ASU Global Sport Education and Research Lab
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Field Studies: A 10-Year Snapshot of NFL Coaching Hires

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Abstract

At the end of the 2018-19 NFL season, five of the eight head coaches fired were African American, and only one vacancy was filled by a coach of color. This inequity raised the question: is the Rooney Rule, the NFL's diversity hiring plan, working? The Global Sport Education and Research Lab (GSERL), with the Paul Robeson Center for Innovative Academic and Athletic Prowess (PRRC), sought to answer one question: **What can we say about the NFL's hiring of coaches of color? The purpose of this work is to explore and report on coach hiring and firing trends, not to extrapolate how or why these patterns occur.** While other research has considered changes on a year to year basis, we looked at changes from the 2009-10 NFL season through the 2018-19 season. All the data presented have been gathered from publicly accessible sources. We conducted two phases of data collection and analysis. Our findings show that the number of head coaches of color has gone up and down. Overall, head coaches of color are hired at older ages, have more significant and relevant playing experience and do not receive equivalent "second chances." Specifically, when African American head coaches have been fired in the NFL, it has been more difficult for them, as compared to white coaches, to obtain another head coaching position at the same level.

Introduction

Tom Fears (Los Angeles Rams) was the first Latino American head coach in the NFL (1967), and Joe Kapp was the first Latino American NCAA Division 1-A coach at a predominantly white program (1982), University of California-Berkeley. Tom Flores (Oakland Raiders) was the first Latino and coach of color in the modern NFL era (after the 1970 NFL-AFL merger). Art Shell (Los Angeles Raiders) became the first African American head coach in the modern era (1989), and Willie Jeffries was the first African American NCAA Division 1-A coach at a predominantly white program, Wichita State (1979). The push for greater representation of coaches of color within the NFL has been well documented, especially since the adoption of the Rooney Rule in 2003.[1] The Global Sport Education and Research Lab, with the help of the Paul Robeson Center for Innovative Academic and Athletic Prowess at the University of Central Florida, sought to answer one question: **What can we say about the NFL's hiring of coaches of color?**

Rather than exploring the question in the snapshot of a single year, we examined this issue with an in-depth approach. We analyzed who was hired and fired and looked for patterns over a ten-year window, from the 2009-10 NFL season through the 2018-19 season. The data below are not exhaustive, and we will continue to build on this research, searching for more patterns and additional questions. The total number of coaches in this data set is insufficient for inferential statistical analyses. **The purpose of this report is to explore and report on coach hiring and firing trends, not to extrapolate how or why these patterns occur.**

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[1] The Rooney Rule requires clubs hiring a head coach to interview at least one person of color.

Method

All of the data presented have been gathered from publicly accessible sources, such as news articles that report on coaches' entrance into and exit from positions. There were two phases of this initial round of research. The first was data collection and analysis done by the Paul Robeson Research Center for Innovative Academic and Athletic Prowess (PRRC). This phase was followed by an analysis of the PRRC data, as well as a secondary data collection and analysis that considered both data collections by the Global Sport Education and Research Lab (GSERL).

PRRC, under the direction of Dr. C. Keith Harrison, compiled data from all changes at head coach, offensive coordinator, and defensive coordinator levels in the NFL. The data includes information on the race/ethnicity of both hired and fired coaches, prior coaching position, and next coaching position (in the case of the coach leaving the position).

GSERL added age, playing experience, and basic descriptive statistics, and conducted a second analysis of all the data. It is our goal to show trends, and in future iterations, provide potential explanations and discussion points for next steps in terms of research and considerations for sustainable change. We see these findings as supplementary and complementary to the foundational and ongoing commentaries of Dr. Harry Edwards and the important and groundbreaking Race and Gender Report Cards, produced by Richard Lapchick and The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) at the University of Central Florida.

All figures represent data captured prior to the start of the 2019-2020 NFL season, in order to capture hiring and firing outcomes of the 2018-19 season. Figures do not represent any coaching moves that occurred during the 2019-2020 season. For example, this does not include mid-season firings, or firings that may have occurred on the 2019 "Black Monday." [2] In our analyses, we defined "hires" as officially hired coaches who were not designated as interim. We excluded interim coaches because by definition they are temporary and transient in nature and therefore may add variability to the data that are not representative of actual hiring patterns.

What is the big picture? Are there contextual considerations?

The number of head coaches of color has gone up and down over the years since the Rooney Rule was implemented in 2003. In the last decade, 14 coaches of color were fired from head coaching positions, and 12 were hired. In the 2009-10 season there were five African American head coaches in the NFL. In the 2018-19 season there were eight coaches of color, seven African American and one Latino. However, these numbers do not tell the full story.

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[2] Black Monday in the National Football League occurs on the Monday following the last Sunday of the regular season. Many head coach firings occur during this time.

In general, using the terms "coaches of color" or "minority" is problematic because the hiring patterns are very different between non-white coaches when we look deeper. Based on the data, there are no trends for Latino, Native, or Asian and Pacific Islander American coaches because there has been one or zero of each. There were no Latino American head coaches at the start of the 2009 season, but there was one from 2011 to 2019. There are no Native American or Asian and Pacific Islander American coaches, nor have there been in the history of the league.

Overall, head coaches of color are hired at older ages, have more significant and relevant playing experience, and do not receive equivalent "second chances"—when African American head coaches have been fired in the NFL, it has been more difficult for them, as compared to white head coaches, to obtain another head coaching position at the same level.

Figure 1 (below) shows the big picture of NFL head coaches broken down by race and ethnicity for every season from 2009-10 through 2018-19. Figures 2-14 show factors that contribute or offer context to this big picture. Several factors involve offensive and defensive coordinator positions, which head coaches often hold directly before and after their head coaching stints. Other factors include football playing experience, age when hired, franchise hiring histories, and new hire data.

Results

1. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Head Coaches – 2009-10 vs. 2018-19

To start, we review the decade by looking at the bookends of our window—what was the number of coaches of color and white coaches in the NFL in 2009 and 2018 seasons?

There were five head coaches of color and 27 white head coaches in 2009, while there were eight head coaches of color and 24 white head coaches in 2019.

Figure 1a. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL head coaches (August 2009 vs. 2018):
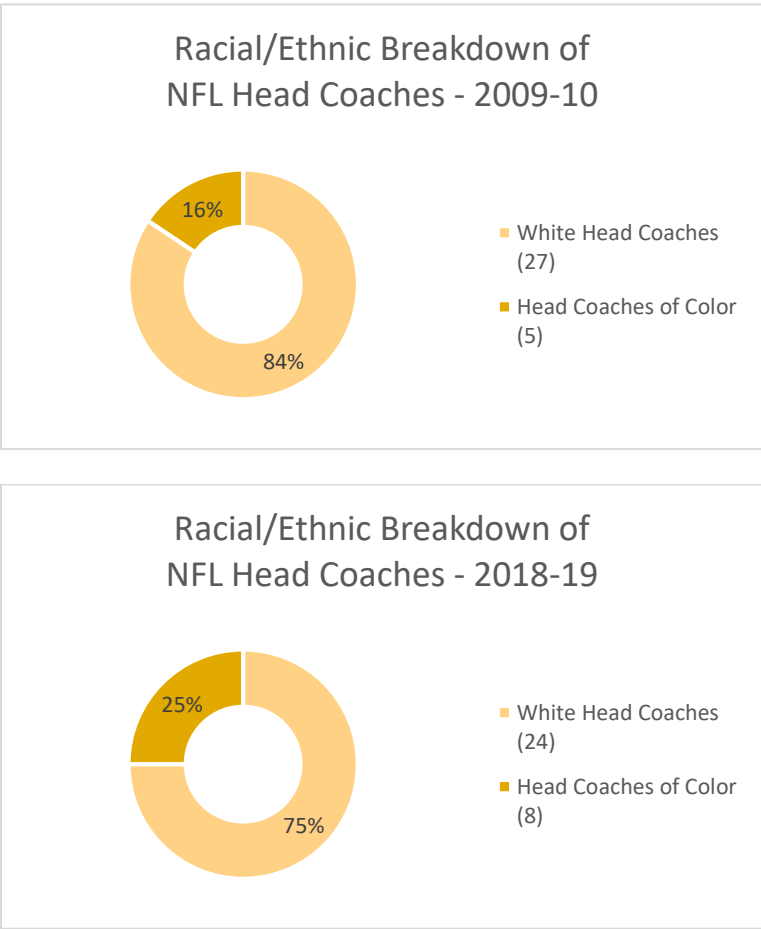
Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Head Coaches - 2009-10

