

Sports Commentary

Affirmative Action Reversal May Find Its Way Into Sports

Sports is a mirror of society

By Cedric Harmon

I thought, when various faces in the news began pontificating last fall that there needed to be changes in affirmative action, that they'd never get past the rhetoric. Ah, but they have.

Gov. Pete Wilson (R-Calif.) has made it the centerpiece to his presidential campaign. In June he signed an executive order that would abolish hiring practices that gave racial preference.

A few weeks later, the University of California system followed suit with its own policy revising its stand on affirmative action.

There have also been recent court decisions prevailing against affirmative action. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled twice in June, 5-4, that racial preferences were not acceptable in the workplace, and when it came to drawing up voter districts.

It's my contention that if the current trend continues, it will infiltrate into sports, and for the

sake of argument, the hiring of black college football coaches. Because, no matter how you look at it, sports is a mirror of society.

"In our profession, we've had a hard time breaking the barriers," said Alex Wood, head football coach at James Madison. Wood is a ranking member in the Black Coaches Association.

I noticed that several programs in the Southeastern and Atlantic Coast conferences had two black coaches on their staffs. I didn't know whether it was some unspoken rule, or just a trend.

"It's like keeping up with the Joneses," Wood said. "It's unwritten to the point that other coaches will look at other staffs and hire two."

Some coaches maintain they never heard of it.

"I just hire coaches," said Clemson's head coach Tommy West, who has one black on his staff. "There is no concern of color." "When I went out and hired my staff, I didn't think about that," said Mississippi's first-year coach Tommy Tuberville, who

hired two blacks.

The biggest excuse that's been used is that blacks aren't better represented at the college level because they're opting for opportunities in the National Football League, thus diminishing the pool of candidates.

"They're competing right now at the college level for hiring of our strong minority coaches in the game every year," observed South Carolina's head coach Brad Scott, who has two blacks on his staff. "They continue to draw the best into the NFL."

The most politically correct thing they say these days is that they're looking to hire the best coaching candidates who are qualified and experienced for the job. Of course, those who argue against affirmative action, and are looking to see it overturned, would argue that that should be

the criteria. I find those people hypocrites. First of all, coaches, like politicians, hire based on previous working relationships - either directly or indirectly.

So their argument - of why they can't find qualified blacks in the profession - is that there aren't any at the entry level working as graduate assistants and working their way up.

"You can't get into college ball from high school," Tuberville said. "It's tough for me to hire any coach, black or white, who hadn't recruited before. It's hard to find any guy with experience."

The NCAA voted against legislation mandating the hiring of a third, minority, graduate assistant, citing budgetary reasons. A compromise was suggested that among the two GAs currently allowed, one be minority. That wasn't accepted

because it would imply a quota.

There are currently six black head coaches among the 108 Division I-A schools. Another six are either assistant head coaches or coordinators. Of the 107 graduate assistants who were hired over the off season, only 11 were black.

"To be honest, when you look at the numbers," said Wake Forest's head coach Jim

Caldwell, who is black, "there's so few."

If the trend continues, colleges and universities, when pressed for accountability of their hiring practices, will only hide behind the court decisions and legislation that would overturn affirmative action.

There will be no consciousness, and that will be a sad reflection on society.

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