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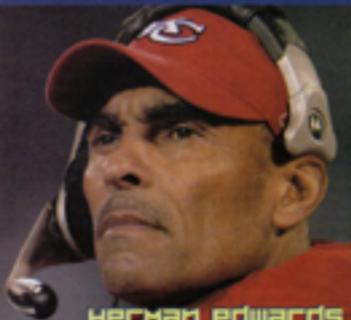
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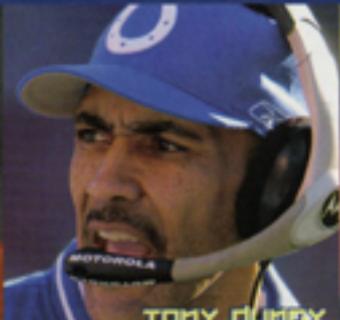


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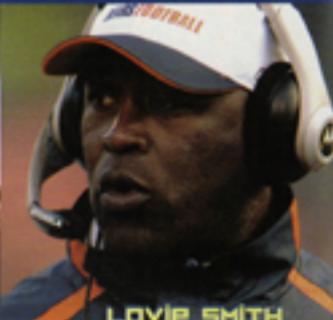
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# MORE MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB

BY MIKE BEACOM

**With progress all around, the 'thinking-man's portion of pro football is still lacking in cultural diversity'**

The issue of skin color was inescapable during the week leading up to Super Bowl XL.

Forget Colts quarterback Peyton Manning getting his long awaited crack at the title, or the controversy that encompassed troubled Bears defensive lineman Tank Johnson. All fans and reporters could talk about was the Tony & Lovie Show, the new era in cultural diversity among the National Football League's coaching ranks.

The league's far-reaching public relations machine was well within its right to promote the historic occurrence. Only a few years after attorneys Cyrus Mehri and Johnnie Cochran had presented a 78-page report on the matter, the NFL had exceeded expectations to diversify its offices from top to bottom.

"I've seen more of an intentionality to want to be more diverse," said Tennessee Titans running backs coach Sherman Smith, who was promoted this off-season

to assistant head coach. "The makeup of our league and society demands it be that way."

With Dungy and Smith coaching on the sport's biggest stage, and minorities occupying a record number of positions, it would have been easy for the league to label the matter "mission accomplished" and move on. But those close to the issue know there is much more work to be done.

Long heralded as a league of forward thinking and sound economic standing, the underbelly of the NFL is still very much contaminated with sometimes slow-to-progress policy.

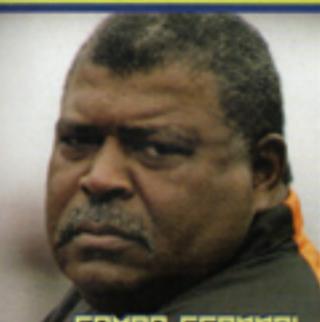
Case in point is the offensive side of the football, where the league and the Fritz Pollard Alliance (FPA) have yet to make much ground on two key positions essential to the development of each organization — offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. Entering the 2007 season only four minority coaches occupy those positions (two of each),

whereas last season the league employed 30 running backs coaches, nearly as many wide receivers coaches and a much larger number of positional coaches on the defensive side of the football.

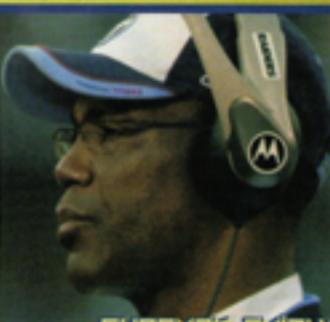
In the lack of progress in those positions racial prejudice or a glitch in the league's method for encouraging more minority hiring? The answer is not so clear, and requires a look at the history behind the league's current policy.

#### THE HISTORY BEHIND THE PROGRESS

Mehri has championed the issue. After making a name for himself in several landmark civil rights cases involving corporate America, Mehri was reading the sports page at his kitchen table one spring morning in 2002 when he decided he wanted to do something to encourage cultural change in the NFL. Mehri recruited Dr. Janice Madden from the University of Pennsylvania to help him conduct a labor economist study and



ROMEO CRENNEL



SHERMAN SMITH

bired interns to build a database comparing won-loss records of minority coaches vs. their white counterparts.

