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The NFL and Volleyball

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - THE NFL AND VOLLEYBALL
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The day following the end of the NFL regular season has come to be known as "Black Monday" as it is the day that head coaches of poorly performing teams are fired. I would suggest that some consideration be given to changing the term to "White Monday" because the firing of coaches has resulted primarily in the opening of head coaching positions to white coaches.

The first African American head coach, Art Shell was hired in 1989 and, over next decade and a half, the number of African American coaches has fluctuated between two and three. After the firing of Tony Dungy and Dennis Green in 2002 and under pressure from outside the NFL, Commissioner Paul Tagliabue appointed a Diversity Committee. The following year, the Rooney Rule was adopted by the NFL, requiring the interviewing of non-white candidates in the hiring process for head coaching positions.

The immediate result was an increase in African American coaches to seven by 2006 and, then, back to six from 2006 to 2009. In 2011, the number reached eight, then dropping to six over the next few years and reaching eight again in 2017 and 2018. In this past season there were three African American head coaches and it looks like it will remain three for next season.

The conclusion of many observers is that the Rooney Rule is not working. It does appear that the requirement to interview minority candidates has been adhered to, but that the interviews have been pro forma.

So what is the problem? One of the leading theories is that the lack of African American head coaches is the result of the new emphasis on offense in the NFL. This emphasis has led to the hiring of head coaches from the pool of offensive coordinators, where there are very few African Americans.

Although there are now more African American coordinators than ever, African Americans have been hired primarily as defensive coordinators. Why is this the case? One study looked at the representation of African American players on offense and defense, finding that 74% of the defensive players in the league were

African American. That number is also found at running back and wide receiver. At tight end, center, tackle, and guard, 40% of the players were white. What this means or reflects is another question for another time.

Perhaps all of these numbers, although interesting, don't really offer much in the way of explanation. Maybe the answer underlies a recent comment by Dallas Cowboy Michael Bennett to David Zirin: "Don't be fooled into thinking that the NFL is integrated. It's actually segregated. It's segregated between those who play and get hurt, and those who get to coach and own." As its 100th NFL season ends, the league continues to have racial divisions that reflect the realities of race in America, and this may explain the lack of African American head coaches.

On another coaching front, a similar story, but this one based on gender was highlight recently by The New York Times. Since the passage of Title IX, women's sport has experienced considerable growth. At the NCAA Division I level, women playing volleyball outnumber men by a ratio of ten to one. At the recent finals of the NCAA Volleyball Championships, there were no women head coaches of the final four teams.

Fewer than half of the coaches of women's volleyball in all divisions of the NCAA are women, which is a decline over the past decade. In the Power Five conferences, only one in three are women. One explanation lies in the fact that only four of the sixty-five athletic directors, those who do the hiring of coaches, are women. At the youth level where most women start playing volleyball, the coaches and program directors are almost all men.

At the time of the passage of Title IX, nearly all women's sports were coached by women. What happened? In 1972, athletic programs for women in American colleges and high schools were rare. Team sports were nearly non-existent. Less than 30,000 women participated in intercollegiate athletic programs.

By 1976, under the influence of Title IX those numbers had begun to change as approximately 63,000 women participated in intercollegiate athletics. By 1990, that number was nearly 93,000, and in 2001 number reached 151,000. In 2012, the number of women participating in intercollegiate programs reached 200,000. The increases at the high school level have been even greater.

This increase in intercollegiate sports for women has meant a corresponding growth in the number of coaching positions. Initially, this was substantial, although in recent years as the women's positions have become more attractive in prestige and salary, the growth has been seen more in the number of men moving into the women's programs as coaches.

In 1972, nine of ten women's teams were coached by women, while that number today is less than five in ten. There has been an increase in the number of women in intercollegiate athletic administration, but those numbers are still limited.

The increase in the number of men coaching women's sport is clearly related to the substantial increase in the salaries paid to coaches and the financial support for women's sport. This in turn has increased the profile of women's sport and value placed on it. Men coaching women has become a prestigious and lucrative position, and with men doing most of hiring and the application pools flooded with males, the end result has been a decline in the percentage of women's teams coached by women.

Will any of this change? It is difficult to predict the future, but things have happened to Title IX in the Trump and Obama Administrations. First, the focus has moved away from athletics to sexual harassment; and second, the most recent budget requests look as if they will result in a decrease of Title IX enforcement personnel.

As the 19th century Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr famously wrote: "The more things change, the more they are the same."

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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