16%

84%

- White Head Coaches (27)
- Head Coaches of Color (5)

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Head Coaches - 2018-19

25%

75%

- White Head Coaches (24)
- Head Coaches of Color (8)

Figure 1b. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL head coaches (August 2009 through August 2018):

Head Coach	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
White	27	26	24	26	28	27	26	26	24	24
Coaches of Color	5	6	8	6	4	5	6	6	8	8

* Interim head coaches are not included in these numbers.

Figure 1c. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL head coaches (August 2009 through August 2018):

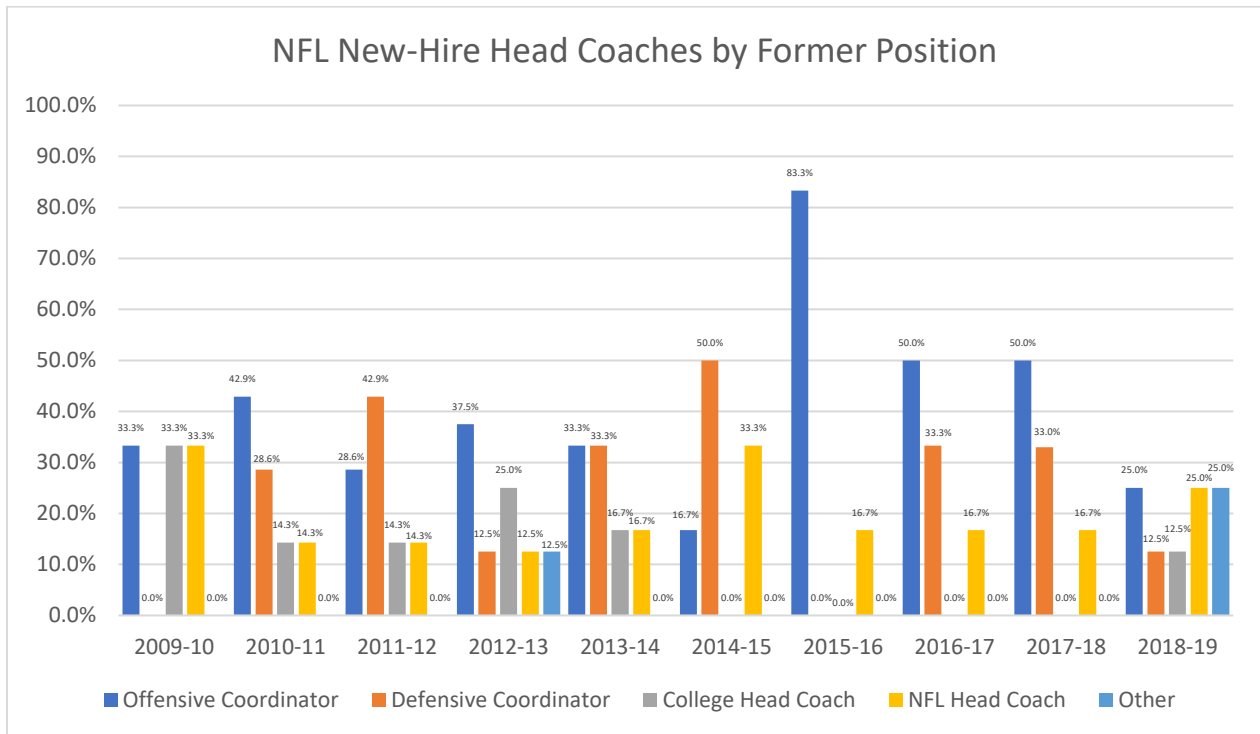Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Head Coaches - 2009-10 through 2018-19
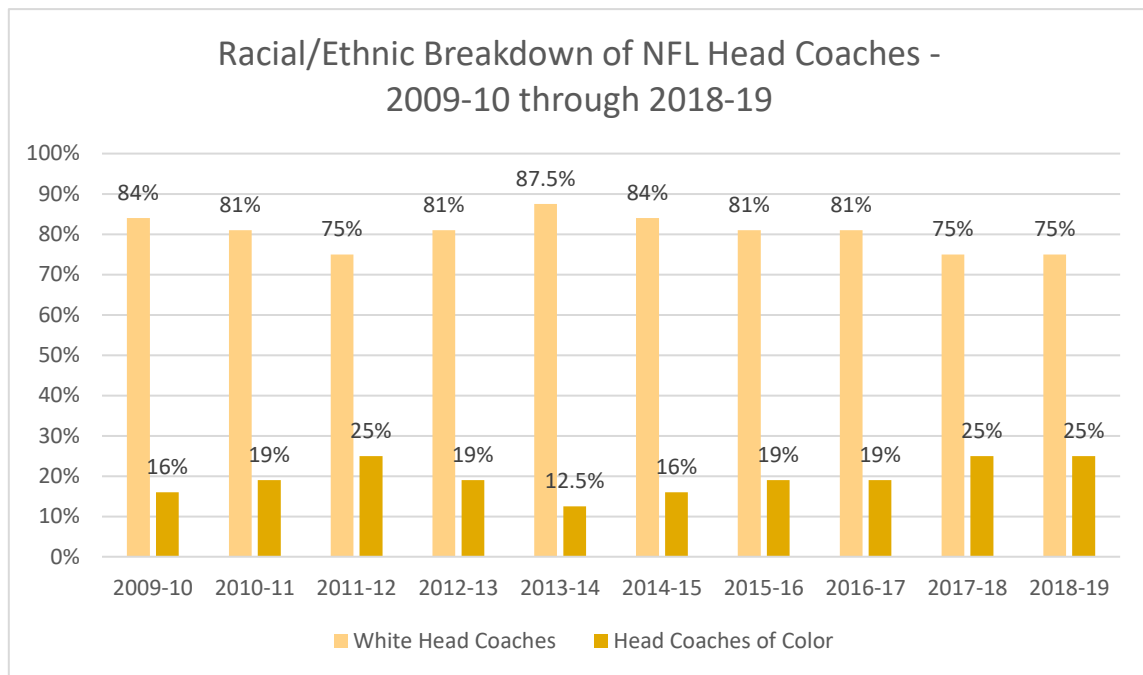
2. NFL New-Hire Head Coaches by Former Position

Experience is known to be important in hiring, so we gathered data on prior head coaching experience. This figure displays the position each coach held just before being hired as head coach. "Other" reflects head coaches who came from other positions such as special teams, linebacker, or quarterback coaches.