"I knew in my heart that if you studied it, the black head coaches did extremely well when given opportunities," said Mehri. "So the question was, why weren't they being given more opportunities?"

He soon approached Cochran, who he had worked with previously on several civil lawsuits.

"I said, 'Johnnie, you want to be part of this thing?' and he just lit up," recalled Mehri.

The report, entitled, "Black Coaches in the National Football League: Superior Performance, Inferior Opportunities," made some startling discoveries. For example, first-year black coaches averaged 2.7 more wins than the white coaches in their first season, and in their final season terminated black coaches had won an average of 1.3 more games than terminated white coaches. The report was well received and in time, it helped to achieve in only a matter of years what the league could not accomplish in roughly a decade.

"Commissioner (Paul) Tagliabue had made this a signature issue, yet they weren't making much progress," says Mehri. "It was like watching a football team going three-and-out and coming off the field, getting the ball back and going three-and-out again. They just weren't moving the ball down the field."

Within a month of the report's release, Tagliabue formed a special committee to address diversity issues. In March 2003, the FPA was created and it's now grown into a year-round operation that requires a full staff. Every December, the FPA submits a list of qualified minority candidates

to the league and each of the 32 franchises as a precursor to the hiring period.

That same year, the NFL passed the Rooney Rule, requiring teams to interview at least one minority candidate for a head coaching vacancy. The rule gained credibility later in 2003 when Detroit was fined \$200,000 for failing to follow its guidelines when they hired Steve Mariucci.

## TWO POSITIONS STILL BEHIND THE CURVE

The plan was solid, and in time more candidates would mean more hires. And for the most part that theory has held true. As Mehri pointed out, not only have more minority coaches been given opportunities around the league, but when he and Cochran first presented their report, Baltimore's Ozzie Newsome was the only minority in charge of a team's personnel decisions. This off-season Jerry Reese helped increase that number to six when he replaced Ernie Accorsi as the New York Giants' senior vice president and general manager.

But despite all of the growth, offensive coordinators and quarterbacks coaches are trailing the progress made in other areas.

"The barriers were easier to break, for some reason, on the defensive side than on the offensive side," said Mehri. "I think the message is the same kind of bias that led to the position segregation, the kind of bias that 'blacks can't be in thinking positions.'

"Step by step over 60 years you have people like John Wooten break down the barrier of being the messenger guard, a thinking position coming in and playing for Paul Brown. You have Willie Lanier breaking down the barriers of playing middle linebacker, another so-called thinking position. James Harris

"I've seen more of an intentionality to want to be more diverse," said Tennessee Titans running backs coach Sherman Smith, who was promoted this off-season to assistant head coach. "The makeup of our league and society demands it be that way."

and Warren Moon and Doug Williams breaking down the barrier of playing quarterback. Why it took so long to do it at quarterback is why it's taken so long as offensive coordinator."

"Now, what does that mean?" asked Mehri. "That really great people like Jimmy Raye, Ray Sherman and Sherman Lewis had steep mountains to climb."

Indianapolis Colts president Bill Polian is a member of a working group of executives that answers to the league's Workplace Diversity Committee made up of several owners. For Polian, the formula for increasing the number of hires is simple: increase the pool of candidates.

"What the Rooney Rule is designed to do is make sure that people in the pipeline get noticed," said Polian. "What needs to happen is that more and more minority offensive coaches need to come into the pipeline. That's where it all starts."

Don't just take Polian at his word; he leads by example. The Colts have long been a good steward of the league's progressive hiring objectives. Not only did Indianapolis give Dougney a head coaching position five years ago, but in 2006 it was the only franchise in the league to employ an African-American quarterbacks coach (Jim Caldwell).

NFL Executive Vice President of Football Operations Ray Anderson, a former member of the working group while a member of the Atlanta Falcons front office, believes awareness is the best solution.

"You draw attention to the problem by putting a bright light on it," said Anderson. "What (the league) is trying to do now, particularly with the lacking numbers in those positions, is open people's eyes and educate."

"Tony (Dungy) said it very eloquently and, in my opinion, best," said Polian. "He hopes the day will come when it's just a question of being a coach, not an African-American coach or a white coach, but just a coach."

**PHOTO RIGHT:** Tony Dungy celebrates with his team after beating the Bears 29-17 at Super Bowl XLI in Miami, FL.



## OBSTACLES EXIST

One thing could work against Polian's common-sense approach to addressing the issue — if coaches are not entering certain pipelines, then the pool never grows, and the desired goals of racial equality, as set by the league and FPA, are never realized.

