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Braiden Bell Asks the Trail Blazers for the Second Chance Rip City Is Known For

Fired over posts he wrote at fifteen, the broadcaster owns his words and calls on the Blazers and the NBA to lead the way from zero tolerance to accountability and grace

PORTLAND, Ore. | Should the worst words a fifteen-year-old ever wrote decide the rest of his life? That is the question now before the Portland Trail Blazers. Last week the team hired Braiden Bell, 29, as its new television play-by-play announcer. On October 1, days before his tenure was to begin and before he called a single game, the team ended the relationship after a reporter surfaced social media posts Mr. Bell wrote between November 2012 and February 2013, when he was fifteen years old.

Mr. Bell has not defended those posts. He acknowledged them immediately and apologized publicly on October 2: “I am deeply sorry for the language that I used on Twitter. These tweets, while wrong, were written by me 14 years ago while I was only 15 years old and have no reflection of who I am today. I do not take lightly any harm it causes now.”

Today, through counsel, Mr. Bell asked the Blazers to reconsider and reinstate him. “Braiden is not asking anyone to excuse what he wrote,” said Arnie Herz, counsel to Mr. Bell. “He has owned it, without excuses. What he is asking is whether a boy’s words from fourteen years ago should outweigh everything the man has done since. If that is the standard, there is hardly a person in any organization in America who could meet it. Accountability means owning what you did and showing who you have become. Braiden has done both.”

A Franchise Built on Second Chances

Few franchises in professional sports have shown more faith in people’s capacity to grow than the Portland Trail Blazers, and that tradition is part of what makes Rip City special. Mr. Bell is asking only to be included in it. He shares the organization’s stated commitment that everyone who is part of Rip City should feel welcome and safe, and he has proposed working alongside the team in community and educational programming, including outreach to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community and to organizations that support women and girls in sports. “The Blazers have a chance to show what accountability and redemption look like together,” Herz said. “We believe this organization, more than any other, can do that.”

A Call to the NBA

Mr. Bell’s situation is not unique. Across sports, media and business, people are losing livelihoods over things they said or wrote as children, surfaced years later and judged by adult standards

without regard to age, time or growth. Mr. Bell and his counsel are asking the NBA to lead the conversation toward a fairer approach, one that asks four questions before ending a career: How old was the person? How long ago was it? What does the adult record show? Has the person taken genuine responsibility? “Zero tolerance sounds strong, but applied to childhood it becomes a standard no one can meet and no one actually believes in,” Herz said. “The NBA has led on social issues before. It can lead here, from moral absolutism toward a culture of accountability, compassion and understanding.”

No Ill Will Toward the Reporter

Mr. Bell also asks that the backlash now directed at Devon Haskins, the KGW reporter who first reported the posts, and John Tierney, the KGW news director, come to an end. Mr. Bell holds no ill will toward Messrs. Haskins and Tierney, and he does not believe anyone should lose a job over this. He invites Messrs. Haskins and Tierney to join a broader conversation about how journalists, teams and fans should weigh words written in childhood. “If we are asking for grace for Braiden, we have to extend it to everyone,” Herz said.

“I love this game, I love this city, and I am grateful to every fan who has reached out over the past few days,” said Mr. Bell. “I will keep working every day to be someone Rip City can be proud of, whatever happens next.”

Mr. Bell will have no further comment at this time. Media inquiries should be directed to his counsel.

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About Braiden Bell | Over the past two years, Braiden Bell has been a highly respected broadcaster for the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury and the G League's Valley Suns, where his honest, fair and engaging play-by-play earned him the Portland Trail Blazers' television play-by-play position. Throughout his career, Braiden has consistently made time to serve the community. He has been a guest speaker for the Arizona State University chapter of the Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM) and has mentored more than fifteen undergraduate sports journalism students one-on-one. With the Mercury, he hosted and emceed panels for the Boys & Girls Club of Phoenix, welcoming young people to the team's practice facility to meet members of the organization. With the Valley Suns, he represented the team on local television during Thanksgiving week, exchanging game tickets for donations to a community food drive, and he hosted a Field Trip Day question-and-answer forum at which players spoke with students about what it takes to succeed.