

## Oration for Brendon Batson, OBE, being awarded Hon DLitt

To be delivered on Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019, 3pm by Lisa

Dodd-Mayne

Our honorary graduand this afternoon is one of England's pioneering black footballers, a leading football administrator, and a man who has worked tirelessly to eradicate racism from English football. I am delighted to introduce  
**BRENDON BATSON.**

Brendon Batson came to England from Trinidad, having moved there from Grenada, when he was 9 years old. He had never before played football, but by age 12, he was firmly in Arsenal's sights and formally signed with them in 1970, aged 17 as the club's first black player. He moved to Cambridge United in 1974, rising to become club captain. However, his career really took off in 1978, when he transferred to West Bromwich Albion in the First Division. There, with Cyrille Regis and Laurie Cunningham, he became part of the legendary trio of black football players known as 'The Three Degrees', playing for the first English team to field three black players together. Sadly, a series of knee injuries ended

Brendon's career as an active footballer in the mid-1980s. However, a new career immediately opened up, supporting footballers through the Professional Footballers Association, which he joined as a senior administrator in 1984. He remained there for 18 years, in roles including Chairman of PFA Financial Management Ltd and Director of PFA Enterprises (the organisation's commercial arm), rising to become Deputy CEO. In 2002, he was approached to join the new board of West Bromwich Albion as MD on its promotion to the premiership, and he still maintains a very close relationship with the club.

Brendon has continued to support footballers, and the wider sporting community. He has set up his own consultancy, working around issues such as equality, coaching and financial support. He remains a trustee of the PFA and of the West Bromwich Albion FC Foundation. He is currently Chairman of the Professional Players Federation, a membership organisation embracing all sports; President of EU Athletics, and Chair of Sporting Equals – a national partner of Sport England, promoting greater involvement in sport by disadvantaged communities especially the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

population – and an active Board member of the Sports Ground Safety Authority. Brendon is also heavily involved with a number of charities, especially St Mary's Hospice in Birmingham, which cared for his late wife, Cecily and The Albion Foundation, taking part in a number of long distance bike rides and recently walking part of the Great Wall of China as part of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary fund raising celebrations of a five game tour by West Bromwich Albion in 1978.

And Brendon has been a leading light in the fight against racism in football. This is something he experienced personally in the late 70s and early 80s: you went out on the pitch, he says, to find 'a whole bank of people snarling at you, calling you names'; he tells of bananas being thrown to symbolise the rejection of black players' humanity. He played a crucial part in the establishment of Kick it Out, football's charity that campaigns against racism and discrimination in the game.

Brendon remains one of its key ambassadors, speaking in public, giving interviews to the media about what has been achieved and, importantly, what is still to be done: one issue still to be addressed, he says, is the lack of black players in management and coaching, even though the proportion of

professional footballers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds now stands at around 33%

This proactive stance is synonymous with the work the University are proud to carry out with our Reshaping Sport Campaign. The University were proud recipients in July 2018 of the British Universities' and Colleges Sport #TakeAStand award. This award is given to the University that is the best at creating initiatives that tackle discrimination in sport, widening participation, and make sport more inclusive for marginalised communities

Brendon has been awarded an MBE and an OBE for his services to football. He is a man of enormous footballing talent, who has fought against racism throughout his life with dignity and determination. He has had the satisfaction of seeing black footballers rise to prominence across English football. Sadly, racism has not yet been completely eradicated: there are still incidents on and off the pitch and racist language has recently become more audible. Thankfully, however, we no longer have the vicious, automatic racism that was endemic

across English football in the 70s and 80s. It is an honour today to recognise  
Brendon Batson's crucial role in its elimination.

Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the  
degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, BRENDON BATSON.