

Joe's Basketball Diaries

Compiled and produced by Anna Weigt-Bienzie
& Lisa Lightbourn



Context

Finding a new way to tell stories connected to the university's strategic priorities but that also resonate with our community, was the 'why' behind this series. It gave us the opportunity to bring the brand to life in an authentic way that reflected its global impact. By having bold, civil discourse on race, leadership, equality, sport, politics and globalization with guests from diverse backgrounds we were able to embody what it means to defy gravity.

This series gave us the opportunity to showcase how we collectively tackle challenges, share ideas and use setbacks as learnings and motivation to propel us forward.

Strategic approach

Each episode was between 25 and 30 minutes in length and featured guests from both inside and outside of the U of T community.

Through these conversations, the goal was to continue to position the brand as innovative, inspiring, authentic and thought provoking. Our guests come from diverse backgrounds and have not only overcome obstacles in their personal and professional lives but are also working towards removing similar barriers for future generations.

By engaging external guests, we broadened our audience outside of our traditional viewership. By using a new format to build brand awareness, with a grassroots approach that hones in on the emotional aspects of the university, we were able to convey access, inclusivity, and care.

Defy Gravity

Ensuring the series was aligned with the university's *Defy Gravity* priorities was integral to its success. Joe's Basketball Diaries encapsulated the four pillars listed below.

1. **Global and local leadership in innovation and entrepreneurship and its impact on economic and social prosperity.**
2. **Impact on culture and creativity.**
3. **Degree to which it enables student success and empowers the next generation to pursue and achieve their dreams.**
4. **Helping to create diverse, inclusive, equitable, modern cities and societies.**

Why basketball?

- Basketball is one of the few sports that has truly been able to cross cultural and ethnic divides, bringing together one of the most eclectic fanbases. Though it was always apparent within the basketball community it became clear to the public when the Raptors won the NBA Championship in 2019 and we as a city and country came together in a way that is still talked about to this day.
- We like to think of U of T's diverse and inclusive community as a mirror image of the basketball fanbase; a reflection of Canada, Toronto and what the University of Toronto has built its reputation on – being a globally diverse institution.
- Now, more than ever, storytelling needs to create a sense of belonging, community and trust. Joe's Basketball Diaries used basketball as a vehicle to explore a range of topics that impact us as a collective.

Amplification strategy and tools

- University of Toronto owned social media accounts including Meta, YouTube, and Twitter.
- Working with tri-campus communications departments and faculties to promote episodes both internally and externally including on individual websites and social channels.
- Encouraging guests to share the episode(s) they participated in, or the series, with their networks and audiences by tagging them in posts and providing links, as well as suggested wording.
- Promoting the series through internal newsletters such as the Bulletin Brief and Daily Update.

Quantitative and qualitative metrics

Since long form video was a new approach for the university, we put forward targets based on the results from previous 8–12-minute video productions.

- Teaser video – 113K views
- Social content – 200K reach
- Video views across six episodes on YouTube and Facebook – 20K views
- One U of T News article – 1K unique views*

Metrics aside, we also wanted to increase brand awareness, especially in equity deserving communities and among students and prospects. We also hoped to generate potential brand partnerships and grow our local and international networks.

** Noting we had to pivot and write articles for each episode due to issues with Google ads.*

Overview of quantitative targets & results

Assets	Targets	Results
Teaser video	113K views	261.4K views
Social	200K reach	6.9 million reach
Video views	20K views	1.3 million views
U of T News launch article	1K unique views	1.9K unique views

Metrics: episodes & social promotion

*Reach: the # of people who viewed the content

#UofT

**Impressions: the # of times the content was viewed

	Sum of reach*	Sum of impressions**	Sum of engagements	Sum of URL clicks	Sum of video views
Teaser (Nov. 2)	317,863	427,949	3,851	334	261,444
Ep. 1 (Nov. 16)	345,357	243,014	1,003	234	171,928
Ep. 2 (Nov. 30)	822,602	1,992,240	8,709	2,668	115,347
Ep. 3 (Dec. 14)	1,087,752	1,618,649	6,468	71	155,884
Ep. 4 (Jan. 4)	1,508,899	2,512,588	12,268	139	162,523
Ep. 5 (Jan. 18)	1,527,262	2,807,089	9,669	19	129,652
Ep. 6 (Feb. 1)	827,133	1,071,310	1,074	20	107,278
Rapid Fire Five 1	54,232	65,836	1,576		49,794
Rapid Fire Five 2	48,843	62,516	1,202		45,743
Rapid Fire Five 3	41,286	55,243	945		36,896
Rapid Fire Five 4	50,441	65,067	1,764		49,181
Rapid Fire Five 5	55,304	76,306	1,444		50,596
Rapid Fire Five 6	24,2381	86,951	1,303		56,307
Grand total	6,929,357	11,084,758	51,276	3,485	1,392,573

