

Jesse Garcia

Prof. Hallote

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Senior Project

The topic that I chose to write this paper on is racism in football, specifically, that although race or ethnicity shouldn't prevent anyone from playing or coaching the game that they love. Sadly it does interfere. My research has opened my eyes and made me realize that there is still a lot of racism in the sport today. It still is difficult for minority players and coaches to advance in the game of football. This can be seen through the work of these 5 scholars who have written about the topic.

The first article I wrote about is *Black Coaches Trying to Make It in a White-Dominated Industry: College Football and the Racial Divide* by Timothy Mirobito. The history of football is very unique and intriguing because of all the things the sport had to overcome to be what it is today. The college level has been through many ups and downs through its time especially when it deals with the color of someone's skin. They broke through the color barrier for athletes and coaches but African American coaches are having a little more trouble finding jobs than whites. *"Black Coaches Trying to Make It in a White-Dominated Industry: College Football and the Racial Divide"*¹ by Timothy Mirobito was very helpful to me to understand the hardships that black coaches go through to get into coaching at the college or pro level. Problems that people still talk about to this day. Coaching in college or the NFL

¹ Mirobito, Timothy and Anderson, D. " Cultural Diversity on Campus" 61-66

was and still is no easy task. The job is brutal because during the season, there are sixteen to eighteen hour workdays and nonstop game planning. The worst part of the coaching job is that your job is never really safe, although it may be if you and your program keep constantly winning. Once a coach starts to lose, people begin to talk and the coach ends up on the hot ²³seat. Even if one wins for five seasons straight, he can get fired after two losing seasons because colleges and pro teams do not accept loss. It is unacceptable to the owners because they make their money by fans going to their games, buying products, and season tickets. However, if you are a losing program or pro team, fans will stop coming to games, which will result in cheaper ticket prices and less money for the owners.

After reading this article, I had newfound respect for coaches and all that they go through in their careers. There is a story in the article about a man named Charlie who struggled to get through the coaching levels. He took his application and went to State University to try to become the quarterback coach, which is the position Charlie played in high school. He eventually got the position after working sixteen to eighteen hour shifts. Shortly after he got the job, he was moved to running backs coach, which was a position Charlie never played before. Consequently, he had to work two times as hard because he didn't know the fundamentals or drills to teach the his players as he had no experience as a running back. Meanwhile he knew everything about being a quarterback and would have been able to greatly help the

² Mirabito, Timothy and Anderson, D. (1993). Cultural diversity on campus: A look at intercollegiate football coaches. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 17(1), 61-66.

kids. Having played as a quarterback and eventually coaching the quarterbacks is almost a sure way in to become the offensive coordinator, which was Charlie's main goal.

The offensive coordinator is the person on the team who controls the whole offense. They call which play to run, which side to run it on, and actually have constant communication with the quarterback at all times through a microphone inside the quarterback's helmet. This was Charlie's goal because once one becomes an offensive or defensive coordinator at those levels, one basically can make it at any school. Once a coach of a winning team is constantly seen, it becomes clear that the win is a direct result of that coach's expertise.

Sadly, Charlie became very discouraged by a statistic in the article. It stated that out of two hundred and sixty six coordinator positions, only thirty were black and held coordinator positions. Charlie never ended up getting to the coordinator level and got stuck just coaching the running backs. Just the stereotype alone that African Americans cannot really get coaching jobs is unfair because that scares many people out of even trying and giving up on their dream. This is an obstacle they should not have to face because it's already like they have a glass ceiling above them. Coaching in college or the pros is very political. It's all about who you know and that is what makes it so hard to work your way up. Now that African Americans already seem to have a glass ceiling above them, it almost makes it impossible.

There was already a questionable coaching fire in the NFL just this year. A man named Steven Wilks was named the coach for the season that just passed and had a very underwhelming year but also had a very poor roster of players compared to a lot of other teams. He was fired right after the season just after one year, which is almost unheard of especially with a roster that they had. It was the talk on Sports Center for quite some time and had the league and fans talking. Coaching is already challenging so there really shouldn't be any more obstacles than there already are. I really hope we can shatter this glass ceiling above African American coaches very soon so everyone can equally have a fair shot at their dream job.