Our data supports prior research that found NFL offensive coordinator is the most frequent former position of hired head coaches, followed in order by NFL defensive coordinator, NFL head coach (of other clubs), college head coach, and other positions.

Since 2009, nearly 40% of head coaches hired left offensive coordinator positions and 29% of the head coaches hired left other head coaching positions.

Figure 2. NFL new-hire head coaches by former position (August 2009 through August 2018):

3. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL New-Hire Head Coaches by Former Position

There is a discrepancy between numbers of white head coaches and head coaches of color, and offensive coordinator is the most common path to head coach. In the decade we covered, 91% of offensive coordinator hires were white. These tables dig deeper to look at the position held just prior to being hired as head coach for white coaches and for coaches of color, between the 2009 and 2018 seasons.

Head coaches of color were most commonly NFL defensive coordinators (6), followed by offensive coordinators (4), head coach of another club (1), and linebacker coach (1).

White head coaches were most often offensive coordinators (19), followed by NFL head coaches at other clubs (13), defensive coordinators (9), and college head coaches (3).

Figure 3. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL new-hire head coaches by former position (August 2009 through August 2018):

Head Coaches of Color Prior Position		
	Frequency	Percent
NFL HC	1	8.3
NFL OC	4	33.3
NFL DC	6	50.0
NFL LB	1	8.3
Total	**12**	**100.0**

White Head Coaches Prior Position		
	Frequency	Percent
NFL HC	13	29.5
College HC	3	6.8
NFL OC	19	43.2
NFL DC	9	20.5
Total	**44**	**100.0**

*Percentages have been rounded and may not equal 100.

4. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL New-Hire Head Coaches by Playing Experience

Playing experience is another relevant factor in hiring head coaches. Below, we show the previous football playing experience of NFL head coaches. All head coaches of color had previous playing experience at the college or professional level, and 54% played in the NFL or in some other professional league. Among white head coaches, 91% played at the college or professional level, and 32% played in the NFL or in some other professional league.

Figure 4. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL new-hire head coaches by playing experience (August 2009 through August 2018):

Head Coaches of Color Highest Playing Experience		
	Frequency	Percent
NFL	5	41.7
College	6	50.0
Other League	1	8.3
Total	**12**	**100.0**

White Head Coaches Highest Playing Experience		
	Frequency	Percent
No Post HS	4	9.1
NFL	10	22.7
College	26	59.1
Other League	4	9.1
Total	**44**	**100.0**

*Percentages have been rounded and may not equal 100.

5. NFL New-Hire Head Coaches by Hiring Age

Head coach positions on average had a narrow hiring age range, typically between 40-59 years of age. Newly hired coaches of color were older than newly hired white head coaches (51.4 years vs. 48.4 years), and the majority of coaches under 40 were former offensive coordinators and white. Newly hired white head coaches were found on both ends of the age curve; Bruce Arians was hired as the Cardinals head coach at age 61 and Sean McVay at 31 was tapped by the Los Angeles Rams. [3]

Figure 5 shows the average age of hires at head coach. It also shows summaries for hires of these positions under 40 years old.

Figure 5. NFL new-hire head coaches by hiring age (August 2009 through August 2018):

| Hiring Age of Head Coaches				
Head Coach	Average Age	**Head Coach Under 40**	Frequency	Percent
White	48.4	White	12	86.7
Coaches of Color	51.2	Coaches of Color	2	14.3
Total Average Age	**49.8**	**Total #**	**14**	**100**

*Percentages have been rounded and may not equal 100.

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[3] Sean McVay was the youngest hired offensive coordinator at age 28.

6. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL New-Hire Head Coaches

The figure below displays new head coaches hired each year, broken down by percentage and race or ethnicity. White head coaches range from 57% to 100% of new hires in any given year, and coaches of color ranged from 0% to 43%, with the highest percentage year including the only Latino coach hired during the ten-year span included in our analyses.

Figure 6. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL new-hire head coaches (August 2009 through August 2018):
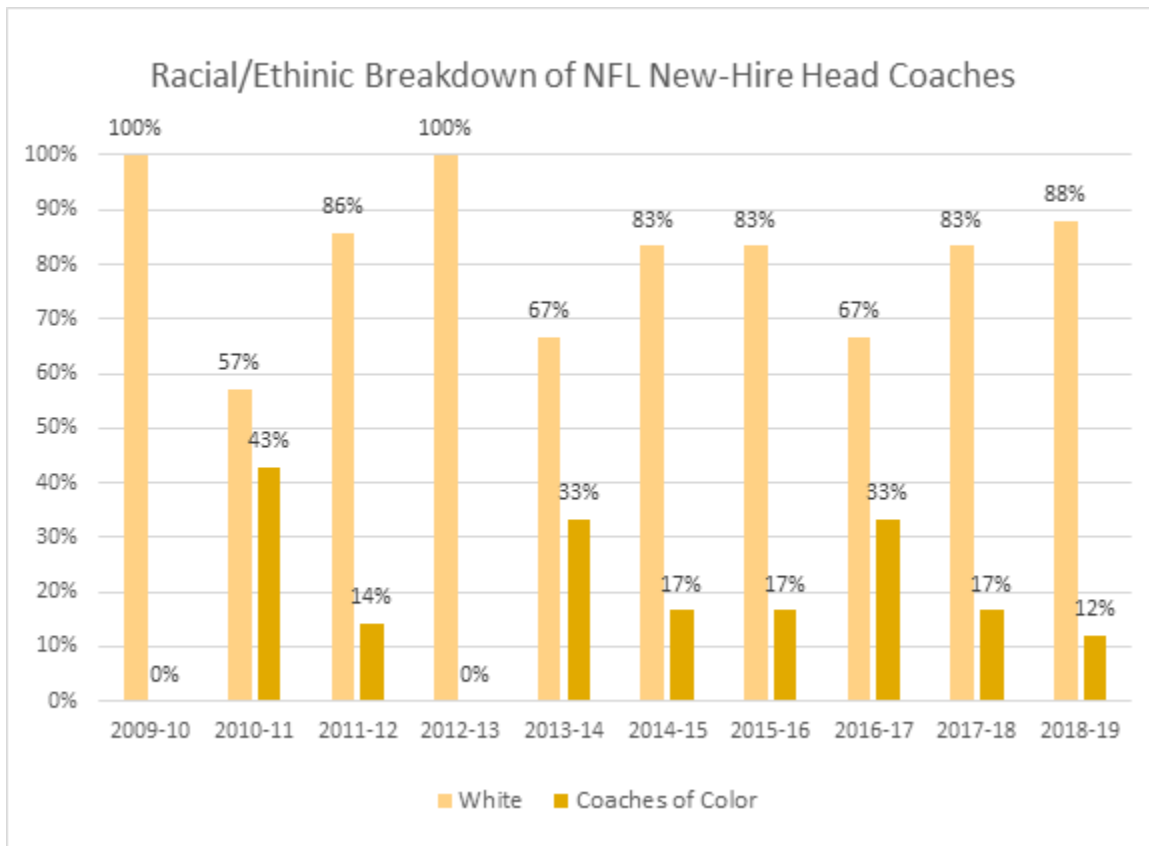
7. Historical Record of Diversity in Head Coach Hiring by NFL Clubs

The chart below shows each NFL club's record of hiring head coaches of color within their franchise history in the modern NFL era. Oakland and Tampa Bay have each hired three head coaches of color. No club in the NFL has hired consecutive head coaches of color, and 12 (37.5%) of the clubs have not hired a permanent head coach of color (Atlanta, Baltimore, Buffalo, Dallas, Houston, Jacksonville, Los Angeles Rams, New England, New Orleans, New York Giants, Tennessee, and Washington). From the 2009 to 2018 seasons four of those 12 clubs have had one head coach tenured at least nine years, which reduces the likelihood of new hires of any race or ethnicity.

