

Body Jealousy

“Dreads and curves have become an issue in high school sports”

“It was a piece of news that seemed to come and go too quickly, but it’s a story worthy of a deeper discussion.

It’s the issue of body shaming, particularly as it comes to high school sports.

Last week, 17-year-old Alaskan swimmer, Breckynn Willis, emerged out of the pool to claim her victory in the 100-yard freestyle. But to her shock, Willis was disqualified.

Not for a false start, or accidentally crossing lanes. The teenager was disqualified essentially for having the wrong type of body.

A black, curvy, athletic body which was overexposed by a regulation swimsuit. In explaining the swimmer’s DQ, the referee said that too much of her rear end was showing, exposed by the same swimsuit that all of her other teammates were wearing.

Yet none of Willis’ teammates were penalized.

This was a point emphasized by Lauren Langford, Director of YMCA Aquatics, coach of a neighboring high school team in Alaska and a long-time swimmer.

“The rest of her team was wearing the same uniform, and she was the only one disqualified,” Langford said. “It is my opinion that she has been targeted and singled out over the last year.

“All of these girls are all wearing suits that are cut the same way,” she continued. “And the only girl who gets disqualified is a mixed-race girl with rounder, curvier features.”

Langford, who wrote an impassioned piece about the incident on Medium, wasn’t just spewing unjustified anger either. She had evidence to back up her claim.

Her teammates were all wearing the same swimsuit. Last year, Willis’ younger sister, Dreamer Kowatch, had a run-in with that same referee where she was similarly criticized for the way her swimsuit fit her body. Also, the referee never warned Breckynn’s coach about the swimsuit “issue” before the decision. But the most obvious explanation, especially for anyone who has been swimming before, is that swimsuits need to be adjusted after coming out of the water.

“We have a term for it — it’s called a suit wedgie,” said Langford. “And wedgies happen. It’s uncomfortable. No one’s going to walk around that way intentionally.”

After her disqualification, the team’s coach took the incident to the Anchorage School District, which reviewed the case and concluded that Willis “was targeted based solely on how a standard,

school-issued uniform happened to fit the shape of her body.” They also went on to say that the referee’s decision was “heavy-handed and unnecessary.”

“We cannot tolerate discrimination of any kind, and certainly not based on body shape,” the district said in a written statement.

The district then appealed to the Alaska School Activities Association (ASAA). They sided with the district, reversed the disqualification and restored the win to the distraught teenager through a statement.

While justice prevailed in the end, the entire situation should have never happened.

Willis has competed in 14 races this season, and a disqualification for her swimsuit never occurred before. So why now?

Humiliation And Identity

Willis’ incident is reminiscent to that of Andrew Johnson, the 16-year-old high school wrestler in New Jersey who, last December, was forced to cut off his dreads by referee Alan Maloney. Maloney, an official who had a noted previous issue with racism, gave the young wrestler an option- cut the dreads or forfeit.

In that disturbing video, we all watched in anger as a trainer cut off Andrew's dreads in order for him to wrestle in his match, all while coaches and teammates gave him messages of encouragement.

Johnson won that match, but the damage was done.

The teenage wrestler was embarrassed, humiliated and intimidated into making a decision that he had no business being forced into doing. His identity was stolen the moment the scissors touched his head.

Never mind that the coaches should have stepped up and taken the loss as a team instead of subjecting Andrew to unwarranted humiliation.

A 16-year-old student should not have been placed into that position, where the pressure of winning essentially coerced a decision which would affect him personally.

And for those who argue that his hair will grow back, stop reading now and go research the significance of Black hair, especially dreadlocks.

The Effects Of Racism

These situations shouldn't be taken lightly.

They're inclusive of racism, sexism and body shaming. For these teenagers, it affects their confidence and perceptions of their rapidly developing bodies. Seeing adults place the unnecessary strain of judgment, intimidation, shame, and racism upon them is infuriating.

Racism places an unwanted spotlight upon a victim, forcing them to have to address a situation they haven't caused, many times in silence or without true support. And it's not something that can be ignored.

"Some will argue this has nothing to do with race, but when the same officials targeting these girls have been heard saying that so-and-so white girl also shows too much skin but has never been disqualified for a similar violation the racial facet of this issue cannot be ignored," wrote Langford.

Willis, like Johnson, has been involuntarily thrust into the spotlight by racism. As athletes, all they wanted to do was compete and put their dedication, training, sacrifice and hard work to use into the sport they love. Instead, they became martyrs, victims of the hatred, ignorance, and jealousy that many possess.

Interestingly, while Willis and Johnson had their names and faces plastered across the media landscape, the referee in Alaska hasn't been identified as of yet. So while he/she has yet to be exposed, a distraught teenager had to fight a battle that she in no way picked.

One caused by ignorance camouflaged as a wedgie."

Source: The Shadow League

Link:

<https://theshadowleague.com/breckynn-willis-swimmer-black-girls/>