

If cards fall, Super Bowl could be Black affair

Dark complexioned individuals have gradually gained a measure of respect in the sports world. Many African-Americans in the football league now hold positions that many previously considered were too complex for them (or something like that), or that Blacks lacked the "necessities" to fulfill certain jobs, like coaching, quarterbacking and officiating.

Yet, as fate could have it, an African-American quarterback, an African-American coach and an African-American referee could be on the field for this year's

Super Bowl. This could lead to a number of historic victories when Super Bowl XXXIX is played in Jacksonville, Fla., on February 6.

Some football fans can remember when there were only a few African-American players on any team in the 1950s and that people were talking about quotas. Now, more than 60 percent of the players in the National Football League are African-Americans, but there are only five handling the reins as head coach. With the playoffs underway, there is a good chance that one of the African-American coaches, Tony



SPORTS PACE

By Huel Washington

Dungy, head of the Indianapolis Colts, could become the first of his race to take a team to the Super Bowl. He came close last year.

If the Philadelphia Eagles, the top team in the National Football Conference, wins their conference's title, an African-American quarterback, Donovan McNabb, will try to exceed the outstanding

Super Bowl XXII performance of 1988's MVP African-American quarterback Doug Williams of the Washington Redskins. In 2000, another notable African-American quarterback, Steve McNair of the Tennessee Titans, came up just a yard short of at least tying the game against the St. Louis Rams in Super Bowl XXXIV.

The times have changed over the past few years, and African-Americans have progressed through various phases of employment in the league — even to head office rank. Gene Washington, 11-year NFL veteran and former sportscaster and NBC commentator, is the Director of Football Operations for the NFL. He reviews players' actions and determines the discipline for infractions, like late hits or head-to-head collisions. Recently he assessed a \$75,000 fine against Denver's John Lynch for an

illegal, hazardous tackle.

There are currently 119 officials wearing the striped shirts in the NFL. Nineteen of those officials are African-Americans. The only two African-American referees are Mike Carey and Johnny Grier. Seven officials work positions in each game: referee, umpire, head linesman, line judge, back judge, field judge and side judge, plus two alternates — with the best men getting the assignments for the big Super Bowl game.

The officials for NFL games are usually picked individually to fill each of the seven officiating positions, but this season, the officials picked to work the playoff games will be the full crews that worked together all season.

Unless Carey's or Grier's crew is chosen, there will have been 39 Super Bowls played without an African-American referee in any game. This time, there is a strong possibility that there will finally be a Black referee on the crew working the Super Bowl game. Carey's crew did a superb job working the Indianapolis Colts-Denver

Broncos game last weekend. Carey, a 15-year veteran from Santa Clara, California, has been an alternate in one Super Bowl but was never used on the field. Grier has 24 year's experience in the league; asked to become a referee; is considered the senior official in the league, but has worked one Super Bowl — and then only as a field judge, his original entry position in the NFL.

Last year, there were 22 African-American officials. One of them, conspicuously absent this season due to retirement, was a 16-year veteran official, Aaron Pointer, whose sisters are the famous singing Pointer Sisters. Another, Al Jury, an African-American back judge who was run over in a preseason game, and who, before retiring, had worked five Super Bowls.

Neither Jury nor Pointer became the head man, a referee. As far as the refereeing goes, White officials like Jerry Markbreit and Jim Tunney, each was head man three times before retiring from the league. For African-Americans, this Super Bowl XXXIX could be the time.

Sportsview

(Continued from Page 15)

and incredibly American thing. To me, he's an utterly American hero."

Johnson, who was born in 1878 and died in 1946, didn't get away completely with living on his own terms. Three years after he beat Jim Jeffries, a former champion dubbed "the great White hope," in a July 4, 1910, title fight, Johnson was convicted of violating the Mann Act.

The act, passed in 1910, outlawed the transportation of women in interstate and foreign commerce "for the purpose of prostitution, debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose." Johnson's trial marked the first time the Mann Act was invoked to invade the

personal privacy of two consenting adults and criminalize their consensual sexual behavior.

"Unforgivable Blackness" documents the racist nature of the prosecution and the admission by the sentencing judge that the conviction was meant to "send a message" to African-American men about relations with White women.


Senators John McCain and Edward Kennedy, along with other politicians and boxers, joined Burns in filing a petition with the Justice Department seeking a posthumous presidential pardon for Johnson.

Now, at long last, it's time for President Bush to right an old wrong.



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