Figure 7. Historical record of diversity in head coaching by NFL clubs (August 2009 through August 2018):

KEY
==Has never hired a head coach of color== | **Was hired as a head coach more than once**

NFL Club	Coaches of Color	Coaching Tenure Outliers
Arizona Cardinals	**Dennis Green 2004-06** Steve Wilks 2018	
==**Atlanta Falcons**==	None	
==**Baltimore Ravens**==	None	John Harbaugh 2008-
==**Buffalo Bills**==	None	
Carolina Panthers	Ron Rivera 2011-19	
Chicago Bears	**Lovie Smith 2004-12**	
Cincinnati Bengals	Marvin Lewis 2003-18	
Cleveland Browns	**Romeo Crennel 2005-08** **Hue Jackson 2016-18**	

NFL Club	Coaches of Color	Coaching Tenure Outliers
Dallas Cowboys	None	Jason Garrett 2011-
Denver Broncos	Vance Joseph 2017-18	
Detroit Lions	**Jim Caldwell 2014-17**	
Green Bay Packers	**Ray Rhodes 1999**	Mike McCarthy 2006-2018
Houston Texans	None	
Indianapolis Colts	**Tony Dungy 2002-08 Jim Caldwell 2009-11**	
Jacksonville Jaguars	None	
Kansas City Chiefs	**Herm Edwards 2006-08 Romeo Crennel 2011-12**	
Los Angeles Chargers	Anthony Lynn 2017-present	
Los Angeles Rams	None	
Miami Dolphins	Brian Flores 2019-present	
Minnesota Vikings	**Dennis Green 1992-2001** Leslie Frazier 2011-13	
New England Patriots	None	Bill Belichick 2000-

NFL Club	Coaches of Color	Coaching Tenure Outliers
New Orleans Saints	None	Sean Payton 2006-
New York Giants	None	
New York Jets	Herm Edwards 2001-03 Todd Bowles 2015-18	
Oakland Raiders	Tom Flores, 1979-87 Art Shell 1989-94, 2006 Hue Jackson 2011	
Philadelphia Eagles	Ray Rhodes 1995-98	
Pittsburgh Steelers	Mike Tomlin 2007-present	
San Francisco 49ers	Mike Singletary 2009-10	
Seattle Seahawks	Tom Flores 1992-94	Pete Carroll 2009-
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	Tony Dungy 1996-01 Raheem Morris 2009-11 Lovie Smith 2014-15	
Tennessee Titans	None	
Washington Redskins	None	

8. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Offensive Coordinators – 2009-10 vs. 2018-19

We also examined the pipeline feeding head coaching positions. Most often, the previous position of a newly-hired head coach is NFL offensive coordinator, followed by defensive coordinator. The figures below show all the NFL offensive coordinators broken down by race and ethnicity in both percentage and total number in the 2009-10 and 2018-19 seasons. In the 2009 season there were three offensive coordinators of color (all African American) and 29 white offensive coordinators. At the start of the 2018 season, there was one offensive coordinator of color (African American) and there were 31 white offensive coordinators.

Figure 8a. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL offensive coordinators
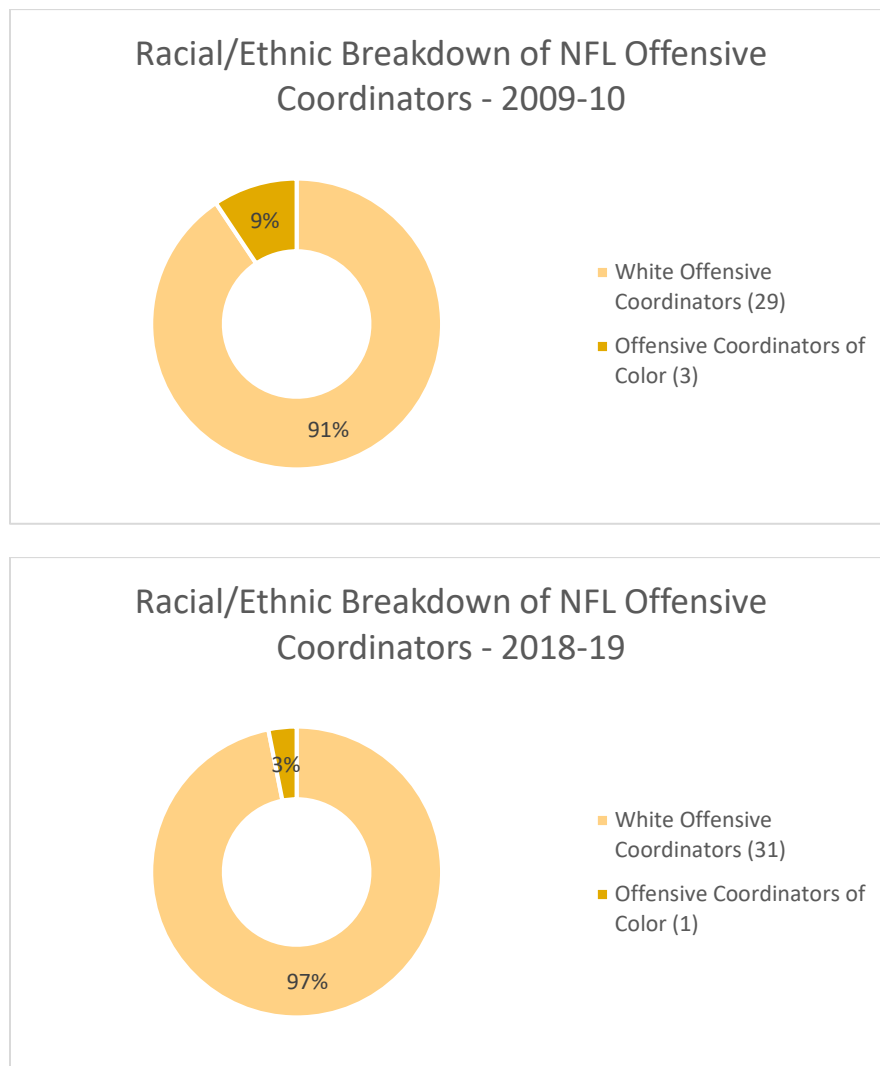*(August 2009 vs. August 2018):*

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Offensive Coordinators - 2009-10

9%
91%

- White Offensive Coordinators (29)
- Offensive Coordinators of Color (3)

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Offensive Coordinators - 2018-19

3%
97%

- White Offensive Coordinators (31)
- Offensive Coordinators of Color (1)

Figure 8b. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL offensive coordinators (August 2009 through August 2018):