The NCAA, for example, can be a training ground for future NFL position coaches by way of the league's coaching internship program, an important cog in the systematic approach to advancing diversity. But the NCAA itself only employs a handful of African-American head coaches despite having 119 Division I-A football programs. So, in turn, there are fewer minority coaches to offer those internships to than the averages suggest there should be, and even fewer on offense. In April, representatives of the FPA met with NCAA President Myles Brand to discuss the issue.

"What I can tell you is that the NCAA being a wasteland is a drag on the progress being made by the NFL. We don't have a pipeline coming up through there, more like a drain," said Mehri. "We can only influence them to the extent that we can inspire them with logic and information and get them to see the benefit of (following the NFL's lead)."

Anderson also endorses a lead-by-example approach to influencing the NCAA, and he pointed out that the league's decision to address the hiring issue head on "has not only been the right thing to do, but it's flat out good business to have diverse leadership."

Another potential stumbling block to increasing the numbers of minority offensive coordinators and quarterbacks coaches is a league rule stating that teams can deny a coach or scout under contract the opportunity to interview for a position with another club unless it is for the title of head coach or general manager. Wooten said such a rule could prevent someone

like Mike Johnson — a long-time quarterbacks coach who was let go by Atlanta in January of 2006 and subsequently accepted a wide receiver coaching position in Baltimore — from working his way up the ladder. In theory, if Baltimore were to choose not to allow him to interview elsewhere, Johnson's only chance at earning another quarterbacks coaching position or ascending to the role of offensive coordinator would be in Baltimore.

"This is happening," said Wooten, the chairman of the FPA. "Now, we understand why it is being done. You want to keep good people. But at the same time you have to ask, 'What is fair to a guy who has been working for you?'"

The greatest obstacle the FPA and pro football might need to overcome, however, is time. The quarterback position, for example, was the last to integrate. And long after Doug Williams won a Super Bowl for the Washington Redskins, African-American quarterbacks were labeled as such. Now that is starting to change.

"If you notice now they don't talk about 'black quarterbacks,'" said Wooten, who points out that incoming quarterback prospects JaMarcus Russell, Troy Smith and Chris Leak were judged on their merits more than their color. "(Today) they simply say quarterback, and that's the way it should be."

But with history just now starting to correct itself on the playing field, it may take many years for today's second- and third-string quarterbacks (a popular makeup of a future quarterbacks coach or offensive mentor) to grow into coaching prospects.

## PLenty TO BE DONE YET

Mehri offers a historical analogy.

"People like Bill Willis and Marion Motley were like the guys that showed up on Omaha Beach. They literally were the first ones to start to deal with the

integration issue," said Mehri. "Super Bowl XLI was like walking into Paris with everybody wildly in support of citizenship. But that doesn't mean there aren't pockets out there that need to be addressed. The celebratory January and February that we had does not mean that the job is all done, because it's not all done. The fact is the offensive side is a slower area for progress."

Said Wooten, "There is so much to be done. Dr. King said, and I'm paraphrasing, that a man is chosen by the character and the content rather than the good of boy network, and that is still going on in this league. That's why the FPA has got to keep moving at it the way we are."

All of the men agree that the end goal is a color-blind league.

"Tony (Dungy) said it very eloquently and, in my opinion, best," said Polian. "He hopes the day will come when it's just a question of being a coach, not an African-American coach or a white coach, but just a coach."

Supporters of the Rooney Rule agree that it must be viewed as an aid, and not a solution toward placing more qualified candidates in top offensive positions and reaching that ultimate goal.

Said Smith, "It's a hard issue. You can't make it a law. To be honest, if I were an owner I wouldn't want someone telling me who to hire. I want the best guy. But the problem is that the hearts of certain owners don't work that way. They don't necessarily want the best guy; they want a certain kind of guy."

The solution to move diversity in key offensive positions might have nothing to do with rules and entities outside of the NFL's grasp, said Smith.

"The Rooney Rule is good, but all it can do is get you an interview. It doesn't get you a job. It's the men who need to change." ■

**PEP HAMILTON**

# LINDY'S 6 TO WATCH

The number of minorities occupying offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coaching positions might be low, but it isn't due to a shortage of qualified candidates.

