Redefining the Stacking Phenomenon Four Years Later: Eight Seasons of Racial Tasking among College Quarterbacks

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Official statistics from the 2008-2011 seasons of the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision (DI-FBS) indicated a significant difference in the utilization of Black and White quarterbacks, such that Black quarterbacks were called to run the ball more often than their White counterparts, who were called on to execute more passing plays (Bopp & Sagas, 2014). This led to the conclusion that although outright discrimination via racial stacking and positional segregation was dissipating, a new manifestation of this racial bias was taking place through racial tasking. The authors defined racial tasking in sport as a function of one’s prejudice towards a minority athlete’s mental and physical capability, resulting in variations of the tasks athletes are asked/expected to perform based on his or her race, despite holding the same playing position (p. 140).

Several theories were utilized in the realization of racial tasking including outcome control hypothesis and centrality, both of which have been used to suggest racial discrimination occurs to decrease the impact of minorities on the result of a game or to remove minorities from vital decision-making positions. One explanation for this racially motivated stereotype is the misconception that Black athletes are naturally physically superior and are more individually driven than their White counterparts, who are characterized as being mentally superior and having a stronger work ethic (Anshel, 1990; Buffington, 2005). Racial tasking on the other hand, is the manifestation of discrimination through the differences in expected or requested actions based on race.

Official statistics from the 2008-2011 NCAA DI-FBS seasons revealed significant differences in the on-field plays executed by Black and White quarterbacks, $F(2, 545) = 44.89$, $p < .000$; Wilks’ Lambda = .86; $\eta^2 = .14$, with Black quarterbacks averaging 92 rush attempts and 268 pass attempts over each season and their White counterparts averaging 51 rush and 312 pass attempts. Significant differences were found between the percentages of rush attempts versus the percentage of pass attempts for the racially different quarterbacks $F(2, 545) = 44.57$; $p < .000$; Wilks’ Lambda = .86; $\eta^2 = .14$. White quarterbacks ran the ball only 14.7% (SD = .12) of the time as opposed to passing the ball 85.3% (SD = .12) of the time. Conversely, Black quarterbacks ran the ball 26.7% (SD = .16) of the time compared to passing the ball only 73.3% (SD = .16) of the time.

These findings supported the proposition that the plays (i.e., run or pass) college quarterbacks executed during the four-year span were influenced by their race. Now that four years have passed, it is reasonable to assume that most of the quarterbacks in the aforementioned study have either moved on and are no longer playing for their respective teams. Thus, the aim of this study is to provide an update to previous findings to determine if the change of personnel (players and coaches) has had an impact on the average number of rushing and passing attempts carried out by racially different quarterbacks. (Note: data for the 2015 season will be added at the conclusion of this season; after which, data from the eight seasons between 2008-2015 will be analyzed and the two four year periods, 2008-2011 and 2012-2015, will be compared).

Official statistics from the 2008-2014 NCAA DI-FBS seasons resulted in 2224 quarterbacks, of which only 1016 were eligible based on the criteria that the player had to be listed as a quarterback in the team’s official media guide as well as attempted a total of at least 135 passes and/or rushes during the season. Of the resultant eligible quarterbacks (N = 1016), 288 were identified as Black and 728 as White as with the previous study, data were first analyzed through a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The race of the quarterback was found to significantly impact the combined dependent variables of rushing and passing attempts $F(2, 1013) = 82.68$, $p < .001$; Wilks’ Lambda = .86; $\eta^2 = .14$. When considered separately, further analysis indicated that race significantly impacted both passing attempts $F(1, 1014) = 28.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$ as well as rushing attempts $F(1, 1014) = 138.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. 
A second MANOVA was computed to determine any possible percentage differences between rushing and passing attempts of Black and White quarterbacks. Significant differences were found between the percentages of rush attempts versus the percentage of pass attempts $F(2, 1013) = 85.68; p < .000; \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .86; \eta^2 = .15$. White quarterbacks ran the ball only 14.7% (SD = .12) of the time as opposed to passing the ball 85.3% (SD = .12) of the time. Conversely, Black quarterbacks ran the ball 26.6% (SD = .15) of the time compared to passing the ball only 73.4% (SD = .15) of the time.

To account for potential differences in team offenses, each quarterback’s team passing attempts, team rushing attempts, and the time of possession per game were all controlled for in the MANCOVA computation. Race was still found to significantly impact rushing and passing attempts made by the quarterback $F[2, 1010] = 54.22, p < .000; \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .90; \eta^2 = .10$. Subsequently, the quarterback’s race was found to have significant impact on his number of passing attempts $F[1,1011] = 6.70, p < .010, \eta^2 = .01$ as well as rushing attempts $F[1,1011] = 85.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$. Controlling for the aforementioned variables, Black quarterbacks had more rushing attempts (EMM = 81.67, SE = 2.40) and passed the ball fewer times (EMM = 288.11, SE = 5.66) than did their White counterparts regarding rushing attempts (EMM = 55.32, SE = 1.49) and passing attempts (EMM = 305.54, SE = 3.52).

These findings continue to support the proposition posited by Bopp & Sagas (2014) that the race of a quarterback significantly influences the types of plays his coaches ask him to execute. As past research into this topic has shown, the existence of racial tasking perpetuates a type of institutional discrimination of which all coaches and athletic administrators should be made aware. Additional research regarding any bias or prejudice, conscious or subconscious, which leads to differential roles and expectations in sport, among management, players, and consumers is warranted. Regarding the career trajectory of coaches, continued examination and understanding of such practices and subsequent outcomes in college football is particularly important. Lastly, future research could investigate whether quarterbacks are conscious of the differences in the style of play they are expected to assume based on race to determine if these results are reflective of a system they deem equitable. Such studies might also be helpful in eliminating or minimizing institutional discrimination in other sports as well.