

# Blacks shut out of NFL's top jobs

By Joseph White

WASHINGTON (AP) - This month, for the first time, an NFL team traded for a Black head coach. Otherwise, the annual round of hirings has been a disappointment to those who have worked to bring more diversity to the league's coaching ranks.

Nine out of 10 openings have been filled, with no net gain in the current tally of six Black head coaches.

"We have some things to point to that we think are successful," lawyer Cyrus Mehri said Tuesday at a forum on hiring practices sponsored by the American Constitution Society.

"We had a record number of interviews this year, over 25, which will increase or strengthen the pipeline as we go forward. We also had for the first time a trade for an African-American coach.

"That being said, we still believe that there's a double-standard," he said. "We still believe it's an uphill battle, it's not a level playing field, and there is evidence of racial bias in the hiring cycle."

It's been nearly 3 1/2 years since Mehri and the late Johnnie Cochran released a landmark report that criticized NFL hiring practices and prompted the league to create the "Rooney Rule," which requires teams to interview at least one minority candidate when searching for a new head coach.

Since then, the number of Black head coaches has increased from two to six in the 32-team league, and more Blacks are working in NFL front offices. Still, much more progress was expected this year because of the unusually high number of vacancies.

"The Rooney Rule is doing a good job," said Michael Haynes, the league's vice president of player and employee development.

"It's a nice process, but it does not necessarily mean a commitment to diversity. I think there's a difference. Right now this is working, but there's still some pitfalls."

Mehri read the names of the nine coaches hired to date — Oakland is the only team still with an opening.

Black coach Herman Edwards was traded from the New York Jets to the Kansas City Chiefs, but most of the other hires were White assistants, including former New England defensive coordinator Eric Mangini, who at age 35 becomes the NFL's youngest coach.

Mehri then read a list of minority candidates who weren't chosen: Art Shell, Jim Caldwell, Tim Lewis, Ted Cottrell, Donnie Henderson, Ron Rivera, Maurice Carthon, Jerry Gray and Greg Blache.

"If you look at the first list and compare it to the second list, you'll see that the Black coaching candidates were at least as strong, if not stronger, than those who were selected," Mehri said.

"Each team could say what their justifications were, but if you look at it collectively, it still shows that there's an uphill battle for African-American coaches."

Even so, the panelists agreed that the league is headed in the right direction. Tony Dungy of Indianapolis, Marvin Lewis of Cincinnati and coach of the year Lovie Smith of Chicago led their teams to the playoffs with a combined regular-season record of 36-12. Most of the assistants on Mehri's list of overlooked Blacks did get interviews, some with several teams, giving them a prominent place in the hiring pool for next year.

The other three Black head coaches are Arizona's Dennis Green, Cleveland's Romeo Crennel and Edwards. "I don't want to overlook the fact that Herman Edwards was able to move from the New York Jets to the Kansas City Chiefs. It's huge," said Hall of Fame tight end Kellen Winslow.

Mehri said the next step in the campaign is to look at the "inner circle of decision makers" within teams — the people who surround the team owners and help choose the coaches.

Later, it was pointed out that none of the 32 teams has a minority as its controlling owner.

"I think that would make a huge difference," Haynes said, "if we had, say, four African-American or minority owners. The fact that we have none, I think that's a big problem."

# Bryant gets new nickname: '81'

By John Nadel

EL SEGUNDO, Calif.

(AP) - Kobe Bryant practiced Tuesday for the first time since his astonishing performance against the Toronto Raptors, and was tagged with a new nickname.

"Just calling me 81," he said of his teammates.

Perhaps that should be Mr. 81.

Bryant said the reality of reaching that point total Sunday night in the Los Angeles Lakers' 122-104

victory over the Raptors still hadn't sunk in, and made it clear he didn't expect a repeat performance any time soon.

"It's just one of those things that doesn't seem real to me," he said. "It's just tough for it to sink in. I'm focused on the task that lies ahead for us.

"The way I'm playing of late, I don't think it's an indication of how we're going to be playing the rest of the season. We had a stretch earlier this season where I didn't have to score the ball like that

for us to win. I look forward to going back to that."

Lakers coach Phil Jackson expressed a similar sentiment, saying: "A team has to have some sense of balance."

Nevertheless, Jackson said he had no problem whatsoever with Bryant dominating the action the way he did against the Raptors, when he shot 28-of-46, including 7-of-13 from 3-point range, and 18-of-20 from the foul line.

"If you were there at the game, I think everybody understands how we won,"

Jackson said. "He got into a rhythm — it was just a landslide."

Bryant scored 55 points in the second half as the Lakers (22-19) outscored the Raptors 73-41, turning a 14-point halftime deficit into an 18-point victory.

Bryant has averaged 44.5 points in 10 games this month in leading the Lakers to a 7-3 record. He is averaging an NBA-best 35.9 points this season.

Wilt Chamberlain holds (See Kobe, Page 15)

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