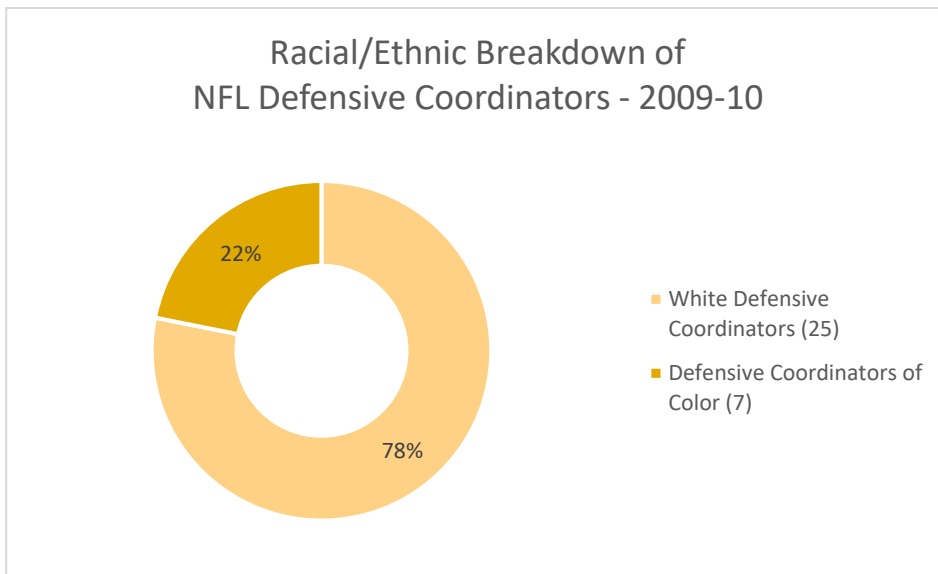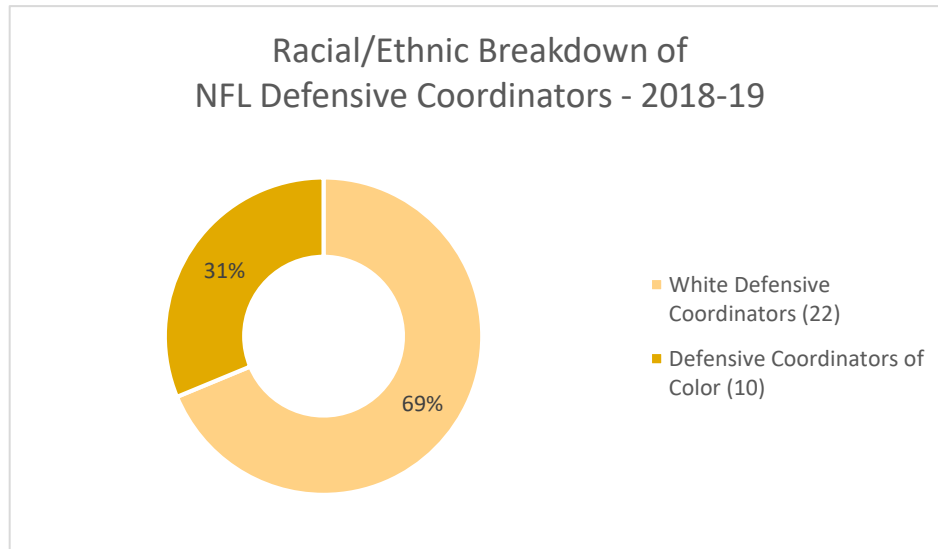| Offensive Coordinator	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
White Offensive Coordinators	29	28	30	31	29	29	28	28	28	31
Offensive Coordinators of Color	3	4	2	1	3	3	4	4	4	1

9. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL Defensive Coordinators – 2009-10 vs. 2018-19

These figures show NFL defensive coordinators broken down by race and ethnicity in both percentage and total number. Compared to 2009, there were three more coaches of color in defensive coordinator positions in 2018.

Figure 9a. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL defensive coordinators (August 2009 vs. August 2018):
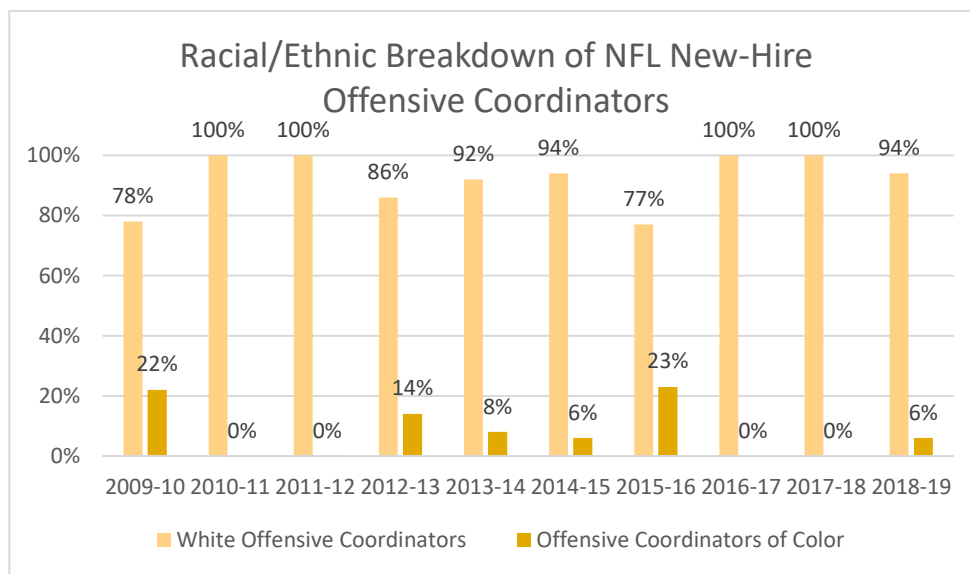

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of
NFL Defensive Coordinators - 2018-19

- White Defensive Coordinators (22)
- Defensive Coordinators of Color (10)

31%
69%

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of
NFL Defensive Coordinators - 2009-10

- White Defensive Coordinators (25)
- Defensive Coordinators of Color (7)

22%
78%

Figure 9b. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL defensive coordinators (August 2009 through August 2018):

Defensive Coordinator	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
White Defensive Coordinators	25	24	25	26	25	23	23	23	22	22
Defensive Coordinators of Color	7	8	7	6	7	9	9	9	10	10

10. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL New-Hire Offensive and Defensive Coordinators

These figures reflect the newly hired offensive coordinators per season broken down by race and ethnicity. For each season with coaching changes, the percentages reflect the number who were white and who were coaches of color. At least 77% of offensive coordinators hired each season were white.

Figure 10a. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL new-hire offensive coordinators (August 2009 through August 2018):

In comparison, coaches of color have had more opportunities as defensive coordinators and the new hire gap between white defensive coordinators and defensive coordinators of color is far less. Coaches of color have been hired for 40% or more of the defensive coordinator opportunities in five of the ten years that we have studied.

