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Lack of diversity in college sports leadership

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Lack of diversity in college sports leadership
DECEMBER 16, 2004

It was a month ago that my colleagues at the University of Central Florida in the Institute for the Study of Diversity and Ethics in Sport issued a fascinating report on the lack of diversity in leadership positions in Higher Education. One of the conclusions of the study is that this lack of diversity may contribute to the same lack of diversity in Division I Football Head Coaching positions. The conclusion seems more than likely, indeed even self-evident.

In Division I-A 94.9% of University Presidents are white. Only 13% are women and they are all white. This is remarkable when you consider that over the past several decades there has been a concerted effort in the academic community to diversify at all levels.

The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity on our campus has very strict guidelines for conducting a search to fill a position. There are requirements that a hiring pool must be diverse before a search can go forward. The result has been a transformation of faculty composition.

Nearly all universities have statements in their advertising for positions claiming they are Equal Opportunity Employers, and this statement often appears on official university stationery. Despite that, there are only four African-American Presidents at I-A universities, and no Asian or Native American presidents. Of 360 identified "campus leadership positions" 334 or 93% are occupied by whites.

Moving through the athletic structure the study finds that 92.5% of the 120 athletic directors are white, that 91.1% of 123 NCAA Faculty Representatives are white, and that all eleven conference commissioners are white. Given this "whiter than white" world it is no surprise that at the time of the study there were only five African-American football coaches, although that number has dropped to two since the release of the study, and this week has increased to three as Ty Willingham was both fired and hired over the past month.

Other than the dominating whiteness of the I-A leadership world, one might also point out that athletic departments, especially

when hiring football coaches, operate under totally different rules than academic departments.

What the study does not examine, and what the recent events at the University of Notre Dame so sharply emphasize is the fact that I-A college football is a totally different universe from the remainder of the university. Also college presidents, athletic directors, and faculty representatives have lost control of the glamour end of Intercollegiate Athletics.

This past week the outgoing President of the University of Notre Dame has publicly stated that he opposed the firing of Ty Willingham as football coach at Notre Dame. The top African-American administrator at Notre Dame has indicated her opposition to the firing, and a member of the Board of Trustees has indicated that most of the Board was not consulted on the firing and that he was opposed to it. Indications are the Athletic Director, Kevin White, was opposed to the firing of Willingham and if that is so I apologize for previously criticizing him.

The Chairman of the Faculty Board on athletics and the NCAA Representative indicated that the Board was not consulted on the firing. The Board issued a statement indicating their dismay and identifying two trustees as having played a key role in the firing. These two are the chair of the Board of Trustees Jack McCartan, one of the most accomplished lawyers in America, and Phillip Purcell, chairman and chief executive officer of Morgan Stanley. Purcell serves as chair of the Board of Trustees' athletics committee.

Who then, it may be asked, fired Ty Willingham? One indication is that it is the same people on Board of Trustees who hired George O'Leary without consulting most Board members. One report identifies McCartan and Purcell, along with incoming president, Rev. John Jenkins, and four others, some trustees and some not.

Whatever may be the particulars of the Notre Dame story, and whomever may have played what role in the firing of Willingham, the hiring of O'Leary, and the just concluded hiring of Charlie Weis, what the entire story nicely illustrates is where power lies in the conduct of intercollegiate athletics. Or perhaps where it does not lie. Clearly faculty boards, athletics committees, athletic directors and presidents do not carry the clout of Trustees in matters athletic.

This is something that has been known for quite some time for those who watch the intercollegiate athletic caravan move along its merry way. It is also a lesson for anyone who looks for university presidents to play a key role in the reformation of the intercollegiate athletic cesspool of commercialism. The presidents have lost control and for the most part athletics, especially football, are accountable only to forces on the periphery or outside the university community. This too is not a recent development.

It would be wise then in the next diversity survey of Campus Leadership by my UCF colleagues to include the Trustee category. My guess is that Bull Leprechauns will share "whiteness" as one more common trait with Bull Gators who populate Boards of Trustees, and percentages in the upper 90's will be as common there as elsewhere in the world of campus leadership.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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