Power Five Conferences: The Lack of African-American Head Football Coaches

Aaron Livingston, Grambling State University
Robert Lindsey, Johnson C. Smith University
Charles Crowley, Livingston College
F. Michelle Richardson, Coppin State University
Chevelle Hall, Virginia State University
Karla Jones, Johnson C. Smith University

Socio-Cultural - Diversity (College Sport)
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop

Abstract 2020-248

Racial stacking in sports is not a new phenomenon. It is prevalent in many sports and has been taking place for many decades. Stacking refers to the disproportionate placement of blacks or other minorities into positions of low centrality (Cox 2012). For example, whites are commonly thought of as smarter and more intelligent than African-Americans, and thus pushed to play positions like quarterback and center in football, and pitcher and catcher in baseball. Historically, racial minorities have been excluded from positions involving leadership and cognitive demands in sports (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). This phenomenon holds true for the coaching profession. During this roundtable sport scholars will address barriers for African American intercollegiate football coaches, provide critical analysis of the status of African American coaches on Power Five staffs, and offers suggestions to hiring practices as an intervention tool for university athletic officials.

Football teams are often perceived as totems of school identity, as well as cultural and regional solidarity. Successful football teams have been linked to spikes in donations, exposure and student applications for school (Chung, 2013). Power Five conferences' combined annual revenues, per tax records: FY18: $2.75 billion, FY17: $2.46 billion, FY16: $2.3 billion, FY15: $2.1 billion, and FY14: $1.57 billion (Barrnet, 2019). There are no statistics on what percentage of players at Power Five schools are African American, but the most recent figures for the entire Bowl Subdivision are close to 60 percent.

Minorities make up only 19 percent of all Division I head football coaches (Whyno, 2018). To date there are only 13 African American in the Power Five conferences; in contrast there are vast numbers of African American coaches in supporting positions across Power Five staffs (Walker, 2017). There is a huge representation gap there exist between white coaching staffs and nearly the 60 percent minority player population (Feinstein, J. 2016). College football as a public entity can’t institute a Rooney Rule like the NFL, which compels teams to interview minority candidates for head coaching jobs (Whyno, 2018). The NCAA can’t compel schools to follow specific rules on hiring practices the way a professional sports league can, but it can strongly suggest ideas such as this (Feinstein, 2016). Colleges and universities in the United States have historically been sites of racial discrimination and exclusion, based on explicit and implicit admissions criteria (Karabel, 2005).