

Team Toyota athlete Brigette Lacquette: The first First Nations woman to play hockey for Team Canada



Every athlete competing at the Paralympic Games or Olympic Games takes a unique journey on their way to the top. While talent, great coaching and years of hard work are elements almost all have in common, the elite athletes who represent our nation at the highest level often have to overcome seemingly impossible barriers to create opportunities for themselves. This is Brigette Lacquette's story.

Brigette Lacquette never imagined that a girl from a tiny Métis community in rural Manitoba could represent her country at

the Olympics. But with hard work, dedication and her passion for the sport fueling her, that's exactly what she did.

Born in Mallard, Manitoba, Brigette grew up admiring high performance First Nations athletes. Her father took her to Indigenous sporting events and she begged him to let her play hockey. He worried the sport was too rough for her... but bought her a pair of skates anyway.

Hockey quickly became a way of life for Brigette, offering her a safe place from the bullying she endured at school and providing an outlet for her to feel strong and at peace. And, when the financial burden of the expensive sport challenged her family, her Cote First Nation community in Saskatchewan stepped up to help with some of the costs.

It wasn't until she started going beyond her community that she experienced racism firsthand. She recalls feeling the eyes of the other players on her during her first tryout for a Winnipeg-based hockey team. She looked different from the other players ... and they made her feel that way, too. Nobody greeted her. Nobody sat with her. She felt very alone.

Later, while playing for a team based in Brandon, Manitoba, Brigette felt like she was closer to belonging... until she experienced racism on the ice at a tournament in Winnipeg.

Hearing comments like “go back to your reserve, you dirty indian” from players on the other team hurt her, but she credits her father to giving her the best advice: ‘Just beat them on the ice.’

“That advice meant so much to me. He was telling me to be the bigger person, to focus on myself, and to use that frustration as fuel to get the job done.”

And that she did. Instead of letting the ongoing racism get her down, she focused on building her skills and improving her physicality. Soon, she was recruited by high performance teams and started playing for Team Manitoba.

A hockey scholarship to a U.S. university helped further improve her skills before she became the first First Nation woman to play hockey for Team Canada.

Today, Brigette is a full-time hockey player, spending her days in training for the upcoming Games and working on what she calls her “ultimate goal”: promoting inclusion and equality in sports. She volunteers with Classroom Champions, acting as a mentor for Indigenous youth and empowering them to dream big and accomplish their goals.

“I’ve always had a lot of admiration for the other women on the national women’s team – but they didn’t look like me or come from the same socio-economic background. I want to be a role model for other young girls in the Indigenous community and it’s really an honour for me to represent First Nations in sport. For these kids, representation matters!”

Brigette also sits on the NHL Player Inclusion Committee, sharing her story and encouraging Indigenous participation in sports.

“I want these girls and kids to know that you can be like me and come from one of the most isolated communities in the country and one day become a part of Team Canada. And not just the athletes. I tell the kids whatever their goals are, to set them – and that it won’t be easy, but it will be worth it. I’m very proud of who I am.”

After being cut from the team in 2013/2014, Brigette struggled with motivation, started some bad habits, reducing her physical ability and her mental health. But she keeps pushing herself, nipping bad habits in the bud to ensure she’s in peak physical condition for Team Canada. She’s constantly pushing herself to be better. And that’s great for everyone.