

Official Statement by AirAsia ASEAN Basketball League CEO



The ABL has just concluded its fact finding into the alleged racism issue brought on by an email by Mr Julius Hodge to myself. Below are the facts from our findings:-

1. The ABL did not receive any reports from Mr. Andaya or his agent bringing up any issues of racist remarks addressed to Mr. Andaya by any of the coaching staff of the Saigon Heat immediately after the alleged incident. Only after the issue was brought up by Mr. Hodge was I contacted by Mr. Andaya's agent to highlight this issue. She herself is not clear about the incident. Whoever had leaked the email correspondence between Mr. Hodge and myself online did not have anyone's positive outlook in mind as it is tough to resolve issues when they are a few months old. They should have immediately reached out to the ABL to resolve this matter if they were truly serious and had actual facts in mind.
2. From what we gather angry words were exchanged between Mr. Andaya and a member of the Heat coaching staff but there were no witnesses or at least none have come forward apart from Mr. Hodge's note. When asked about the incident in early February in Manila face to face by Mark Andaya's agent, Mr. Hodge had replied he did not know anything about the issue. Although I believe recently Mr. Hodge has brought up that he may have heard this to the agent.
3. It was brought to my attention by the Saigon Heat management before the season that Mr. Hodge's services would be terminated even before the first game of the season as it seemed that Mr. Hodge already had problems settling into the lifestyle and environment there while also not having a positive working chemistry with the coaches. After some discussions with the Heat, the ABL encouraged the Heat to re-look into their decision and to give Mr. Hodge a try out also with the condition of his wife in mind.
4. As a professional Mr. Hodge had continued to perform on court and we applaud him for his professionalism.
5. In terms of the fight during training between players again we've had no reports that this happened from either the Filipino or American players except for Mr. Hodge. Training ground scuffles happen all the time across the boundary of all sports and this is a norm. It happens all over the world and has happened in the past in the ABL as well. With so much testosterone on the court even in training this is bound to happen. And if you are a 5'7" coach you too would think twice before wading into a crowd of 6'7" angry scuffling men.

There are two points here:

Mr. Hodge's dissatisfaction with the work environment and possibly with the management and more importantly that the Saigon Heat had already brought up the issues of possible negative work chemistry between Mr. Hodge and their coaching staff even BEFORE the league began. They kept him on after the ABL had asked them to try to work out differences with Mr. Hodge.

The alleged racism issue which was NOT reported at all to the ABL when it allegedly happened either by the affected player or his agent. At this point we cannot find strong corresponding reliable witnesses who can corroborate the story and the non-reporting of the incident by the alleged victim does not help this claim.

The ABL is a growing league. Many professional players, especially those who have played in the NBA or in the Philippine PBA are used to a different environment even in terms of living conditions and certain luxuries which are quite comfortable compared to what might be offered in the other ASEAN nations where basketball is still a growing sport. Living conditions can make or break a player's morale if they are not used to it. In the ABL we have coaches and management who may or may not be used to the high demands from players who may be used to certain conditions.

This is not a perfect league. Our teams and the ABL ourselves are on a journey in uncharted waters in a league that is one of a kind in the world and we're not faultless, but neither are the players or coaching staff that are hired by the teams. For that reason the ABL seeks to solve issues instead of sensationalizing them in media. Is the league or our teams perfect? Of course not. We're still in our 3rd year of infancy. That's still a stumbling toddler compared to the NBA or the PBA. There are growing pains for all involved. We will keep giving our all to create the greatest basketball legacy this region has ever seen. We are going to do that with as much professionalism, blood, sweat and tears as we can possibly muster. We hope those that wish to be a part of this family will afford us the same.

Sincerely,

Kuhan Foo

CEO, ASEAN Basketball League