The next article I read was "*Changing the Culture: Football*" by Ricky Santo. Football is more than just a sport, for many it's a job and it's a business. Racism should not be supported in any work place under any circumstances yet we find cases of racism quite often still. Football did not break the racism barrier to just allow racism back in its business at a later date. In the article "*Changing the Culture: Football*"⁴ CSU coach Ricky Santo says that racism still is a part of football and to truly see it and understand it we must live it and understand where the victims are coming from. Santo talked about it in football terms. He stated that football is the ultimate team sport and if just one single player messes up the whole team messes up. This is because each player feeds and relies off another. If one player is not in his spot then another player has to leave his position to cover his teammates and then someone has to cover his position and so forth meaning that a spot will always be open. He is

⁴ Santo, Ricky, "Changing the Culture," *Journal of Adult Education* 44, no. 2. 2015, 21

stating that a spot for racism has opened because we haven't had each other's backs and haven't been playing as a team. We have left spots open for racism to creep its way back in and it must be stopped because the job aspect of football and coaching is hard enough. People don't spend their lives and countless hours ⁵watching film on other teams or other players just to experience a road block in their way to their dream. I agree with what Ricky Santo is saying in how we have to acknowledge the sociocultural conscious in the world today. Meaning to understand the way people think and behave which their race or ethnicity, social class, and language influence. This is a great idea because how else are you supposed to understand where someone is coming from or what he or she are dealing with if you can't comprehend the situation. Obviously some situations are tough to comprehend because of circumstances you cannot change such as race or ethnicity but that's when as a coach you need to sit down with your peers or players and talk to them and put yourself in their shoes and then look at the situation through a different lens. Santo proposed a plan and the proposed plan consisted of an educational aspect then a neighboring aspect. The educational aspect was a trained professional comes in for a four-week period and teaches the coaches and players about racism. They watch slide shows take quizzes and do fun events to come together as a group and form as Santo would say the "ultimate team." After the four-week period with the professional they will now move into the neighboring aspect which consists of your local pastor coming to practices and talks to the players. This is another four-week period of time that the coaches and players go through to continue to bond as a

⁵ Santo, Ricky " Changing the Culture," 21.

team and a unit. Another thing neighboring helps with is in the locker room. This is when players are with each other the most without coaches and just talking to each other. This is where true bonding comes in. I can speak about this personally because I also played high school football and college football and I can honestly say this is where I made most of my lifelong friends and bonded with my teammates the most. Football really helped me make friends in high school and college because as the season goes on you grow closer and closer with your teammates. Football teaches you at the end of the day it doesn't matter what race/ethnicity you are or what language you speak or where you rank in the social class because at the end of the day those are your brothers. You are taught in football that no matter what the circumstances are you have to protect your brothers till the end and I can honestly say being on football teams I considered them my second family and I would do anything for my teammates. That's is Ricky Santo's whole point that if you form a great bond and make lifelong friends you completely forget about racism and don't see everybody by the color of their skin or the language they speak you see them all as your brothers.

The third article I read and talked about was "*The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports*" by Charles H. Martin.⁶ Racism in college sports was everywhere at the time. No team in the south or the Midwest would play against another team with an African American on it, which is disgraceful. Many games had to be canceled or many African Americans had to be benched for that game because the coaches feared for that player's safety. When you really think about it this really is unfair

⁶ Martin, Charles. 2002. "The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports, 1890-1960". *Indiana Magazine of History*, June.

because an African American is a person too but was treated like outcasts and different. African Americans in college and in life in general had to fight and fight to even get a chance to play on college teams even though their athletic skill was more than qualified to play college sports. An example of racism in college sports in the article there is a huge rivalry game in Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. It is Wabash verse their archrival Depauw college. Before the game started Depauw players, officials, and religious leaders argued about the presence of one African American player named Samuel S. Gordon on the Wabash squad. Depauw threatened to leave the field and take their ⁷players home because they will not play against an African American. An hour later they officially decide that Samuel is allowed to play but even having won the argument the Wabash coach benched Samuel for this game because they feared for his safety. This was happening everywhere in southern colleges because teams really refused to play against African Americans. Imagine how hard it must've been for African Americans at that time to play college sports when even when they are allowed to play their coach has to hold them out because it is actually too dangerous for them to get on the field because he thinks the other team is going through dirty shots at the player. It's so sad to think that this is once what most of the United States was. At the end of the 1904 season the conflicts between both of these schools came up again but not about Samuel Gordon but about another African American named William Cantrell and his ability to play in the game between the two schools. Tempers flared and tensions grew so high that they actually had to cancel the game between the two

⁷ Martin, Charles. "The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports" 86

schools because officials thought that this game would grow to violent. It really bothers me personally that these kids especially William were not allowed to play this game because people were so in their own way that they would resolve to violence to stop one player from playing in a college football game. It really is a trickle down effect for African Americans in college because you come into school to play college sports and right off the bat no one wants you there or likes you. Then your fellow teammates and classmates see how people outside the school treat you as a person and treat you the exact same way. Then when you have to forfeit games because of the threat of violence your teammates hate you even more because they lose out of stats and NFL coaches coming to scout. There are so many obstacles in place for African Americans to succeed in college sports at this time and it is amazing to me how they didn't give up. I now realize how strong and independent African Americans were to keep being persistent and never giving up to achieve their dream and it really is inspiring.

