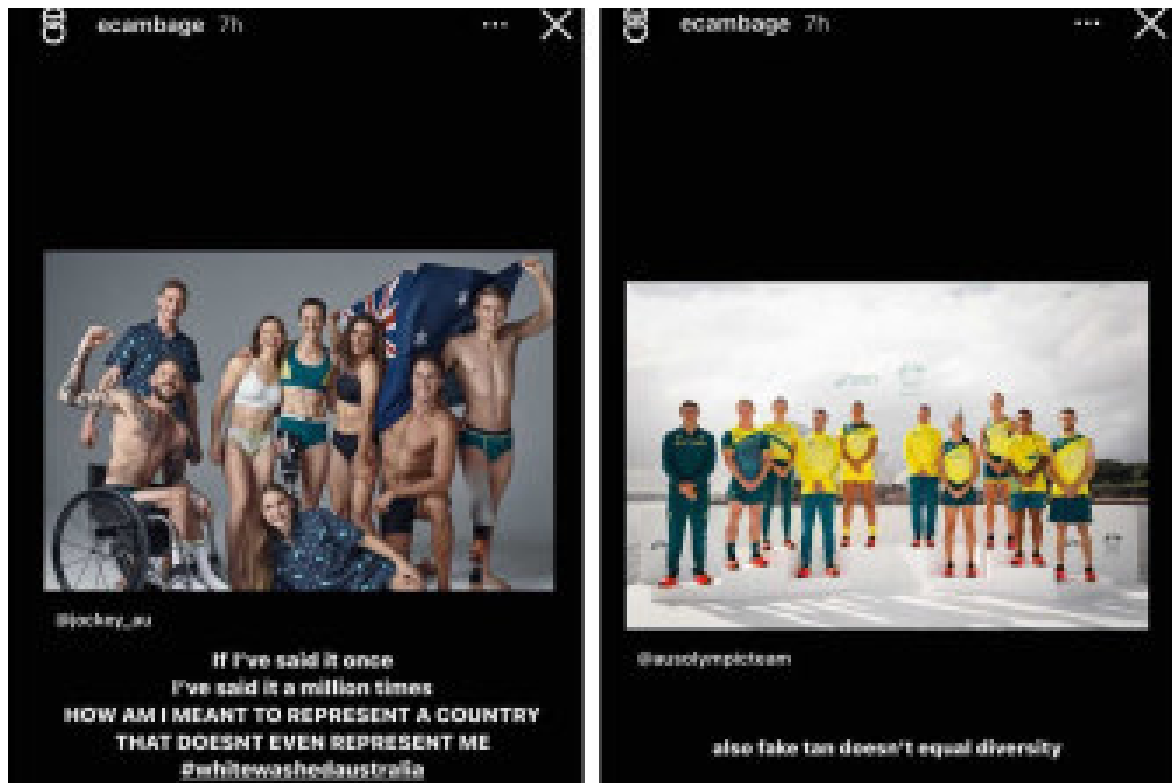


‘Wake up’: Cambage slams lack of diversity in Australia, threatens Olympic boycott

By Vince Rugari
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Opals basketball star Liz Cambage has called on Australians to “wake up” to a lack of racial diversity and representation in Australian sport and media, doubling down on her criticism of the Australian Olympic Committee for not valuing people of colour.

Cambage, a two-time Olympian, threatened to boycott the Tokyo Games on Instagram on Friday after accusing the AOC of “whitewashing” two promotional shoots involving the Australian Olympic team.



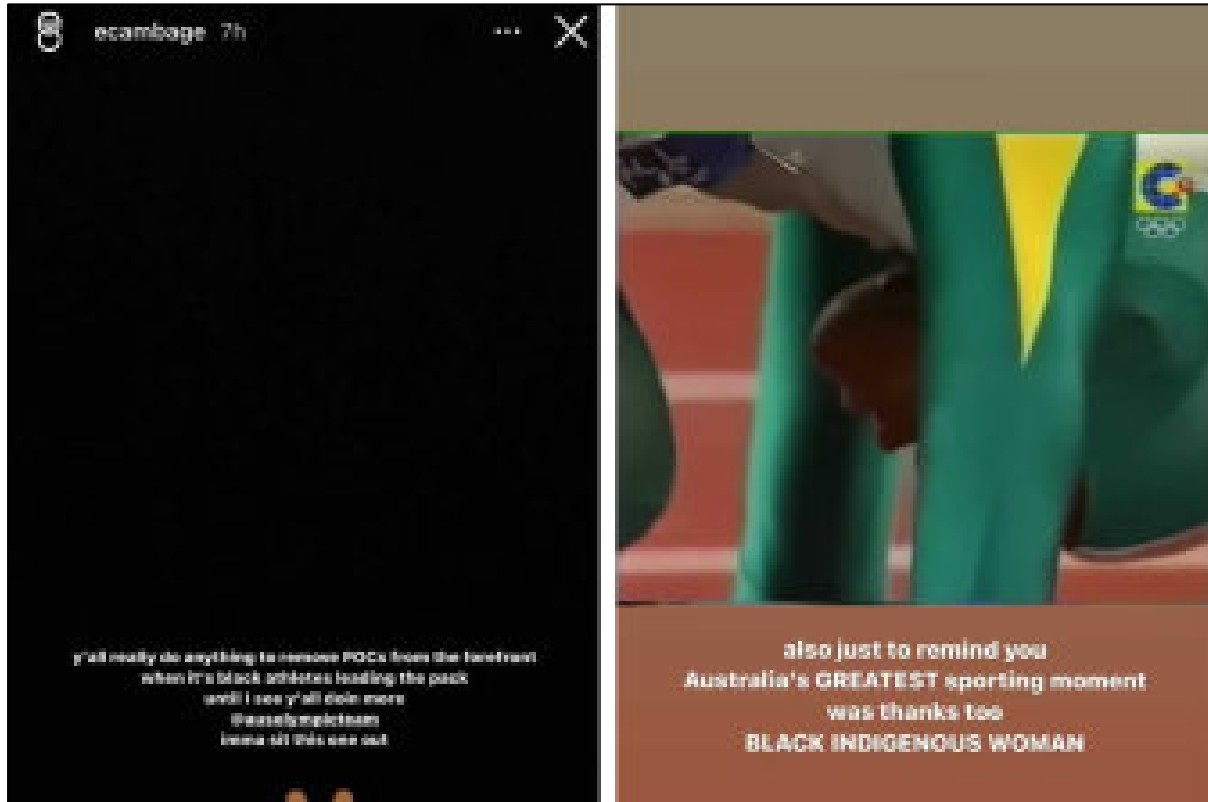
Instagram posts from Australian basketballer Liz Cambage.

