

# NFL Field Study Best Practices

**ASU** Global Sport  
Institute  
Arizona State University

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The Global Sport Institute examined hiring and firing trends for NFL head coaches, offensive coordinators, and defensive coordinators from the 2002-03 through the 2019-20 football seasons to see the impact, if any, of the Rooney Rule. The study included statistics on individual coach attributes such as years of experience as a player, years of experience as a coach, and age when hired and/or fired.

In the 2002-03 season and the inception of the Rooney Rule, **80%** of NFL head coaches were White, while **20%** were coaches of Color. In the 2019-20 season, that percentage **remained unchanged.**

## The Rooney Rule

Adopted in 2003, the Rooney Rule is an NFL policy requiring every team with a head coaching vacancy to interview one or more diverse candidates. In 2009, the Rooney Rule was expanded to include general manager jobs and equivalent front office positions. The Rooney Rule is named after the late former Pittsburgh Steelers owner and chairman of the league's diversity committee, Dan Rooney. (source: nflcommunications.com)

As of the 2020-21 season, there are

**10 teams**  
that have **never** hired a permanent  
**coach of Color** in the modern NFL era.

A thorough analysis of the data shows that the Rooney Rule has not created a consistent increase in the number of annual hires for head coaches of Color. They continue to comprise a small percentage of the total head coaches in the NFL as compared to White head coaches, even as the players themselves are predominantly African American.

# The Takeaways

Beyond the Rooney Rule and all else that individual NFL franchises may have in place to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, we recommend that clubs incorporate the following six best practices into their hiring and decision-making process if they have not already done so.

- 1** Do not let age serve as a deterrent to placing a person of Color in your candidate pool or actually hiring them.
- 2** College head coaching experience should be more of a plus for diverse coaches than it has been in recent years.
- 3** Place equal weight on past NFL playing experience for both White coaches and coaches of Color.
- 4** Give greater consideration to giving coaches of Color a “second chance” than your instincts may tell you to.
- 5** Be cognizant if you are one of the teams to have never hired a head coach of Color.
- 6** Do not rely solely on the “usual sources” to develop your candidate pool.

As part of the **Sports Equity Research Project** we will work to expand this list and develop new lists covering other sports.

## Why This Matters

It's easy for organizations – whether they are an NFL team, a fortune 500 company or a small business – to fall into old habits of recruiting and hiring people who look like them or who are familiar to them through social circles and business networks. Breaking away from these routines can help expand the diversity within your organization while bringing new insights and perspectives to the table.

## For more information:

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