

Sense of urgency needed to address colleges' lack of diversity

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I recently said that it is time to declare a civil rights movement in college football in a column on ESPN.com. But the call for action must go beyond football.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida will soon issue the 2008 College Sport Racial and Gender Report Card. An early look at the results show how pervasive the lack of opportunity to people of color really is in college sports.

Anyone who thought that the election of an African-American as the president of the United States meant that we were entering a race-free or race-neutral era in our society needs to look at the huge gaps between African-Americans and whites as college coaches and administrators.

With all the media attention focused on how few African-American college football head coaches there are, it would be easy to assume that is a unique racial issue in college sport. But that is just the start. It is racially scandalous. Four African-American head coaches out of 119 Football Bowl Subdivision schools — where 46 percent of the players are African-American — verges on scandalous. That's half what it was 10 years ago.

I was a guest on an episode of ESPN's "Outside The Lines" on Dec. 14 that focused on the lack of African-American head coaches. Part of the discussion centered on Auburn's hiring of Gene Chizik, who had a 5-19 record as head coach at Iowa State. He was chosen over Turner Gill, who is one of the four African-American head coaches. Gill turned around a terrible State University of New York at Buffalo program, won the Mid-American Conference and beat then-unbeaten Ball State in the championship game. On the same show, Mark Schlabach, ESPN.com's national football writer, said, "I had two SEC coaches tell me Turner Gill will never get that job because he is married to a white woman." Schlabach said Gill and Florida's Charlie Strong not only face long odds against getting a big-time job at a BCS school because they are African-American but also because of the race of their wives.

We can see how bad it is in college football. It is highly publicized whenever an African-American coach is hired or fired in football and the lack of coaches stands in stark contrast to the percentage of the players who are African-American.

What about the rest of college sports? Who are the coaches? The assistants? Who hires them and what do they look like? Who are our athletic directors? Associate ADs? What do the presidents who hire the ADs look like? How about the conference commissioners of the BCS schools. It is not a pretty picture.

Whites dominate the head coaching ranks on men's teams, holding 89, 89 and 93 percent of all head coaching positions in Divisions I, II and III, respectively. African-Americans held 7, 5 and 4 percent of the men's head coaching positions in the three NCAA divisions, respectively.

On the women's teams, whites held 88, 89 and 92 percent of all head coaching positions in Divisions I, II and III, respectively. African-Americans held 7, 5, and 4 percent of the women's head coaching positions in the three NCAA divisions, respectively.

As with the head coaching positions, Division III is the least diverse for student-athletes. But the percentages of African-American student-athletes are sharply different in Divisions I and II than for coaches who look like them. In Division I, African-American male student athletes make up 25 percent of the total male student athletes. In Division II it's 24 percent. In Division I and II, African-American female student athletes make up 16 and 13 percent of the total female student athletes, respectively. In Division III, 9 percent of the men and 5 percent of the women are African-American.

I think most people believe there are very large numbers of African-American assistant coaches, waiting and ready to

step up when the opportunity comes. While the numbers are better than for head coaches, whites still held 77, 79 and 88 percent of the assistant coaching positions on the men's teams and 79, 81 and 89 percent on the women's teams in the three divisions, respectively. African-Americans held 18, 14 and 8 percent, respectively, on the men's teams and 14, 9 and 6 percent, respectively, on the women's teams.

Gene Smith, who is African-American and the athletic director at Ohio State, was also on "Outside The Lines." He is all-too-rare, as African-Americans hold only 7, 4 and 2 percent of the AD jobs, respectively, in Divisions I, II and III. As they do everywhere else, whites dominate the position, holding 90, 92 and 97 percent in Divisions I, II and III, respectively.

As with assistant coaches, many assume there are significant numbers of African-Americans waiting in the wings as the associate athletic director. Not even close, as whites again dominated with 89, 89 and 96 percent of the total associate AD positions in Divisions I, II and III, respectively, while African-Americans only held 7, 8 and 3 percent of the positions at each level.

The president hires the athletic director. Of the 119 FBS presidents, 93 percent (111) are white and 78 percent (94) are white men. African-Americans hold only 2.5 percent of the presidencies in the group.

But at least African-Americans show up in the aforementioned categories. The conference commissioners are the real power brokers in college sport. All of the 11 FBS conference commissioners are white men. Among these 11 men are those that head BCS conferences and hold what are now considered to be among the most powerful and influential positions in college sports. When you look at all of Division I, excluding the historically black conferences, all 30 of Division I conference commissioners were white. Three conferences were led by women as commissioners.

NCAA President Myles Brand works hard for racial equality. However, he needs some new tools to bring real change. It is the end of 2008 and in nearly every major position in college sports, no matter what division, nearly 90 percent, and often more, are held by whites.

We need the stakeholders to get bold with Title VII lawsuits. We need Congress to hold hearings. We need African-American and white players alike to speak out. The system is broken when it is so exclusive. We need to fix it now.

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