

Dr. Richard Lapchick is known as the “racial conscience” of sport in society. A former basketball student-athlete at St. John’s University, Dr. Lapchick is the pioneer researcher of report cards of collegiate and professional sports. He is the Director of the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida. He offers these words on the eve of the Fifth Annual Hiring Report Card of NCAA college football head coaching positions.

We need a new game plan. We need an arsenal of weapons we have not had to change the hiring practices for head football coaches in college sport. What we have now is a failure.

It is almost bizarre to say this but I am encouraged about America but discouraged about college football. One week before the publication of the BCA Hiring Report Card, America elected our first African-American president. Yet our record for hiring football coaches of color is scandalous. The 2008 season will end with our second lowest number of African-American head coaches in the last 15 years!

This is the fifth time that the Black Coaches and Administrators have issued their Hiring Report Card. The HRC examines in depth how we hire a new head football coach in our institutions of higher education. Last year we could say that the BCA has objectively changed the way we hire head football coaches in America by including more candidates of color in both the interview process and in who sits on the search committees. We could say the process is more open.

The first Hiring Report Card was issued at the low point of the 21st Century with only three African-American head coaches. The 2008 season was played with eight coaches of color, six of whom were African-American. With the firing of Ty Willingham and the resignation of Ron Prince, there are only four African-Americans left at Mississippi State, Houston, Buffalo and Miami with a Latino at Florida International and a Polynesian/Samoan-American at Navy.

There were a total of 87 people on the search committee for the FBS open positions. Of those 87, 27 were search committee members of color. That is clearly a good percentage (31%).

There were a total of 74 candidates interviewed for the FBS open positions. Of those 74, 25 were candidates of color and that is good on the surface (34%).

In fact, there are more “A” grades for this year are the highest in five years of analyzing the head coaching vacancies.

That all sounds like progress except that only Navy and Houston hired coaches of color among the 18 FBS schools that hired new head coaches. Since 1996, only 12 African-American coaches have been hired out of 195 vacancies, a meager 6 percent of the total. Again, as of this publication, there are eight (6.7 percent) coaches of color at FBS schools and six (5.9 percent) coaches of color at FCS schools.

With an African-American president at last, how can we tolerate the hiring practices in college football in 2008? We cannot. What we are doing is not working. Bud Selig mandated candidates of color for interviews for Major League Baseball Managers and it worked. The NFL instituted the “Rooney Rule” two years later and it worked. So why doesn’t the process in college football work? We need more firepower.

I first met Coach Eddie Robinson 11 years ago when I started the process of co-authoring his autobiography with him. At the time, there were eight African-American head coaches in Division IA. Today there are five African-Americans, one Latino and one Pacific Islander leading Division IA

programs. In 1997 Coach told me he did not think he would live to see an African-American president. I wish he could have hung on for the 17 months that would have allowed him to bear witness. But that joy would have been tempered by the continued exclusion in college football head coaching position which is clearly the most segregated position in all of college sport. There still have been only 22 African-Americans who have ever been a Division IA head football coach and opportunities have been even worse at Division IAA, II or III.

The BCA believed that an open and objective process would ultimately result in more opportunities for African-Americans to be named as head coaches. The Report Card has been a start but has not been sufficient. We have called on the NCAA and President Myles Brand to adopt an "Eddie Robinson Rule," a college version of the NFL's Rooney Rule mandating that people of color be interviewed for all head coaching positions with sanctions for those who do not. The BCA is also seriously looking at initiating Title VII civil rights law suits against schools. We need a new arsenal to fully open the doors of opportunity.

Dr. C. Keith Harrison, Dr. Sharon Yee, and the research team at the Robeson Institute again did an excellent job of shedding light on where we are today. In college football, the light is dim and the inner sanctums are dark. The 2008 Report holds schools accountable in one of sports most inequitable situations! I congratulate the BCA and the work of the Robeson Institute to achieve this outstanding and practical research effort.

The 2008 Report should make a difference but more than research is needed to bring about more meaningful opportunities. Give us the tools to rip through the barriers that continue to obstruct opportunities for people of color to be on a level playing field when ADs and presidents select college football coaches. Without them, we are faced with an abhorrent embarrassment of a haunting racist past as we welcome an African-American President to lead us to a new day.

Richard Lapchick, Ph.D.
Chair, DeVos Sport Business Management Program
President, National Consortium for Academics and Sport
Director, Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida