



TORONTO RAPTORS
EST. 1995

Attention Editors: Sports, Culture and Lifestyle

MEDIA / PHOTO ADVISORY: Toronto Raptors debuting new jersey in collaboration with Indigenous Metis designer, Evan Ducharme

Toronto – Wednesday, June 16, 2021

What: The Toronto Raptors is set to debut their limited edition jerseys in collaboration with Canadian Indigenous fashion designer, Evan Ducharme. The jersey will feature designs and patterns from Indigenous Peoples incorporated with a new Raptors logo. The Raptors organization will commence the reading of the land acknowledgement on June 21 in conjunction with the debut of the new jersey.

Maple Leafs Sports & Entertainment and the Toronto Raptors will be donating a portion of each jersey to the Assembly of First Nations.

Who: John Wiggins, VP of Organizational Culture and Inclusion, Toronto Raptors
Masai Ujuri, president, Toronto Raptors
Bobby Webster, general manager, Toronto Raptors
Kyle Lowry, NBA captain, Toronto Raptors
Evan Ducharme, Canadian Indigenous Metis fashion designer

Where: Scotiabank Arena
40 Bay Street
Toronto

When: National Indigenous Peoples Day, Monday, June 21, 2021

Media check-in	10:30 a.m.
Remarks and panel	11 a.m.
Revealing of Jersey	11:30 a.m.

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Media Contact Information:

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NEWS RELEASE

Attention: Sports, Culture and Lifestyle
Editors

June 21, 2021

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Toronto Raptors debuting new jersey in collaboration with Indigenous Metis designer, Evan Ducharme

TORONTO – In a recent media conference, the Toronto Raptors announced the release of their limited edition jersey designed by Canadian, Indigenous Metis designer, Evan Ducharme. As part of the 2021-2022 uniform rotation, the Raptors will be wearing the jerseys, honouring the proud heritage of Canada's Indigenous Peoples.

“As an immigrant from Nigeria, I see Canada as a place where people of all cultures stand together in solidarity for a common cause,” says Masai Ujiri, president, Toronto Raptors. “Since the organization’s inauguration, our Indigenous Peoples fanbase have cheered us on through the good times and bad. We decided this was the year where we show the world how special Canada’s Indigenous culture is for the success of the Raptors organization.”

President Masai Ujiri, John Wiggins, VP of Organizational Culture and Inclusion and Bobby Webster, general manager of the Raptors, assured the public more effort will be made to represent the Indigenous culture. Prior to the Canadian national anthem at each home game, the land acknowledgment will be read at Scotiabank Arena to approximately 20,000 fans and for those at home to hear.

“Unlike most NBA teams, our fanbase is not primarily targeted towards a single city but rather an entire country,” says Wiggins, VP of Organizational Culture and Inclusion. “Indigenous Peoples are an integral part of Canadian history. The reality is that we, as Canadians, have silenced the voice of the Indigenous culture in the past, but now is the time for change, now is the time to give our Indigenous community the respect they deserve.”

The Indigenous inspired uniforms will be the Raptors’ new “statement jerseys”, a term coined by uniform designer, Nike, setting the tone for big rivalry games. Statement jerseys are a reflection of a NBA team’s desire to make a bold statement every time the players step on the court. The unique visual aesthetics of the statement jerseys express the spirit of the organization through visual storytelling, important to Canadian history. The uniform will include sash clothing (representing strength and cultural distinction) and vibrant colours integrated into the Raptors logo.

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“As someone of Native descent, my people have been underrepresented in mainstream media,” says Ducharme. “This opportunity signals a turning point for more Canadian Indigenous artists to receive international recognition. It was inspiring to see the Raptors stand for racial inequality during the BLM movement, and now shining a spotlight on Indigenous representation gives more credence to the team’s slogan ‘we the north’”.

Ujiri confirmed the agreement happened recently relative to the media conference, with more details to be finalized. In partnership with Nike, Ducharme and the Raptors organization are currently designing the jersey with team captain, Kyle Lowry to debut it.

