Getting a Second Shot: Subsequent Head Coaching Opportunities for Black NFL Coaches

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Virtual asynchronous 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)

Abstract 2020-242

Session: Race

The National Football League (NFL) receives a lot of attention from fans and the media for its racial hiring practices, specifically regarding the Rooney Rule (Johnson, 2018; Lyles, 2018; Reid, 2018; Stites, 2018). Established in 2003, the Rooney Rule requires that at least one minority candidate be interviewed for a head coaching vacancy. The lack of minority coaches in the NFL is interesting given the proportion of minority players. Since the majority of NFL players are Black, Everhart and Chelladurai (1998) would suggest a similar ratio of coaches might be Black, since former players are typically considered prime candidates to transition into the coaching profession. The 2018 racial and gender report card for the NFL noted that 69.7% of NFL players were Black, 35.5% of assistant coaches were Black, and 21.9% of head coaches were Black (TIDES, 2019). This progressive decline from the player pool to the upper echelon of coaching staffs may be alarming to some and has resulted in the topic being extensively examined by scholars.

While many scholars found no evidence of racial discrimination in promotions to head coach (e.g., Fee et al., 2006; Solow et al., 2011), some have suggested the lack of Black head coaches may be a result of discrimination occurring in the lower rungs of the promotion ladder (Solow et al., 2011). Since this conclusion was drawn, a few studies utilized inferential statistics to examine discrimination in these lower rungs of the promotion ladder (e.g., Braddock et al., 2012; Foreman et al., 2018; Rider et al., 2016); however, examinations of head coach opportunities for former head coaches are scarce. Nevertheless, these examinations are important for a couple reasons. First, former head coaches benefit from having connections in the NFL for acquiring head coaching jobs (Fast & Jensen, 2006), and former head coaches possess these connections. Second, the Rooney Rule may be causing the same minority candidates to be offered interview opportunities as a result of head coach experience and/or already established NFL connections.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of race on subsequent head coach opportunities for former head coaches. To examine the effect of race on subsequent head coach opportunities, NFL data during the sample period extending from the 2000-2001 season through the 2015-2016 season will be used. A hazard model will be estimated with a binary dependent variable to indicate the season in which a former NFL head coach secures a subsequent NFL head coach position. The independent variable of interest will be a binary variable indicative of whether the former head coach is Black. Several control variables will be used to account for years of coaching experience and success as a head coach.

The results of this study will have implications for scholars and practitioners. For example, as the Rooney Rule has been adopted by several organizations outside sport (Duru, 2017), scholars and practitioners can learn more about unintended consequences of the Rooney Rule for former managers seeking subsequent opportunities so policies can be better crafted.