*Reach: the # of people who viewed the content

**Impressions: the # of times the content was viewed

Metrics: social platforms

	# of posts	Sum of reach*	Sum of impressions**	Sum of engagement	Sum of URL clicks	Sum of video views
Alumni	28	6,416	76,610	1,017	480	12,021
Instagram story	7	3,497	3,500	40	0	0
Facebook	7	2,919	2,978	33	0	429
Twitter	7	0	1,089	64	5	206
LinkedIn	7	0	69,043	880	475	11,386
U of T	86	6,922,941	11,008,148	50,259	3,005	1,380,552
Facebook (paid)	10	3,249,622	5,970,077	0	0	326,485
Facebook	13	2,436,174	4,101,760	33,303	2,746	416,015
Instagram	13	562,585	559,969	11,958		464,150
Instagram stories	13	120,020	121,591	393		
Twitter	13	480,394	151,392	3,273	164	18,400
Twitter U of T News	10	46,352	11,811	227	95	788
Twitter (paid)	1	25,794	36,848	0	0	
YouTube	13		54,700	1,105	0	154,714
Grand total	114	6,929,357	11,084,758	51,276	3,485	1,392,573

Metrics: U of T News

Originally, we had only intended to write one article for U of T News announcing the launch of the series but due to challenges with Google ads, we decided to write short overviews for each episode that could be used to link back to our own website.

Articles	Total # of views	Total # of unique views
Article 1	2,130	1,908
Article 2	1,107	960
Article 3	1,009	956
Article 4	923	860
Article 5	773	723
Article 6	728	654
Grand total	6,670	6,061

Metrics: YouTube

Growing the university's YouTube subscribers was always our intent, however previous benchmarks had not been set. However, given the content and the ways in which the series was promoted, it ended up generating a week-over-week increase.

Episodes	Subscribers
Ep. 1	+12
Ep. 2	+77
Ep. 3	+160
Ep. 4	+90
Ep. 5	+135
Ep. 6	+135



Demographics

27 Guests

12 Of which are members of the U of T community (professors, faculty, students & alumni)

12 Of which identify as women

81% Of whom identify as BIPOC



The stories behind the numbers

Given this was the first time the university had created long form video content, we were thrilled to learn that the series outperformed not only the benchmark metrics we had set but also the metrics of previously produced video series.

Numbers aside, it was fantastic to hear the impact this series had globally. Below are only a few examples of the affect it had with on a variety of audiences:

- Nick Nurse, head coach of the Toronto Raptors and men's national basketball team, after seeing the promo for the series reached out asking to be included in an episode.
- David Shoemaker, ILC member and CEO of Canadian Olympic Committee, agreed to be a guest in one of our episodes and provided fantastic feedback on the series.
- Students, professors and senior administrators from across the university have shared their love of the series and how they felt seen in the episodes and conversations. This has reconfigured how members of the university now work with one another and made U of T more accessible to diverse communities.

The stories behind the numbers cont'd

- The MLSE Foundation, NBA Canada, Sinai Health Foundation, Raptors for Research, and Canada Basketball have all shared interests in connecting with the University and potentially engaging in future partnerships which will give the brand new opportunities to leverage its presence in the community locally and internationally.
- There have been discussions around partnership opportunities with the organization, the Giants of Africa, to help further the work being done by U of T on the continent.
- David Hollander, an NYU professor, who teaches the award-winning course, 'How Basketball Can Save the World' reached out interested in a collaboration.

Key learnings

- Using basketball as a vehicle to have challenging conversations, with a varied group of guests, was a great way to reach diverse audiences, regardless as to whether they were sports fans, given the chosen topics were applicable to individuals of all ages and backgrounds.
- This series was a fantastic avenue in which to engage alumni and form new partnership opportunities.
- Articles on U of T News outlining each episode and featured guests helped drive traffic to our YouTube channel.
- Series such as this, that position the university in a different light, are helping breakdown stereotypes, giving the institution the opportunity to come across as more relatable to current and incoming students.
- A minimal investment (less than \$500) per episode generated phenomenal outcomes on Meta and YouTube.
- The Rapid Fire Five social content was a terrific way to engage with our audience, build excitement for upcoming episodes and shine a light on future guests.
- Creating a hashtag moving forward would be beneficial in tracking who, how and where the content is being shared.
- Including time stamps highlighting various points in the discussion in our YouTube description helped viewers find parts of each episode they were most interested in.

Next steps to consider

- To reach an even larger global audience we would like to utilize the existing product and upload the audio version to a podcast streaming site, as well as our owned channels.
- Working with the Brand Hub to repurpose our product into snack size content for YouTube Shorts, Reels and TikTok would allow us to capitalize on the series and give longevity to the storytelling from season one.
- Given the audience and fan base this series has generated, it would be fantastic to continue to build on that with a second season that continues to align itself with the strategic priorities of the university. Topics for consideration could include:
 - Sustainability and sport
 - The role of sport in post conflict societies
 - Leaders of colour
- We also would like to see conversations filmed in different parts of the world where U of T is building alliances like Rwanda, India or Kigali and in partnership with organizations such as Giants of Africa to further support the institution's international priorities.

Appendix

Videos and articles

1. [Does sport transcend borders and politics?](#)
2. [Mental health](#)
3. [Model minority](#)
4. [Community](#)
5. [Globalization and the power of sport](#)
6. [Women & sport](#)

Social video promotion

1. [Rapid Fire Five – episode one](#)
2. [Rapid Fire Five – episode two](#)
3. [Rapid Fire Five – episode three](#)
4. [Rapid Fire Five – episode four](#)
5. [Rapid Fire Five – episode five](#)
6. [Rapid Fire Five – episode six](#)



DEFY
GRAVITY