Figure 10b. Racial/ethnic breakdown of NFL new-hire defensive coordinators (August 2009 through August 2018):

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL New-Hire Defensive Coordinators
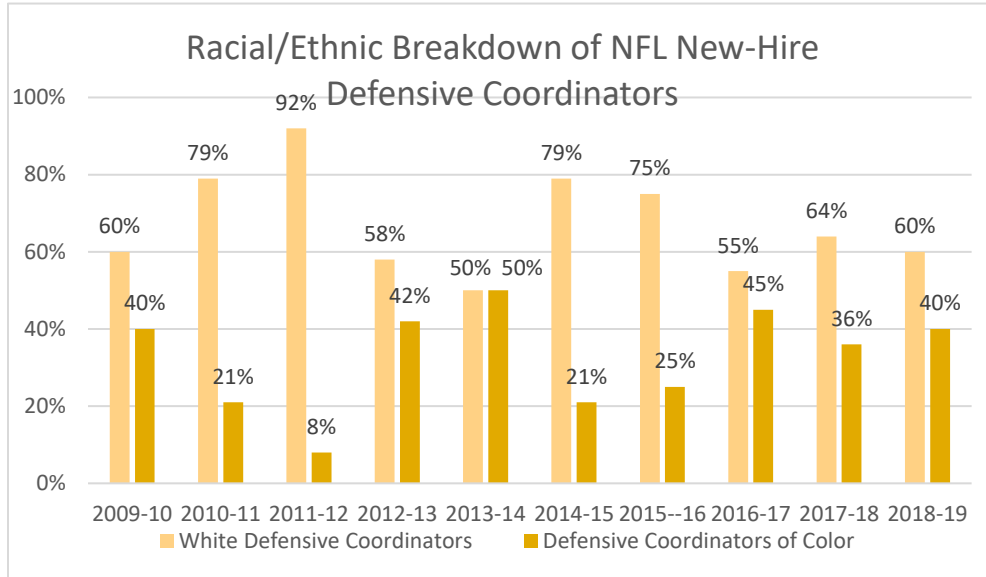
11. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NFL New-Hire Offensive and Defensive Coordinators by Age

The figures shown below illustrate the average age of new hires at offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator positions. Overall, offensive coordinators of color and white offensive coordinators are hired at approximately the same average age. Defensive coordinators are hired at older ages on average than head coaches and offensive coordinators.

Figure 11a. Hiring age of new-hire offensive coordinators (August 2009 through August 2018):

Hiring Age of New-Hire Offensive Coordinators				
Offensive Coordinator	Average Age	**OC Under 40**	Frequency	Percent
White OC	45	White OC	43	93
OC of Color	45	OC of Color	3	7
Total Average Age	**45**	**Total**	**46**	**100**

Figure 11b. Hiring age of new-hire defensive coordinators (August 2009 through August 2018):

| Hiring Age of New-Hire Defensive Coordinators				
Defensive Coordinator	Average Age	**DC Under 40**	Frequency	Percent
White DC	51	White DC	9	69
DC of Color	48	DC of Color	4	31
Total Average Age	**50**	**Total**	**13**	**100**

*Numbers are rounded.

12. Changes in NFL Offensive Coordinators of Color

Since the start of the 2009-10 season, there have been 13 coaches of color who left offensive coordinator positions and ten coaches of color hired as offensive coordinators.

This figure represents the offensive coordinators of color each year. The lighter shade (bottom) represents the number of offensive coordinators of color who left that year. The darker shade (top) is the number of hired offensive coordinators of color that year.

Figure 12. Changes in NFL offensive coordinators of color (August 2009 through August 2018):
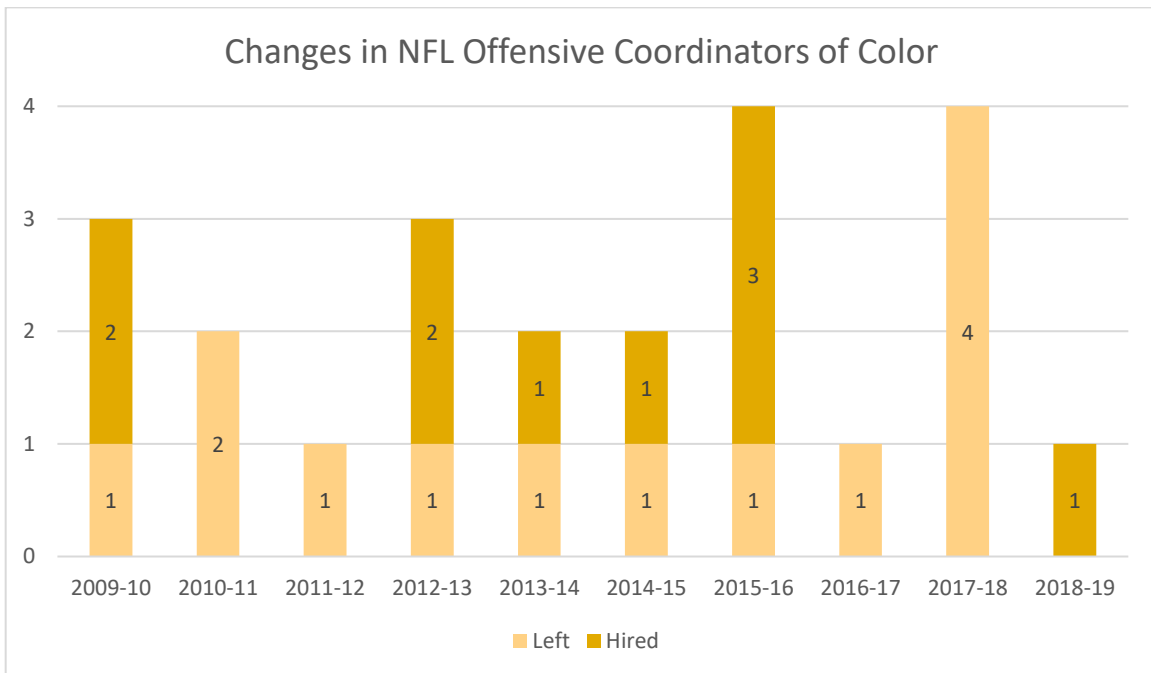
13. Changes in NFL Defensive Coordinators of Color

The defensive side shows a different trend: 34 coaches of color have left defensive coordinator positions, and 37 new defensive coordinators of color have been hired since the start of the 2009-10 season. The chart below displays the changes in defensive coordinators of color each year. The lighter shade (bottom) represents the number of defensive coordinators of color who left that year. The darker shade (top) represents the number of hired defensive coordinators of color that year.

Figure 13. Changes in NFL defensive coordinators of color (August 2009 through August 2018):

Changes in NFL Defensive Coordinators of Color
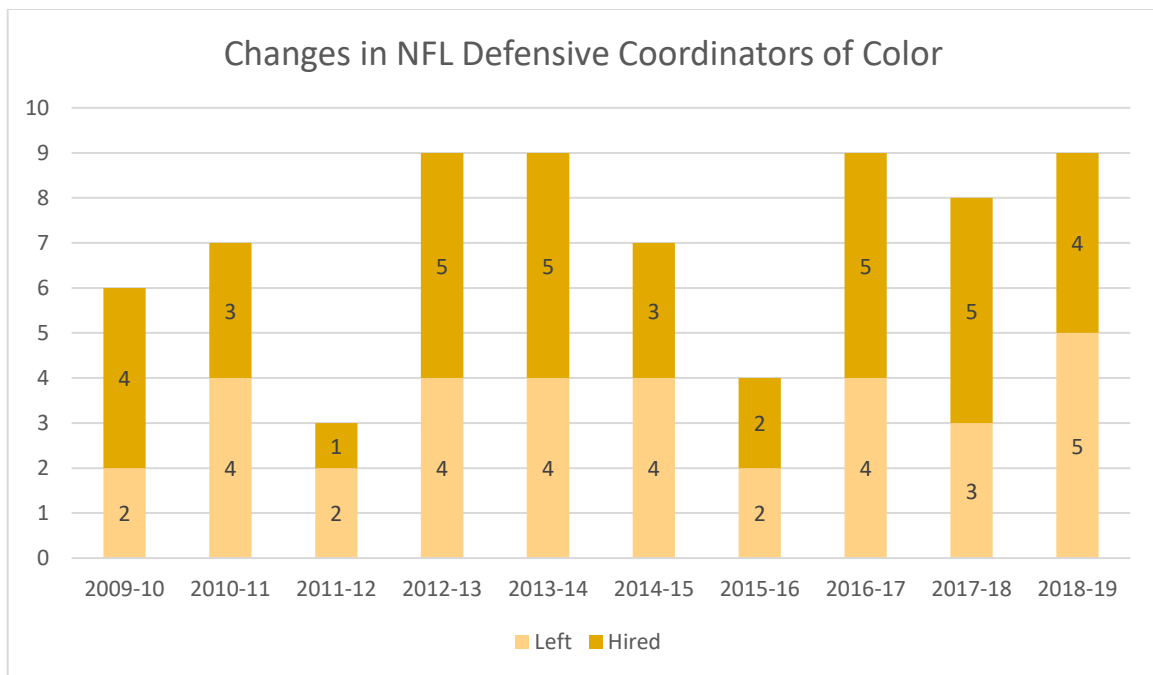
14. Next Positions for Outgoing NFL Head Coaches

