

A leader both on and off the court Masai Ujiri has made an enduring impact in sports philanthropy and business his dedication extends to a passion for Global human rights and international politics showcasing his cross- sector commitment to making a difference growing up in Zaria Northern Nigeria Messi's Journey started on humble basketball courts. These modest beginnings laid the groundwork for a story of resilience and ambition that transcends boundaries from local playgrounds to iconic Global Arenas Messi knew the court is where Champions are made and where tomorrow's leaders learn to dream big transitioning from his playing days. Masai's unwavering vision for African Excellence led him to established Giants of Africa in 2003 Beyond basketball this initiative has empowered youth championed women's rights and fostered inspiration for generations highlighting the transformative power of sports his exceptional talent for identifying promising players and assembling formidable teams propelled him from his early days as an unpaid Scout for the Orlando Magic to his groundbreaking role as the first African born general manager of a prominent Western sports franchise with the Denver Nuggets culminating in receiving the prestigious executive of the Year award in 2013. Shortly after Masai Ujiri became the new President and general manager of the Toronto Raptors the next 10 years would become the most successful tenure in franchise history with the second most wins in the NBA. Moreover, the launch of the "We the north campaign," served as a unifying rally and cry uniting a Nation Under a common purpose his collaborations with Toronto rapper Drake to revitalize courts and marginalized communities his partnership with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to offer Solace to the students affected by the 2016 Lage Saskatchewan tragedy and his outspoken advocacy for social justice issues all exemplify his commitment to advancing Humanity's greater ideals. A Dream Deferred no longer in 2019 the Toronto Raptors became NBA champion but we wanted to win in Toronto and we in Toronto from aside this is only the beginning an inspiring story of a vision that transcends trophies through Giants of Africa Messi made a commitment to build 100 courts across the continent partnering with influential figures such as President Barack Obama in the summer of 2023 the organization commemorated its 20-year anniversary with the Giants of Africa Festival the largest African youth sports event dedicated to education and empowerment uniting thousands from all corners of Africa. and Masai has recently established the Zaria group a PAN-African investment and development Enterprise aimed at catalyzing Africa's Sports entertainment and cultural economy this platform seeks to become an architect of a modern African Renaissance through building Arenas and the ecosystems around them Masai story is a call-to-action win give generously lead authentically and seek excellence in all arenas inspiring the next generation of leaders on and off the court.

**Male Speaker unknown** - Please welcome our first panel unlocking Africa's potential the role of supply chain and infrastructure development our John Yearwood, Editorial

Director - Diversity & Culture, Politicoand Masai Ujiri President and vice chairman of the Toronto Raptors and co-founder of giants of Africa.

**John Yearwood**- Good morning, Washington and good morning EXIM hope you all are doing great today this I hope that over the next 25 minutes or so you'll get to know a lot more uh about this incredible gentleman to my right as well as uh some of the amazing work that you're doing in Africa. So, welcome uh Masai.

**Masai Ujiri** - Thank you thank you thank you this is awesome thank

**John Yearwood**- Masai, let's start a bit at the beginning because certainly I want to get to the word that you're doing with Zaria Court which would um something that a lot of people in the audience are very interested in but let's start a little bit at the beginning uh growing up in Zaria in north northern Nigeria what did you dream about did you ever think that you would be uh in a position where you are today.

**Masai Ujiri** - um no um I'm so inspired to be here in Washington DC first of all um I met my wife here I started my scouting yeah I started my scouting um uh career here in Washington uh DC actually got married in in Washington DC so many beautiful people here um it's incredible to be in this environment and I thank Reta and the chairman for you know having me here I'm really humbled by the opportunity that the NBA has given me and growing up in Northern Nigeria um I learned the values you know like of what us kids you know like do playing outside finding Sports um respecting our parents um finding joy in the neighborhoods that you live in and at the age of 13 I found um basketball and that changed my life you know but I grew up with middle class parents who were in the medical um field and they gave me an incredible unique you know platform to be a kid and be normal you know and um and then I had the opportunity to come uh to the states to school.

**John Yearwood** - What do you say no doubt this is interview will be on YouTube at some point and maybe um young 13y olds in um Nigeria might be looking at it what do you say to them uh if they're looking to get if not where you are then certainly pretty close

**Masai Ujiri** - You know um the all cliches are working hard and you have to dream big yeah you have to I think now you have to see the world in a different place you know and um there's a unique platform in this world now and it's called the smartphone um it's why Africa is becoming even bigger um the continent where I grew up I'm so lucky that I've had this Western platform you know like to be educated and to have experience but dream big you know like dreams are actually like free we don't pay for them yeah you can actually like dream and think of things that you want to do as a kid and you can actually like find many ways to inquire and really um me in sports I learned on the fields I learned you know um on those raw courts um playing and then

the education meets with it but um uh kids now um there's a platform to really like grow I think and if you expand your mind a little bit and respect your elders a little bit you know respect what came before you I think there's a good medium you know like where this generation actually like Excel and this youth can develop even further.

