

# Diaba

**Diaba Konaté, 22, Student, Malian-French**

“I was born in a Muslim family. Only my mom wears the hijab. I grew up praying and doing the mandatory things in the religion. I moved to America [from France] when I was 18, December 2018. And then in 2019, when COVID happened, I really started to question myself, and kind of got to know myself more, asking myself questions about my identity and who I want to be in the future. Because of COVID, it was an uncertain period of time and I needed more [answers]. I needed things to be clarified in my mind. So I prayed a lot. I began to find a lot of answers to my prayers, and realized I wanted to commit more to my religion, because I felt like Allah gave me the answers to my questions and just filled my heart with a lot of positivity and love. By committing to my religion, for me, it wasn't just keeping up with my prayers and fasting, but also wearing the hijab.

[Transferring from Idaho to California,] I felt more comfortable being here, in California, because I saw other people [similar to me]. So I felt normal. While in Idaho, I felt weird. I didn't feel very comfortable. Also, people saw me before wearing the hijab [as a basketball player], and they saw me after wearing it. So I was scared of them judging me, which never happened. But I was also scared of showing up differently and being the same person; I was scared of having another appearance. When playing basketball, the only difference in playing as a hijabi is that [when it gets hot] I'm still covered up. I don't wear short sleeves anymore. The hijab I'll wear is a sports hijab. But I'm used to it now. It's a part of me.

Now, I'm just so happy. I feel really comfortable in it. [As I had mentioned,] I was looking for an identity. And now I know who I am: I'm a Black woman, and I'm a Muslim woman too. I love that about myself: I'm not afraid to tell people who I am. There are a lot of people who are Muslim, but you can't see it, but I show it and I'm not afraid of that. [It's also a contradictory relationship.] I'm not trying to spread any propaganda, it's just me being myself, and I don't want to draw attention to myself. I'm not the [perfect] Muslim. It's personal, but at the same time, it's visible. I really want to keep my religion and my face for myself, even if it's visible.

I also want people to have a good image of Islam, which today is hard to have because of what social media shows [us] about Islam. Terrorism, especially, in France, [is prominent]. So it's hard to have this on my shoulders. I used to play [basketball] with the French national team from ages 18-21, before I put on the hijab. I never had a problem playing for the French team. Last summer was my first time going back home while wearing the hijab, and I was with a group of friends who went and played in a tournament. The officials told me a few hours before the tournament, 'I'm sorry, but according to the rules, you're not allowed to play with the hijab.' It was the same [type of hijab] as I'm wearing right now; it's designed to play sports, it's secure. So I should be allowed to play right there, especially if the brands designed the hijab to play sports. It was very heartbreaking because I felt like the problem is not with me, but it's with my religion. They had previously accepted me as a person when I wasn't wearing the hijab, but they attacked and discriminated against me as a person wearing the hijab. [The hijab] pushes me to better myself and just be a better person. Through who I am, I can also educate people.

I never had any issues while wearing the hijab. Now, I go to France, and I don't know what my life's going to be like. Do I want to go home? Or do I want to stay here?”