Where do head coaches land after leaving their job? It is important to understand how or whether they re-enter the applicant pool and their potential for a second chance at being a head coach.

The next coaching positions for outgoing head coaches of color were less varied compared to outgoing white head coaches. Outgoing head coaches of color most often became NFL defensive coordinators (36%). Outgoing white head coaches most often became NFL defensive coordinators (22%), NFL offensive coordinators (21%), or head coaches of other NFL clubs (14%). Exiting white head coaches were hired for other NFL head coaching positions at twice the rate of coaches of color (14.3% vs. 7.1%). They also went on to offensive coordinator positions in the NFL at nearly three times the rate of coaches of color (20.6% vs. 7.1%).

The scope of our current analysis was limited to the immediate subsequent coaching positions obtained after being fired from a head coaching position. In the last ten years, one outgoing head coach of color has been hired immediately to another head coaching position, compared to nine white head coaches. Also, we acknowledge that some coaches enter or reenter broadcasting careers.

Coaches with an offensive background are more likely to obtain head coaching positions than coaches with a defensive background, and coaches of color are disproportionately defensive coaches.

Figure 14. Racial breakdown of next positions for outgoing NFL head coaches (August 2009 through August 2018):

Next Position for Outgoing Head Coaches of Color		
	Frequency	Percent
NFL HC	1	7.1
NCAA HC	1	7.1
NFL OC	1	7.1
NFL DC	5	35.7
NFL Asst. HC	2	14.3
Special Clubs	1	7.1
Special Adv.	2	14.3
DB Coach	1	7.1
Total	**14**	**100.0**

Next Position for Outgoing White Head Coaches		
	Frequency	Percent
None	7	11.1
NFL HC	9	14.3
NCAA HC	2	3.2
NFL OC	13	20.6
NFL DC	14	22.2
NCAA DC	1	1.6
NFL Asst. HC	6	9.5
QB Coach	1	1.6
Special	1	1.6
Canada HC	6	9.5
TE Coach	1	1.6
DB Coach	2	3.2
Total	**63**	**100.0**

Selected Prior Research in this Area

With all of the attention that African American athletic achievements have drawn, one could argue that sport has been as central to African American progress as any institution or organization. However, the inverse could also be said—that sport impedes African American progress (Hoberman, 1997; Powell, 2007). Harry Edwards (1997) wrote that the first principle of the sociology of sport is: "Sport inevitably recapitulates the character, structure, and dynamics of human and institutional relationships within and between societies and ideological values and sentiments that rationalize and justify those relationships" (p. 1007). Sport is a reflection and a mechanism in which power operates, reinforcing inequality and difference. Studies of the disproportionate numbers of African American coaches in football (at the collegiate and professional levels) reveal a consistent pattern of underrepresentation, and many draw conclusions about how power operates in sports.

Early on, research showed unequivocally that there was a representation problem: African Americans weren't being given opportunities. In 1980, Jomills Braddock conducted a study on behalf of the NFL Players Association (NFLPA) and found that African Americans suffered discrimination, preventing proportional opportunities as assistant and head coaches. Race and queuing (coaching experience) were significant in why African Americans were disproportionately underrepresented as head coaches, and race and ethnicity, playing position, and sport accomplishments were significant in their not being selected as assistant coaches. Braddock also found that, in the proverbial "perfect world" with no racial discrimination or disadvantage, African Americans would have been appointed assistant coach at four times the actual rate, and head coach at ten times the actual rate. Braddock's research married institutional practices, employment selection, and discrimination and serves as one of the foundational studies in this area.

The Rooney Rule was birthed as a result of research and action by the Fritz Pollard Alliance.[4] Janice Madden (2002) illustrated that African American coaches were the last hired and first fired, given inferior opportunities, and held to higher standards. African American head coaches averaged 1.1 more wins per season, led their clubs to the playoffs 67% of the time compared to 39% of the time for white coaches, averaged 2.7 more wins in their first season, and, in their final seasons, terminated African American coaches averaged 1.3 more wins than white coaches who were also terminated.

Madden's initial research sparked the field, and a swell of studies emerged offering various economic and labor market analyses and explanations of the institutional discrimination that Braddock highlighted. Barry Bozeman and Daniel Fay (2013) delved deeper into the pipeline problem - referring to the issue as a "clogged" pipeline - and returned to Braddock's question about whether the NFL's African American coach hiring record was normal or indicated racial bias. Bozeman and Fay found bias.

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[4] The Fritz Pollard alliance is a group promoting the hiring of coaches of color throughout the NFL, composed primarily of current and former NFL players and staff. It is named after the NFL's first African American coach.

African-Americans are more likely than whites to play positions such as running back and wide receiver and, as a direct consequence, are more likely to coach these positions than others (such as linebacker or quarterback). These initial assistant coach positions, in turn, may give African-Americans a less select route to being a coordinator, and this lesser likelihood of achieving the coordinator position reduces their likelihood of obtaining a head coaching position (2013, pp.2-3).

Race and ethnicity and a coach's former position matters. Bozeman and Fay's study determined that the history of discrimination played a continuing role in who becomes a coach and their stratified trajectories (by race and ethnicity, position, and expertise). African American players are steered into particular positions at early ages because of their real and perceived/stereotypical characteristics, and this sets them on a trajectory that is replicated, perhaps unconsciously, and demonstrably disadvantages African American coaching candidates. Our findings confirm what has been reported earlier—that the most common path to head coach is through the offensive coordinator position—and thus, the stacking of African Americans into skilled offensive positions other than quarterback leads to exclusion from the normal pathway. Even when an African American makes it as a collegiate or professional quarterback, they face the historic and persistent stereotyping that that they are not "real" quarterbacks/pocket passers—they are running backs with strong arms.

Christopher I. Rider and colleagues (2016) found that "performance-reward bias" operates in the career utility hierarchy. As they explain:

> [performance-reward bias] is a specific within-job mechanism that generates differential returns to position for equivalent performance in the same position...performance-reward bias implies that even when coaches of color are allocated to relatively promising positions they are less likely to continue ascending the corporate hierarchy as white, equivalently-performing position-holders (pp. 2, 9).