**John Yearwood** - and that's I and I want to sort of move on to talk about the work that you're doing uh with um the courts the Giants of Africa program uh you've hoped to build 100 courts and you're about 30 I understand into that um when you talk about working with young people um what kind of messages are you giving to the young people of Africa uh in terms of the possibilities.

**Masai Ujiri** - Well um so I started going to give back when I became uh got the opportunity in the NBA and we started doing basketball camps and basketball clinics and because I grew up in this environment and I had a pathway to come to um the states to go to school most basketball players come on scholarships um you just start to affect those kids by bringing coaches over and you start to see the potential yeah you see the potential in on the continent the talent is incredible and I'm not even talking about sports talent Africa's biggest treasure is his talent of the people it's his people yeah so and its vast it's whether you're talking about sports whether you're talking about entertainment whether you're talking about it doesn't matter chefs um Hollywood Nollywood everywhere music everything business Pilots everything you can think of doctors talent is incredible and our parents' guide us in an incredible way where education is first and foremost okay I started going back and doing camps and clinics and I saw that one I had to really promote a couple things Youth Development yeah women empowerment and then how we go into these tough neighborhoods to really make them rise in doing this I saw that there was a problem and the problem is infrastructure yeah and we lack infrastructure and it was Sports infrastructure that we lack yeah Sports infrastructure is infrastructure and I've learned that and coming here and you see all the gyms you see all the Arenas you see the whole ecosystem that works around Sports and we have this base on the continent we have this talent we have um almost raw materials we have buildings we have that have been built many years ago during Independence and for some reason Sports gets left out and I've seen this billion dollar industry in the west take off and I'm telling everybody now to pay attention to Africa just because of the demographic yeah we know what's happening we know how the population is doubling and it is youth population median age 20 so take note that's the continent on the rise and people need to pay attention now and I've learned that by being in the forefront of learning Sports here.

**John Yearwood** - You know the whole Giants of Africa program and there was one final question on that before we move on to the Zaria court which is a much larger

project that you were involved in but uh the whole idea of um uh the Giants of Africa project, I'm wondering how can you uh how can folks in this audience and elsewhere help you to get to 100

**Masai Ujiri** - You know um if you think talent and whoever you watch whatever Sports you watch I'm bias sorry I'm speaking in the name of sports today uh and business uh and a little bit of politics it for me it isum it's infrastructure and I want the growth of that on the continent and for people to understand the ecosystem so when I pledge to build a 100 courts it is that community the kids coming and playing yeah what's the ecosystem around it right yeah so shops stores yeah that court is going to create women programs yeah that is going to grow and give people the ability to become something it creates peace I'm going to say that many times sports is one thing in this world that brings peace so those 100 quotes really signify whatever neighborhoods they are in it's going to bring peace in a remarkable way everywhere there is violence everywhere there's problems and we have a lot of them now in the world you take a ball and you go dribble that ball or you say there's a World Cup game or there's an NBA Finals yesterday there was a WNBA final game if I told everybody here that there was a World Cup final being held in the Next Room or NBA game being held in that room over there nobody would be listening to me right now nobody yes you'd have nobody in this room so what do I want I want every everybody to think about the talent and think about all these teams some of you are football lovers baseball basketball you watch college basketball when you watch next time look at the back of the jerseys and see how many African names you see yeah look at football it's not even played in Africa and every team has tons of them yeah it tells you that the talent is on the continent right yeah

**John Yearwood** - and how did you segue from Giants of Africa into Zaria courts and that project sort of take us through that process.

**Masai Ujiri** - Yeah so it was through building these courts that I learned and doing these basketball camps that I actually learned that yeah we really lack facilities yeah where are these kids coming to play right and I see the rise in talent of yeah the MVP of the NBA JoelandBeid was in a basketball camp that I was a director of basketball Without Borders and by the MBA sitting down a kid from Cameroon and nobody knew grew up on the continent could become this yeah Yanniskombu I know we they say Greece he's African he's let's be real he's Nigerian huh yeah yes so you have this incredible athletes you know that really are walking around the continent that's what inspired me because there are some of them that don't grow up they don't even touch a ball because where they lived there's no facilities but fast forward to what you saying two minutes um then I get in this face of being the President of the Toronto Raptors and I see that ecosystem I have an arena okay think about this Miami New York Toronto the

arena space the business what it brings how it injects the economy Okay naming rights all the events held in those Arenas okay hockey basketball conferences circus concerts constant if you go to Scotia bank arena now in Toronto and you call our offices and ask for a date to do a conference to do an event it'll tell you to they'll book a date for you in 2026 cause it's all full okay then dial back go to Africa okay Acra, Lagos Nairobi, Johannesburg, Abijah no Arena none think about the artists okay let's go away from Sports Davido burner boy all these guys selling out um Verizon selling out Madison Square Garden and even in their own continent there's nowhere to play that business I'm appealing to you I'm appealing to you to take note that everything that goes on here because of demographic because of urbanization yeah because of connectivity all these things are going to happen in Africa eventually for sure they're all going to happen we need we need this funds but we need is good people yeah we need good American business because we know what the world is and we know what is happening everywhere yeah we need that development.

