



Education Fund Salutes Olympian, Advisory Council Member, Ashleigh Johnson



Considered one of the best goalkeepers in the world, Paris 2024 was Ashleigh's third Olympic Games after helping lead Team USA to gold at the 2020 & 2016 Olympics. In 2016, she became the first African-American woman to make a U.S. Olympic Women's Water Polo Team. The 29-year-old supports learn to swim and water polo programs in her hometown of Miami, spending time teaching swimming to kids in under served communities and helps promote equity and equality in education. "That part of my journey has been really rewarding, being able to take those skills and knowledge that I've gained through the sport and give that to the kids so they can swim comfortably and feel safe," [she told NBC Sports writer, Leo Santos](#). "All of these kids I talk to have their whole lives ahead of them and it's important to let them know that I was someone who pursued my dreams and they can do the same thing. It opens up the opportunity for those kids to have a little bit bigger dreams and see themselves in different places."



Check out [Leo Santos' April, 2024 feature](#) about Ashleigh where she reflects on being the only Black player on the USA women's Olympic Water Polo team again and the barriers that are being confronted.



Ashleigh notes that that having access to a pool is a major barrier the sport faces to bring in more diversity, especially in areas where the population of low-income and minority families is high.

- *"I think in general, this still is a predominantly white sport and there are still those barriers that have not gone away,"*
- *"Having a kind of role modeling is huge, like getting that equal representation, changing the narrative about who belongs here and who doesn't. That's progress that we still need to make and hopefully will be made in the future."*
- *"Looking at the youth level of our sport, it's the level of young black goalies [that is increasing] and when you're an example in that position, it has made me really proud."*
- *"I don't think that the diversity on the Olympic team is going to change as quickly as the youth level of our sport. So when I think about progress, I think about it starting at the youth level, where you build the sport, where you build skills, and then seeing how that trickles to the club level, and then the college level and eventually the Olympic level."*

Meet the other members of the Education Fund's Advisory Council [HERE](#). These prominent experts in various disciplines help us address the effect of commercialization and other factors on the academic integrity of intercollegiate athletics and the health and wellness of college athletes.