This bias is prevalent in lower level positions (e.g. position coaches), where coaches garner different levels of rewards. Also, based on the position they coach, the centrality of the position, and the racial makeup of their position players, performance-reward bias suppresses the rate at which coaches of color—relative to equally-performing whites—are promoted to positions considered prerequisite for organizational leadership. Findings from this study and parallel recent empirical research studies suggest that unconscious bias and race-based stereotypes operate in football hiring (Siler, 2018).[5] Regardless of their performance, experience, or coaching background, white position coaches and assistants are more than twice as likely to be promoted to coordinator than their African American counterparts. Our data on the age of head coaches and offensive and defensive coordinators gives some additional perspective on this.

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[5] As explained by Kay et al. (2009), NFL leadership candidates of color "will have to do more than simply overcome the obstacles inherent in how the current social system is structured; they will also have to alter how people think it should be structured (p. 421-22)."

Unconscious bias and aversive racism affect occupational mobility (see Bridgeman, 2008; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006) through processes and biases that are "subtle and operate largely by default" (Wang, 2006, p.16). For example, company decision-makers (e.g. general managers of NFL clubs) are prone to categorize and stereotype with respect to a candidate's qualifications for a specific opportunity without any intent or conscious awareness of their racial bias (Bridgeman, 2008; Collins, 2007).[6] Thus, a frequently offered solution is the classic contact hypothesis (also known as intergroup contact theory), the idea that white decision-makers need to encounter, interact with, and get to know coaches of color, which will ultimately (and inevitably) lead to less bias and non-discriminatory hiring.[7]

Qualifications

In an ideal world, we would have extensive, robust data, and we could run tests of statistical significance to say definitively whether or not change has occurred. However, we do not have ample data size of total coaches and coaches of color for inferential statistics related to race and ethnicity in NFL coach hiring. Thus, we look at raw numbers and percentages to discern patterns and trends. There is also a problem with lumping all coaches of color together. Our analysis focused largely on African American coaches. The numbers and playing experiences of other coaches of color are not as substantial and their unique experiences may better be evaluated separately.

Overall, we must be cautious with some of our findings, because we are looking at outcomes, which obscure the messiness and intricacies that operate in decision-making on the employee and employer sides. For example, when looking at factors like "next position" to measure pathways and differences in opportunities, it is easy to simply report a coach's next job, because we can see the job that they accepted. However, this does not tell us all of the opportunities the coach may have had compared to other coaches and why they accepted a particular position. Beginning with Madden's research, scholars have studied and found that there is a qualitative and quantitative difference between African Americans and whites in the coaching opportunities/offers received, so it is reasonable to expect that the number and quality of football programs (and probably pay rate) are also different between racial/ethnic groups. This information is unknown, and it would be extremely difficult to get verifiable data on all offers made because it is not public information, and offers can range in formality and informality. Therefore, our pathway findings, which implicitly assume that all coach prospects took the "best" next opportunity, may or may not be true or measurable and may or may not be predictive or important to key outcomes. Did the coach get the head coaching job

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[6] Art Rooney II, president of the Pittsburgh Steelers, offered the following narrative in February 2019: "We have to judge our progress on the results. It's like looking at your team. You are what your record says you are. I'm not going to sit here and accuse anyone of racism, but the facts are what they are. We have to look at the opportunities that were given to minorities this latest round and see what can be done about it."

[7] This is a flawed solution, considering the recent spate of racial strife and racist climate; if the contact hypothesis were valid, we should be experiencing a much higher level of racial harmony.

because they accepted an offensive coordinator position previously, because of high quality performance, network connections, or for some other reason?

Discussion

Many ask the basic question, "Is this progress?" We prefer the question, "What is needed for sustainable, long-term change?" An alternative way to think about the process is to focus on the pipeline. In almost every case, the pool of coaching candidates is composed of former players, so if the pool of those hired is predominantly white, one might take this outcome as a leading indicator that something is wrong. We need to understand how former players become coaches and then head coaches, whether the process is fair, and if a lack of fairness leads to disparate outcomes. What happens to coaches who don't fit the "normal" head coach profile, with normal being empirically defined as white, male, offensive coordinators?

To this end, we emphasize the need for monitoring change and setting a plan for transformation: (1) what is being done to diversify coaching positions, and is it achieving its stated objectives; and (2) what is needed to bring about sustainable positive change at the institutional (organizational practices) and interactional levels (individual ideas and attitudes and relationships)? Future research should examine discrimination from a number of angles beyond proportionalities and across different sports in order to fully consider the culture of discrimination in American sport. For example, researchers may consider types of discrimination that occur in football coach hiring and in other sport industries, including the process of selecting interview candidates. In the absence of consecutive head coaches of color in the history of any NFL club, we ask, are there attempts to retain and hire additional coaches of color? Are African American coaches as a whole given a single chance by an organization, confirming the perceptions held by African Americans that one member's individual success or failure impacts the whole group?

We should also investigate the role of networks and mentorship in hiring. Shropshire (1996) discussed the social and private nature of hiring in sport, pointing out the prevalence of an "ol' boys network" and providing examples of owners hiring their former college teammates and players. Networks are a hidden aspect and harder to legislate and change. Still, it raises questions for coaches of color. Is it less advantageous for a coach of color to be mentored and hired by an African American head coach? And, what is the role of coaching networks, beyond coaching style and reputations? Another direction to explore, outside of football, is other sports where many head coaches and administrators differ in race and ethnicity or gender from their players, such as in women's sports. We could examine pay as another measure of unequal opportunities and persistent discrimination. In other industries, such as nursing, pay gaps are at least partially explained by gender and racial job segregation (Reskin, et al., 1999). Nursing units that are all female earn less on average when compared to units that have some males, and units with a non-white majority also earn less.

There is a strong argument that the process is most important – a process that leads to fair outcomes and promotes hiring to win, a priority that drives club owners, college presidents, and athletic directors. Determinations of who is "qualified" and head coach qualification criteria are woven into this issue and need to counter the trite explanation that blames coaches of color for their underrepresentation: "The process is fair, but there are not enough people of color in the 'pipeline' to become head coaches. There simply aren't coaches of color because they are not prepared, qualified, or in sufficient supply."

A deeper dive into diversity in sports in general should be considered in order to unpack the complex barriers to inclusion. In the initial fight for diversity in hiring, proportionality may be an easy and obvious assertion, but not for inclusion. Disaggregating coaches of color can lead us to new theories and insights. For example, proportionality (the percentage of a racial/ethnic group playing football compared to the percentage of that racial/ethnic group in coaching positions), has been central to disparity research in coaching, but evaluating proportionality alone might suggest that there are/have been too many Latino American coaches and there is no need for Native American and Asian and Pacific Islander coaches. Given the underrepresentation of these groups in the NFL and the actual small numbers of coaches from these groups, the goal of increasing diversity is not advanced if we conclude that they are somehow overrepresented in coaching based simply on proportional assessments.

Proportions certainly provide some information about diversity. But how many coaches of color should the NFL, or any league, have on board in a given year? How do we know what is fair? And diversity is only a one-dimensional picture. How do we push for inclusion beyond disproportionality – opportunities for women, Natives and Pacific Islanders, Latinos and Asians? Another model could be to mirror national demographics, but this too is a flawed approach. Sport is not alone in this quandary of setting the ideal target. In order to fully assess these complexities, additional measures should be explored that capture the process, not just the product of inclusive hiring.

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