Arizona State basketball's Caleb Christopher designs logo to focus attention on BLM movement

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Caleb Christopher didn't get a lot of playing time last season as a true freshman on the Arizona State basketball team. But the fact that he has become an integral figure in the social justice movement in Tempe is no surprise to Sun Devils coach Bobby Hurley.

Christopher, a 6-foot-1 sophomore guard, didn't think his school's response to the Black Lives Matter Movement in wake of the George Floyd death, as well as other injustices, was sufficient. He wanted to make a difference, be the one to create a conversation.

He did just that.

Christopher designed a logo that was displayed on the Sun Devil Stadium scoreboard in conjunction with last month's Juneteenth holiday, which celebrates the end of slavery in the U.S.

The original plan was for the logo to be applied on T-shirts to be worn by the school's student-athletes this coming season as a show of solidarity; that's still an objective.

"He has a great way of communicating and he wants to confront issues, be part of a solution. He demonstrates those qualities in practice every day," Hurley said. "When I heard what he wanted to do and then saw the finished product I wasn't surprised."

Christopher first spoke out on a Zoom conference call with other athletes and Sun Devils athletic staff, including Hurley and football coach Herm Edwards. Christopher thought the school's original statement was vague and didn't get the message across in an adequate fashion.

That prompted him to discuss some ideas with older brother Patrick and father Laron, both of whom have been successful in creative endeavors.

His idea for the logo was of the Black Power fist, with Patrick suggesting that the hand hold the Sun Devils' trademark pitchfork. The final touch was working in names of all the Black student-athletes at the school.

"I really wanted to do something to make a statement," Christopher said. "It was wanting to be a part of change and being able to start conversations that can make a difference, educate people."

With that clear vision in mind, Christopher then enlisted the help of Dennis Kennedy, an ASU grad and professional graphic designer whose posts on social media are popular with Sun Devil enthusiasts. Among those posts were several encouraging Caleb's highly touted younger brother, Joshua, to sign with ASU over Michigan, which he eventually did.
Kennedy was impressed not just with Christopher's vision but with his approach. The two communicated on FaceTime, then Kennedy took it from there, presenting the finished product in about eight hours.

Kennedy said that the toughest part was fitting all the names into the designated space, all while keeping players from the same sport grouped together. It was a jigsaw puzzle of massive proportions.

There were a lot of adjustments along the way. As Kennedy worked toward the bottom of the design he had several names left to squeeze in, so back he went downsizing a name here or there, moving one over or up, to make enough room for the others.

"Usually with these things you do it, give the client a look at it and then make some changes," Kennedy said. "He told me no, that was good."

The process was not without its stumbling blocks. Christopher wanted to get the logo out in conjunction with Juneteenth festivities on June 19, so he admits being a bit rushed. In trying to get the list of athletes together he over looked a few, one being Dominic Garcia, the lone Black player on the Sun Devils ice hockey team.
He reached out to Garcia and others to apologize, but most just appreciated Christopher's effort. While the few were omitted from the original sketch their names were added to an updated graphic which will be displayed on the T-shirts.

"It was my bad. I didn't double back," he said, "I wanted to get it out in a hurry and I didn't follow through. I learned a lesson there."

No doubt Christopher took the mission seriously, having himself been the victim of a racial profiling incident not long ago in his native Southern California.

There was also a highly publicized incident involving three ASU football players who had racial slurs hurled at them at a fast-food restaurant.

The Pac-12 also is looking to make inroads in promoting social justice and combat racism, recently creating a new head of diversity and inclusion position. There will also be a social justice and anti-racism advisory group comprised of athletes and academic leaders from all 12 schools. The ASU representatives have not yet been determined.

Hurley and his family took part in some of the protests and the coach says his team will take an active role in promoting social justice in the community although in what form that will come has yet to be decided.

Christopher is proud to be part of the movement.

"Everybody can be part of a change," he said. "I just want to do my part."

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