Another article I read was *From Desegregation to Integration: Race, Football, and "Dixie" at the University of Florida*⁸ by Derrick White. College sports were in a very good place when it comes to racism. College teams were finally allowing African Americans to play on their teams and they were thriving. Many of them were Heisman winners and leading their teams to many wins and many bowl games. It was great to see because it finally seemed as if racism was dying down and college sports was finally going to be integrated between Whites and African

⁸ E. White, Derrick. (2010). *From Desegregation to Integration: Race, Football, and "Dixie" at the University of Florida*. The Florida Historical Quarterly. 88. 469-496. 10.2307/29765122.

Americans and everything was finally going to work out. A major setback occurred in 1962. It was the end of the season and one of the biggest bowls in college history called the Gator Bowl was being held and teams needed to be selected. At this time the Gator bowl was being watched on a national scale and basically was the championship of college sports. The Penn State lions were one of teams selected into the Gator Bowl. As the committee looked for others they had an agenda. Duke who had an 8-2 record withdrew from the Gator Bowl because Duke ⁹knew they wanted Florida in it anyway. Oregon State how had the Heisman winner Terry Baker should have been in the Gator Bowl against Penn State but the Gator Bowl committee had other plans. They decided to elect University of Florida to play in the Gator Bowl even though they had a worse record than Duke and Oregon State with a record of 6-4. The Gator Bowl committee decided that this was best because they thought this game would get the most national attention because if they elected Oregon State into the Bowl no one from the South would end up watching the game. The committee thought this because they looked into how many southerners voted for Terry Baker to win the Heisman and the number was very low meaning they had no interest in watching him. So they decided to go with Penn State verse Florida that to them was a great headline because it was right in the middle of the Integration period and they decided to promote the headline of this game as the North verse the South. The committee even decided to play the game on the anniversary of the civil war. This got so much national attention that the game sold out in a matter of days because everyone was dying to go see it. As you could've guessed tensions at the

⁹ White, Derrick. *"From Desegregation to Integration"* 469-496

game grew out of control. Students started mobs and chanting, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate" and many other racial slurs such as ones like that. This caused police officers to use tear gas and rubber bullets to deter kids from riots. This one game set back racism so far in its time of integration because the tensions ran very high again. The athletes and coaches took on this game as if they were fighting for the north and the south. The university of Florida actually took this game on as if they were the south and were fighting for victory, as did Penn state as the north. Integration was finally happening in college sports but this game made many civil rights movement leaders realize how to help end racism on college campuses. They realized that it was not just one part of a school that could be integrated. Civil rights leaders broke it down into three groups and those groups were students, teachers or staff, and the higher ups like deans and presidents. They discovered that they could not end racism unless all three of these groups came together in agreement and even if one didn't agree it would not work. So as much as the Gator Bowl committee set back integration at the time they also helped civil rights leaders develop a way to spread peace throughout the college campuses around the country and finally helped to start to put an end to racism on college campuses and in college sports.

The last article I talked about was "*Old and New Forms of Racial Bias in Mediated Sports Commentary*"¹⁰ by Anthony Schimdt and Kevin Coe. Racism is still involved in the NFL in many different ways. One way that it still affects players and

¹⁰ Schmidt, Anthony, and Kevin Coe. "Old and New Forms of Racial Bias in Mediated Sports Commentary: The Case of the National Football League Draft." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 58, no. 4 (2014): 655-70. 2014.

viewers is in the media. The media has a very powerful stance on players and viewers and basically determines how people think about one another because most people take their advice instead of just watching the game and coming up with their own opinion. For example most people will watch sports center after all the games on Sunday without watching the actual game and listen to the person on sport center covering the game and take his opinion and use it as his own. 79% of television announcers are white while only 7% of television announcers are African American.¹¹

In today's world that is something you barely see anymore because most jobs are very well integrated and are fair to everyone no matter ethnicity, color, or race. I'm not saying the media industry is racist but I do believe that there should be a more equal balance of jobs between everyone. In the article it states that stereotypically most white announcers view players differently than say African Americans announcers would see them. An example in the article is that most white tv announcers view African American quarterbacks as violent, fast, and lacking the mental side of the game of football, while they consider white quarterbacks smarter and know the game of football more. That example has been used and said around the NFL for a while now. I can't tell you how many NFL drafts I've watched when an African American quarterback was being interviewed for the draft or being talked about and the announcers would debate if he had the mental side of the game down but wasn't worried about their athletic ability at all.