**John Yearwood** - Can you take um 30 seconds a minute to describe exactly for people who may not be familiar exactly what you're doing with Zaria Court was an extraordinary project.

**Masai Ujiri** - Yes, so um in 2016 um President Kagame I invited President Kagame to come to the All-Star Game in in um Toronto. He came and he's sitting down in the suite and All-Star in Toronto was incredible yeah so you got Drake you got the All-Star uh game you got Kobe Bryant everybody was there and it was so vibrant and he sat down in the suite and um he's looking and I actually thought my wife says to me go check on him because I think he's sick or something you know like and he's sitting down like this and I went and I said excellent is there something wrong and he says um no um how much does it take to build an arena like this okay so he goes and builds one get him all the information we talked to Suma the builders from Turkey come and build an arena in Gali downtown Kigali okay they starts to build an ecosystem right and he does it the right way okay gets an events management company they come and they start managing the events whether it's concerts games the NBA who I work for invest the only investment they've done in terms of a basketball league because they recognize talent and business they go invest in Africa and put the basketball Africa league and he now has the ability to hold this time and time again because of this Arena okay we're doing the stadium around there next to the arena and around that Stadium we build we're building Zaria Court which is that ecosystem and that space you want to think about in business and what people do around this and I look at what people do around on my Arena okay you need hotels right you need restaurants need sports bars we need shops merchandise all these cultural things that are going to hit which drives this economic ecosystem you know in sports that we always put aside on the continent

because we don't see uh Sports as a business we see it as recreation instead of seeing sports as a business.

**John Yearwood** - and I understand that you plan to expand uh going Senegal um Ghana a bunch of other places that uh we hope to expand this courts this Zaria courts concept.

**Masai Ujiri** - Yes that's the goal everybody sees um Africa as a country it's a continent yes it is a continent yeah yes it is a continent and we need to we need to educate ourselves you know like even more but with the Free Trade Agreement it's going to be the biggest and largest free marketing space in the world and when you think of connectivity I think when you think of the resilience of all these governments now they growing uh they are becoming you see the Kagame of the world you see the Ros of the world you see these people coming and interacting you know like with the rest I think there's a place now you know like where we're going to have I'm hoping you know like the stability and know how on how to grow in Africa

**John Yearwood** -that's I mean you're interesting there's so much to talk about and we don't have a tremendous amount of time left but I wanted to ask you again going back to a number of people in the room who are providing a number of services because one of the things that uh the chair was talking about earlier the whole idea of um getting Americans more engaged in export and working with businesses not just here but also overseas um what opportunities do you see for people in the room who might want to work with you on um uh

**Masai Ujiri** - there's so many opportunities honestly when you think of things that are here and um whether it's construction architecture engineering tourism yeah everything that you can actually think of insurance security there's so many things so many things you know like that you can actually you know like bring to the table and there's really like there's business sponsorship Partnerships signages everything that you can think of that you know business that you want to do on the continent it is opening up and from my position hopefully us doing business on the continent being transparent on how we do business on the continent and bringing people in will make people even more comfortable on the continent because you are dealing with a lot of countries in a continent

**John Yearwood** -but how about this this is sort of a about a tricky question of a difficult question in terms of how do you take advantage of the opportunities on the continent but not taking advantage of the people on the continent.

**Masai Ujiri** - I think it's very simple you know like you involve them and there's a lot of Youth you know like you involve them you involve yeah one of I think there's so many great um programs here on the continent in in in this part of the world that you can use

as exchange programs yeah which I think work you know like incredibly well yeah so how do you even educate people more and how do you bring them over here even to educ empower them to go back and even give back you know like more how do you Empower women yeah how do you empower women yeah think about this all over the world we need to really like think about this yes they're smarter than all of us right yes we say yes yeah we come we when I we say it at home we go you go home and you say oh if you ask every man um my boss I'm going back to my boss at home I have two I have I have a 9-year-old daughter and I have a wife okay two bosses okay but then when we come back to our works spaces we don't respect as much yeah we need to change that and we even need to change it more on the continent and these opportunities are huge because we have incredibly smart women in the continent.

John Yearwood - damn we're almost out of time I mean what's U what's next for you.

Masai Ujiri - well I have a season that's starting in about I have a season that's starting in about like six days you know like but honestly like my dream and my goal um is everything that I see here and you guys have done so well on this in in this place I am blessed that you know um my wife is from Sierra Leone her mom is from Sierra Leone her dad is from Guinea my mom is from Kenya uh my dad is Nigerian my kids were born in Canada my wife has American citizenship I have British citizenship because I lived there for 9 months when I was born and then I grew up in Nigeria so when we put all our passports on the floor in our house you know like yeah where are we from right and we are citizens of the world yeah and I see this world as an unbelievable peaceful place right yes.

**John Yearwood** - well Masai I know you're from everywhere we're just glad you're here today so thank you so much for this conversation and I know you'll be around for a little bit but uh we had a lot more that we could talk about but thank you very much for your time.

**Masai Ujiri** - Thanks John thank you thank you