About: Founded in 1995, the Toronto Raptors are a member of the National Basketball Association. Since 2002, the Toronto Raptors have been Canada’s only basketball team. The franchise won their first championship in 2019 against the Golden State Warriors, led by the six time all-star point guard Kyle Lowry.



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FACT SHEET

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Indigenous Métis fashion designer, Evan Ducharme, incorporating culture into new Toronto Raptors jersey



Sash: Ducharme's background is Métis, the sash being commonly associated with Métis culture – along with two other Indigenous groups. The significance with sash clothing is in the Indigenous culture representing strength and nationhood. Sash is bestowed upon Métis members who have made cultural or social contributions to the betterment of the Indigenous Peoples.



Logo: Placed in the centre of the jersey, a newly imagined logo from Ducharme will feature feathers blended into the Raptors alternative logo from 2015. In the Indigenous culture, the feather is the symbol of strength, wisdom and honour. The colours all have significant meaning: black (represents the Earth), red (represents fire, energy and blood), yellow (represents water) and white (represents the starry-night sky filled with Indigenous ancestors).



Regalia: This form of clothing is viewed as sacred clothing in Indigenous cultures, worn during ceremonies and celebrations. Regalia is typically associated with an individual who wields authority or great significance among a group of individuals. The Toronto Raptors will wear regalia-print patterns on other parts of the uniform such as socks or on shooting sleeves.



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BACKGROUND

June 21, 2021

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The cultural shift of Indigenous recognition in Canada

Throughout each passing decade, the Canadian government has recognized the lack of cultural inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in mainstream media. More Canadians are becoming vocal about the appreciation for the Indigenous Peoples' sacrifice to strengthen the nation's identity. A cultural shift has begun by providing more awareness Indigenous Peoples issues.

Learning to Preserve the Indigenous Heritage

The First Nations University of Canada is an independently-administered university-college designed to protect the cultural values of Indigenous Peoples. Bilingual learning provides Canadians the opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding behind the historical heritage of the Canadian Indigenous culture. Indigenous-based education help provide greater insight to how much work is still needed to address the issues plaguing the Indigenous population living in Canada.

National Indigenous Peoples Day

Celebrated annually on June 21, the holiday was chosen to be held on the same day as the summer solstice. Indigenous Peoples have a tradition spanning thousands of years to gather in ceremonies on the longest day of light in the year. Ever since the announcement of National Indigenous Peoples Day back in 1996, the holiday has become a day of celebration, honouring the cultures and contributions of Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada.

A Dark History of Mistreatment

Canada (a nation considered a diverse, multicultural country to both residents and foreigners) was formed on Indigenous territory. The Indian Act of 1876 stripped Indigenous Peoples of their rights, culture, even families to attend residential schools against their will. An uncomfortable reality, the cultural appropriation carried out by the British suppressed the way of life for Indigenous, therefore damaging cultural acceptance from a mainstream audience.

MORE

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What did the Canadian Government do to apologize for the mistreatment of the Indigenous Peoples?

On National Indigenous Peoples Day, the Canadian government took to social media acknowledging the need to provide more resources to ensure the well-being of Canada's Indigenous population. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced plans to provide up to \$75 million in COVID relief funds including food security, mental health support and protective equipment. Trudeau used his platform to publicly speak to Canadians about the unjust mistreatment of the Indigenous community throughout Canadian history, with plans to address issues in the Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice.

In 2019, Trudeau announced federal funding will be allocated for travel costs for families who have found where their relatives are buried and will pay for grave markers. From the 1940's until the 1960's, many Innuits were separated from family members to undergo treatment for tuberculosis. The families of patients never knew where their loved ones were located or even if they passed away.

Reconciliation through Canadian Sports

On July 28, 2020, the Edmonton Oilers defenseman Ethan Bear honoured his Indigenous heritage by allowing him to play with his last name translated into Cree syllabics on the back of his jersey. The decision by the Edmonton Oilers is a monumental step for Indigenous community and the acknowledgement in a major professional sports league. The symbolic gesture signified cultural expression in the National Hockey League, unifying athletes from different backgrounds to display their background with pride.

