our four working subcommittees. Dr. Baskerville explained how we engaged with the HBCU network, and how she believed that students on these campuses could benefit by using golf as a business tool for upward mobility and economic growth. She expounded on her longtime relationship with Craig Kirby, another Diversity Task Force member.

Craig Kirby is the founder and president of Golf. My Future. My Game., based in Washington, D.C. Kirby has a political background, and his relationship with Dr. Baskerville cleared the path for our HBCU work. We are convinced that maximizing this relationship is key to increasing diversity and inclusion in every category.

CBC members agreed that golf needed more diverse representation, and that a linkage to Black and Brown communities could present opportunities for economic growth. They agreed with our strategies to forge alliances with community programmers and the



Bringing the voices of the golf industry together

Founded in 2009, WE ARE GOLF was developed to provide a unified voice on behalf of golf’s stakeholders to address legislative and regulatory issues of importance to the golf industry at a federal level. The National Club Association is a member of the WE ARE GOLF Executive Roundtable.



Left to right: Michael Cooper, Congressman Elijah Cummings, James Beatty



Left to right: Michael Cooper, Congressman Cedric Richmond, Steve Mona

HBCU network. Finally, they agreed to be vocal advocates for our cause as time allowed.

Moving in the Right Direction

We hoped to reconvene with the CBC during National Golf Day 2020, but that did not happen due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, recent political and social issues have accelerated diversity and inclusion efforts in golf, as evidenced by the following:

- Jay Monahan's announced that the PGA TOUR will donate "at least \$100 million" to "racial and social injustice causes" over the next 10 years. Some of the money will be spent on HBCUs and the Advocates Pro Golf Association Tour, which prepares African Americans and other minorities for careers in golf.
- The PGA TOUR promoted Marsha Oliver to VP, Community & Inclusion. She is responsible for charitable activities in tournament markets and cultural change initiatives.
- The PGA of America promoted Linnet Carty to Director of Community Engagement. She is responsible for diversity and inclusion education, curriculum design and training.

- PGA CEO and the commissioners for the PGA TOUR and LPGA created the Industry Collaboration "to advance diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as the industry's broader growth of the game endeavors."
- The PGA of America eliminated Horton Smith's name from an award that honors its members' contributions to education. Smith was president of the PGA from 1952 to 1954. He defended the organization's now-expunged Caucasians-only policies.
- Renee Powell was elected to the PGA of America board of directors. Powell is the second African American woman to compete on the LPGA Tour, and serves as the head pro/manager at Clearview Golf Club, the only golf course in America designed, built, owned and operated by African Americans.
- NBA superstar Steph Curry donated \$1 million to start golf programs at Howard University, a HBCU in Washington, D.C.
- Phil Mickelson donated \$500,000 to Jackson State University, a HBCU in Jackson, Miss.
- Phil Mickelson, Charles Barkley, Steph Curry and Peyton Manning competed in a made-for-television exhibition, raising more than \$7 million for HBCU programs.
- PGA TOUR player Cameron Champ donated \$40,000 to fund two scholarships at Prairie View A&M University, a HBCU in Texas.
- Lee Elder will serve as honorary starter at the 2021 Master's, at Augusta National Golf Club. Augusta National will also award two annual scholarships in Lee Elder's name to deserving students at Paine College in Augusta, Ga.
- The inaugural African American Golf Expo & Forum (aagolf-expo.com) will be held August 21-24, 2021, just outside Atlanta, Ga. *Golf Digest* is the title sponsor.

The Way to Greater Diversity

Yes, progress is being made. But more work is needed for golf to reflect the changing demographics in America. That brings me to my final three points:

1. Industry leaders must remember that diversity extends beyond race. Gender, age, religion, ableness and sexual orientation, among others, must also be considered.
2. To assure diversity of thought, there must be ample representation at the board and senior leadership levels, for they are the primary decision-makers.
3. I urge golf industry leaders to develop relationships with community programmers. Some have chosen the entrepreneurial route because it is in their spirit, while others do so out of necessity as the industry offers so few positions. Invest in them (and HBCUs). They will pave the way to greater diversity and inclusion in golf. **CD**

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