¹¹ Schmidt and Coe. "Old and New Forms of Racial Bias" 655-700

The other side of it is the TV announcers at the NFL draft would talk about white quarterbacks and not be worried at all about their mental side of the game but are worried about their athletic ability. As the media you shouldn't base the skill of a player by the color of their skin but by the film that they have produced while playing. Analysts study hours and hours of film on these players and break down every single play they have in college and take it very seriously. So announcers and analysts should just base their predictions on their skill just on the tape. Reading this article really opened my eyes to TV announcers and Sportscenter because I never realized their opinions on things and the patterns they use.

Racism is in every single bit of football from the old days back in the 1800s and even now in the present. Even in this NFL draft coming up on Thursday analysts have a quarterback out of Buffalo going very late in this years draft because they worry about the mental side of his game. The physical side of his game is outstanding to watch. He has one of the stronger arms out of the other aspects and can really run the ball too while some of the other prospects cant. I understand sometimes African American players just like white players could lack the mental side of the sport because it does require a lot of thinking. It just seems to happen to most African American prospects coming out of college to the draft. I really hope racism in mediated sports could be nonexistent sooner rather than later because these players train all their lives and wait all their lives to walk across that stage on draft day. It would be a shame if they didn't enjoy their day that they dreamed of and worked so hard to achieve just because someone wants to be racist and bias.

Racism is insidious as it works its way into every aspect of life, including sports. Football in particular, has been subject to racism in both subtle and intense ways. It has affected players, coaches, and even fans, which is illustrated in my articles.

One of my articles is dated back from 1896 to 1906, and racism is blatant. Even if a player was allowed to play, he had to worry about being physically harmed as a result.¹² This is not surprising though because slavery had only officially ended in 1865. What is sad is that racism continues even today in 2019. Not only does it exist with the players, the coaches are at risk as well. One of the coaches, named Charlie, was put in a coaching position in which he did not excel instead of the position in which he did excel. He was underutilized because he was black. He wasn't given a fair shot based on the color of his skin when he could obviously get the job done because he played the position in college. That's just one example for one of the articles I have read to really show you how bad racism is and how racism still lives today.

A lot of the articles I have read have a lot of similarities. The article *The Color Line in Midwestern Sports* and the article *Coaching with a White Divide* have a lot in common. Both articles show how African Americans in the beginning of the sport were treated very poorly whether it is a coach or a player. At first in the sport of football African American players actually had to fear for their life to play football. It was a very dangerous task to play football in the Midwest in the 1800s. Without those people who risked their lives to play football that helped break the color barrier maybe some people wouldn't even be playing football today. The same goes

¹² Martin, Charles. "The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports" 86

for the African Americans who wanted to coach. If they didn't fight their way up the ladder on the coaching grid maybe no African American would be coaching a football team right now either. Coaching was very hard to do for African Americans because they were placed at a position that they never had experience in so they would fail. Sometimes a head coach would fire a position coach for not knowing what to do with that position even though he has no experience there. This is how the white coaches got to fire and get rid of the African American coaches. While reading these two articles it was very sad to see how bad racism actually was back in the day. Some of the measures taken just to not let African Americans play a sport is really out of hand to me.

In the articles *Desegregation to Integration*¹³ and *Old and New Forms of Racial Bias in Mediated Sports*¹⁴ there are a lot of unseen similarities. In the article *Desegregation to Integration* the Gator committee picked a team which was the Florida Gators instead of Oregon state because Oregon state had a black quarterback and ratings would have went way down. So instead they picked the Gators who didn't have enough wins to be in the big bowl game but they wanted the media to play it up as a game of the North verse the South. They thought this would get millions to watch the game and support the game. They wanted the media to put emphasis on the North vs. South aspect of the game to bring viewers. They used racism and the media to sell more money for the sport and knew repercussions would come for all the players playing in it especially African American players. This

¹³ White, Derrick. "From Desegregation to Integration" 469-496

¹⁴ Schmidt and Coe, "Old and New Forms of Racial Bias" 655-700

ties into the article *Old and New Forms of Racial Bias in Mediated Sports* because TV announcers would do the same thing to African American players on draft day and on the news or Sportscenter where highlights are watched. Announcers would already assume what players are good at based on their color of their skin. For example some analysts always say that African American quarterbacks are more athletic and violent and faster than white quarterbacks while white quarterbacks are always smarter. The media in both of these articles tries to put emphasis on the color of the player's skin color because they think they could get a headline from it and it's wrong. All these articles have very similar main points and overall messages. To me all of the messages given in these articles are about racism. Racism as a big part of this sport that I love and it is ashamed it was a part of it and still is. All the African coaches and players had to fight through to get to where they are today is really incredible. Doing my paper on racism in American football was really eye opening to me. I always knew how African Americans had to break the color barrier and I knew everyone said it was very tough to do. After reading these articles I never imagined it was this hard to do and never imagined this is what they had to go through. It really makes you appreciate how hard people worked to break the color barrier so anyone could play this great sport of football because to me it is the best sport out there.