On Nov. 19, 2020, the Chilliwack FC youth (CFC) girls' soccer club faced backlash for wearing a BIPOC (black, Indigenous and other people of colour) patch on their jerseys. A representative of the CFC board supported the idea of inclusivity, but felt it was inappropriate to make a political statement on the jerseys. However, the girls felt the board was neglecting support towards social justice issues after a denied appeal, a few players opted to wear the patch. After a complaint from a bystander watching one of the games, the club's chairperson (Andrea Laycock) issued three players a two-game suspension for using their platform to advocate Indigenous rights.

MORE



What are Other Countries doing to Support Indigenous Peoples?

Australian point guard Patty Mills announced the “Kerba Ged” program which aims to improve the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal Peoples living in Australia. When interviewed, Mills wanted to use his status in the NBA to finance the necessary resources for Indigenous Peoples to succeed. An Indigenous member himself, Mills also launched the Indigenous Basketball Association this year focusing on providing pathways for Indigenous Peoples to make a living by playing professional basketball.

A Platform to Showcase Talent

According to Vogue Magazine, there has never been more of an emphasis on Indigenous designs than the present. The talented Indigenous artists are able to showcase their designs during Vancouver’s Indigenous Fashion Week, playing a role in becoming a part of the rise of Indigenous streetwear brands on the market. A rising amount of Canada’s Indigenous designers have been receiving global recognition since their debut at Vancouver’s Indigenous Fashion Week. Jared Yazzie received critical acclaim on social media for his clothing line showcased during the fashion week, managing to attract the attention of French-Italian fashion designer, Pierre Cardin.

Now is the time for a social movement

The racial discrimination between African-Americans and Indigenous Peoples have some similarities. A study from Maclean’s magazine found 42 per cent of Indigenous Peoples fell victim to unlawful justice from law enforcement - while wearing Indigenous inspired clothing. Thirty-five percent of African-Americans feel at one point in their life they have experienced prejudice from officials based on offensive stereotypes associated with African-Americans (such as baggy clothing).

After hearing the news of George Floyd’s passing, Canadian organizations joined together in solidarity to protest the social injustice. For example, the Toronto Raptors had “Black Lives Matter” printed on the team’s bus and were the first NBA team threatening to boycott the season, after the unlawful shooting of Jacob Blake. In addition to the athletes on the team, the Toronto Raptors organization has been using its platform to stand up against social injustice.

The Raptors can use its social media pages to reach out to the 2.6 million fans to encourage unity in demanding more cultural representation for the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. To really enforce the slogan “we the north”, the Raptors can use national media coverage to become a catalyst of change.



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New Raptors' Jersey Addresses Changes in Canada's Cultural Landscape

The Toronto Raptors will be working alongside Canadian Indigenous Metis fashion designer, Evan Ducharme, for an Indigenous-inspired uniform. Sash clothing will be used to signify cultural representation. Point guard Kyle Lowry (left) is set to debut the new uniforms with president Masai Ujuri (right) at the official announcement.

Photography Credit: NBAE/ Getty Images

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June 21, 2021

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http://toronto_raptors_news-new-indigenous-uniforms/

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TO: Blake Murphy

FROM: Suzanna Lem and Justin Oreskovich

RE: Toronto Raptors jersey collaboration with Indigenous Metis designer, Evan Ducharme

Hi Blake,

We saw your recent article on the Toronto Raptors and its participation in the Black Lives Matter movement and thought the following would be of interest to you. The Toronto Raptors will be announcing its release of a new jersey for the 2020-2021 season.

In collaboration with Canadian Indigenous Metis designer, Evan Ducharme, Nike and the Raptors, a limited edition jersey will be released featuring the Indigenous culture and fashion Canada has to offer.

We've included the press information and will be following up with you to see if this aligns with your upcoming articles.

Best,
Suzanna and Justin

Sources

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Backgrounder Links:

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