During the first week in March, the Chicago Bears hired Pep Hamilton to be the team's quarterbacks coach. In San Francisco last season, while serving as the assistant quarterbacks coach, Hamilton was credited with helping to mold former No. 1 overall draft choice Alex Smith. Now, he will be given the difficult task of further developing Rex Grossman, one of the league's most scrutinized players in 2006.

A former quarterback at Howard University, Hamilton is one of only two African-American quarterbacks coaches at the pro level. After spending five years coaching the quarterbacks at Howard, Hamilton spent three years as a league intern before getting his first full-time NFL job in 2003 with the New York Jets organization. There he served under then-head coach Hermann Edwards.

"Pep Hamilton is a guy who I took a great interest in when I was in New York," said Edwards. "Pep learned a lot from Paul (Hackett) and then in San Francisco under Norv Turner. (He is) well equipped to be a quarterbacks coach; there is no doubt in my mind. I'm just glad that he is getting an opportunity with Lovie Smith."

Edwards has molded many fine coaches through the years, but he believes the hiring of Hamilton is an important sign for minority coaches on the offensive side of the football.

"When you think about some of the quarterbacks coaches in the past; Jimmy Raye was obviously a coordinator as was Sherrin (Lewis)," said Edwards, "so you have a few, but you really didn't have that many minority guys as quarterbacks coaches."

"It's just a matter of more opportunities for guys to do a good job and then all of

a sudden you can be a quarterbacks coach."

This off-season, the San Diego Chargers and Atlanta Falcons each hired a minority candidate to take over the offensive side of the football. The Chargers promoted running backs coach Clarence Sherman, whose 16 years of prior coaching experience made him an attractive candidate, while Atlanta turned to Horace Jackson, a one-time offensive coordinator in Washington before overseeing the Bengals' wide receiving corps the past two seasons.

In addition to those two coaches and Hamilton, the league also has three minority coaches assuming the duties of assistant head coach in addition to managing an offensive position: Jim Caldwell in Indianapolis (quarterbacks), Jim Skipper in Carolina (running backs), and Sherman Smith in Tennessee (running backs). All five candidates are worthy of moving up the ladder in the near future.

Here are five other offensive coaches who deserve a closer look for openings in the near future:

#### **MIKE JOHNSON, wide receivers coach, Baltimore Ravens**

After spending four years in Atlanta, three as Michael Vick's position coach, Johnson's contract was not renewed following the 2005 season. The Ravens snapped him up and he made an immediate impact on what had long been considered one of pro football's most dismal passing games. Prior to joining Atlanta, Johnson spent time as the quarterbacks coach for the Chargers and Oregon State.

#### **JAMES LOFTON, wide receivers coach, San Diego Chargers**

One of the premier wide receivers of his era, Lofton has slowly risen in the coaching ranks. After leaving broadcasting in 2001, Lofton joined the Chargers' organization where he's been credited

with getting the most out of a limited cast. Last December, the soft-spoken Hall of Famer was a finalist for the head coaching job at his alma mater, Stanford, and at one point in January was considered a possible frontrunner for the Raiders' head coaching vacancy.

#### **JIMMY RAYE, running backs coach, New York Jets**

Raye is the prototypical example of a minority coach who has been somehow lost in the process. Raye is a superb coach, no one questions that, but at 61 years of age his window for opportunity is closing. Raye has spent 11 of his 36 years in the league serving as an offensive coordinator, but the former standout quarterback at Michigan State has never been given a shot at a head coaching vacancy.

#### **RAY SHERMAN, wide receivers coach, Dallas Cowboys**

Few offensive candidates are as seasoned as Sherman, who has coached running backs, quarterbacks and wide receivers. Those times he has held the role of offensive coordinator, but he has never been given more than one year to work with. Sherman found a new home this off-season in Dallas where he will serve as the wide receivers coach on Wade Phillips' staff.

#### **MATT SIMON, running back coach, San Diego Chargers**

After having spent 28 years coaching at the collegiate level (four as the head coach at North Texas), Simon took full advantage of a coaching internship with Denver in 1998 to land a job as the Baltimore Ravens running backs coach the following year. Under his tutelage, the Ravens owned one of the most successful ground games in the league. This season will be Simon's first with San Diego.

— Mike Beaumon