Cambage’s initial remarks forced an apology from the AOC, which conceded the 29-year-old was right to point out the lack of diversity in a Jockey Australia shoot that included eight white Olympic and Paralympic athletes. In a photo of the AOC’s team uniform launch, though, Indigenous rugby sevens player Maurice Longbottom was present.

Basketball Australia officials were scrambling to get in contact with the WNBA star on Friday evening to ascertain whether she legitimately intends to boycott the Olympics, where Australia’s women’s basketball team are among the major medal contenders.

Cabbage's views divided opinion on social media, and 14 hours after her first posts on Instagram, the 29-year-old followed up with a passionate response to critics in a nearly four-minute speech, during which she provided no further clarity on her Olympic availability.

"Australia, wake the f--- up. I'm not playing these games no more," said Cabbage, who is in the US preparing for the new WNBA season with the Las Vegas Aces.



Instagram posts by Liz Cabbage.

"To all the white Australians in my DMs, in my comments, talking shit about me here and there, I don't actually care. Your ignorance is embarrassing and it's sad and I feel really sorry for you, that you have literally zero empathy, and lack of respect to even try and understand where I, a black woman, is trying to speak out on the lack of diversity in Australia.

"It's sad. The whitewashing is sad. Your black athletes lead you everywhere. Indigenous athletes are some of the best athletes we have and y'all don't use them at all."

Cabbage twice apologised to Longbottom, who was in the second of the two photos she originally posted, accompanied by the comment: "also fake tan doesn't equal diversity".

She insisted she was aware of who Longbottom was and said her fake tan remark was aimed at the others in the photo, which was taken last month as the Australian uniforms for Tokyo 2021 were unveiled. Longbottom was wearing a shirt designed by Indigenous artist and Olympic boxer Paul Fleming.



Australian Opals star Liz Cambage at the 2016 Olympics.

“Maurice Longbottom, once again I’m so sorry from the bottom of my heart that things got twisted today and the media used you as a tool to defer from the real issue that Australia is ignorant, is so ignorant and it’s embarrassing,” Cambage said.

“We have a diversity issue, we have an inclusion issue, and we have a visibility issue for kids growing up that don’t see anyone that looks like them in magazines, on TV, on the news, anywhere. And Australia, if you have an issue with my words, you are the issue, and you can kiss my black arse.

“And yes I saw the apology. Words don’t mean anything to me. Actions mean something to me. So let me see it. Because until then I’m not buying shit.”

Earlier, a spokesperson confirmed that the AOC had selected the athletes for the Jockey shoot and that it should have chosen differently to better reflect the true diversity of Australia’s Olympic teams.

Beneath that image, Cambage wrote: “If I’ve said it once I’ve said it a million times. HOW AM I MEANT TO REPRESENT A COUNTRY THAT DOESNT EVEN REPRESENT ME #whitewashedaustralia.”

However, the AOC said it was “rightly proud” of its overall record on diversity and inclusion.

“Tomorrow the Annual General Meeting will consider a change to the AOC Constitution which will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island representation on our Athletes’ Commission,” the spokesperson said.

Next month we will launch our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan following lengthy consultation with our Indigenous Advisory Committee. Our Olympic Team for Tokyo, as it did in Rio, will consist of more women than men.

“We proudly defend our track record on diversity and there will be further photo shoots that reflect our broad diversity of athletes.”

Basketball Australia and Cambage’s management were also contacted for comment.

Cambage - an outspoken advocate for social justice, racism and discrimination issues - has represented the Opals at the past two Olympics, and has previously flagged her desire to represent her country again in Tokyo.

No one at Basketball Australia or within the Opals has been told by Cambage of any plans not to play at Tokyo, according to sources. But officials were following up with Cambage on Friday night about whether her plans had changed.