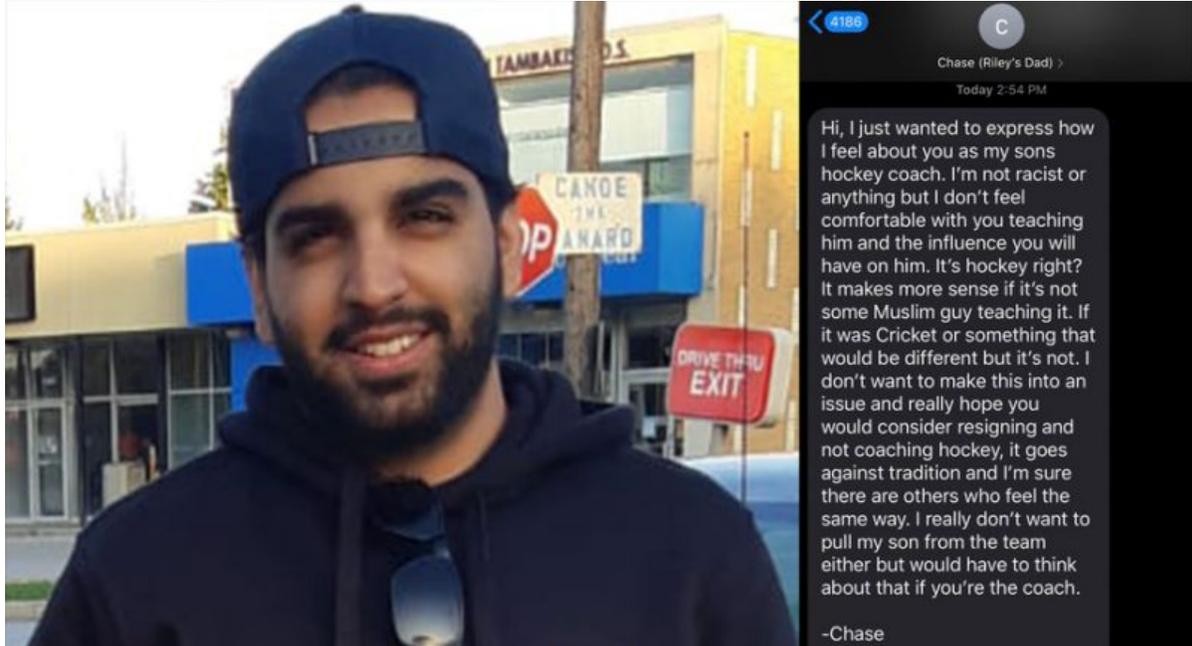


Courtney Szto comments on racism experienced by youth hockey coach

Youth hockey coach speaks out after receiving racist message from parent

[Shireen Ahmed, Yahoo Sports Canada](#) Oct 13, 2019, 1:23 PM (*snipped*)



Windsor native Talha Javaid runs a youth hockey program in East Lansing, Michigan. (Photo: Shireen Ahmed)

Oct. 9 was a normal afternoon as Talha Javaid walked home from the Windsor, Ont., mosque he attends every Friday for congregational prayers. But when the 23-year-old hockey player and youth coach checked his phone, he stopped in his tracks.

“I was like, ‘What. The. Hell,’” he told Yahoo Sports Canada. Javaid received a text message from one of the parents of a child he coaches. The text message was fully loaded with racist and xenophobic ideology and began with the unoriginal line, “I’m not a racist but...”

Javaid and his best friend Sebastian Nystrom travel to East Lansing, Mich., and pay for ice time out of pocket to provide free clinics and development sessions for players five to eight years of age. His dedication to the sport and to give back to the community was not good enough for one father, identified as Chase, who expressed that he doesn’t “feel comfortable” with his son being coached by a Muslim. Chase was concerned because of the influence Javaid would presumably have on Riley, his child.

In outrageous and ignorant fashion, Chase stated that if Riley was learning how to play cricket, then having Javaid as a coach would be well, more sensical.

Javaid does not, and has never, played cricket.

As a Pakistani-born Canadian Muslim, Javaid is one of the few people of colour in the hockey community in the Windsor-Detroit region. He has played ice hockey and ball hockey since he was a child. Much of his exposure to hockey was from a program at the local mosque called “Fajr Quran Hockey” (FQH) in which young kids go to the mosque for early morning worship and then play ball hockey in the gym downstairs. The Pittsburgh Penguins fan is a full time economics student at the University of Windsor. He volunteers as a hockey coach on weekends. His program has been running for less than a month.

In the text, Chase alluded to the hockey “tradition” that clearly did not include Javaid. He went as far as suggesting that Javaid ought to resign.

“Tradition is coded language for whiteness and the way things have always been,” said **Dr. Courtney Szto, assistant professor at the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen’s University** and assistant editor of the [Hockey in Society](#) blog. “And a Muslim coach throws a wrench into the whole thing. It doesn’t jive with our dominant narrative of who gets to participate in that culture.”

Javaid said he is overwhelmed by the amount of support he has received and appreciated the solidarity. He noted that his non-PoC friends were aghast and surprised by the incident. Javaid told them he’s used to it — something they found difficult to accept. But the reality is that often when people of colour share their stories, it serves, teaches and educates others with privilege who do not know what it’s like to be on the receiving end of abuse or discrimination.

Javaid’s tweet went viral and he has gotten the support of a few notable players, including Stanley Cup champion and Hall of Fame goalie [Grant Fuhr](#) and Minnesota Wild forward JT Brown. Brown, one of the few black players in the NHL, is someone Javaid has looked up to. Brown faced death threats after [raising his fist during the Star-Spangled Banner](#) at a game in 2017, in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and other marginalized people experiencing injustices.

Javaid admits this was not his first encounter with racism in the hockey world — he has dealt with racial abuse and discrimination since he was five years old.

“People think that what happens in the USA doesn’t affect Canada? They’re wrong,” he said. “I remember 9-11, and what happened the next day. I got bullied by older kids at my school. I was five years old.”

And more recently, Javaid has had to endure bigotry from his own bench. “After Trump was elected, one of the guys on my rec team told me he didn’t want a Muslim guy being his captain,” Javaid recalled. “I told him ‘this is a *you* problem.’ I had the most points on the team and he had like two. I got the playing time I deserved, and I didn’t even bring it up with the coach.”