

Game celebrates historic match-up

Lovie Smith-Tony Dungy match-up represents the first time two Black coaches will meet in the big game

After a decades-long struggle for minority coaches in professional football, the Colts' Tony Dungy fully embraces the significance of two Black head coaches in the Super Bowl.

INDIANAPOLIS - Tony Dungy could only shake his head in disbelief as he reflected on the numbers back then.

Way back when Black head coaches in the NFL didn't exist. Back when any thought of establishing a pipeline of minority head coaches essentially was a pipe dream.

That was the reality the Indianapolis Colts' coach stepped into in 1981 when he accepted his first NFL coaching job as an assistant with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Dungy quickly did the math. Then, he set out to alter the equation.

"When I came into the league, there were 14 African-American assistant coaches and 28 teams," Dungy, 51, said Monday, a day after he and the Bears' Lovie Smith became the first Black head coaches to reach the Super Bowl.

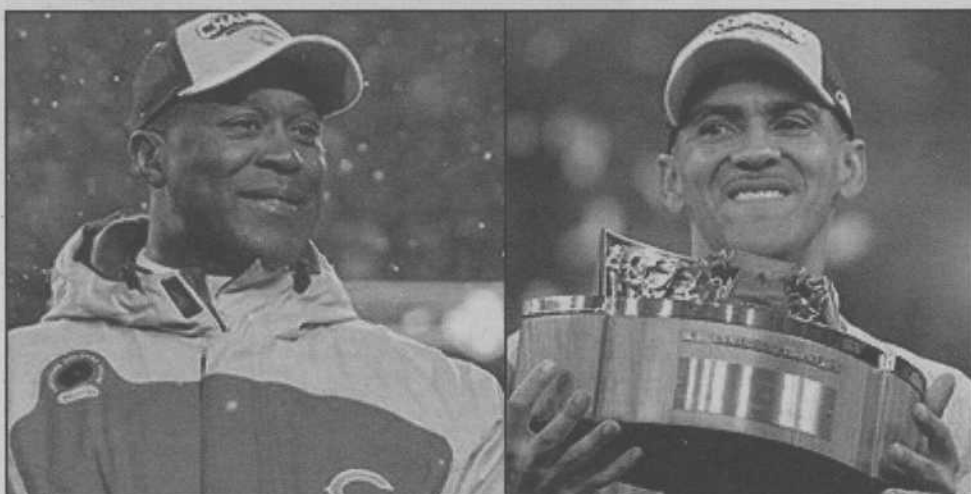
"People who had an opportunity to change that were going to have to do it. It was about bringing good coaches and people into the league. In my heart of hearts, it was also to bring good African-American coaches."

On Feb. 4, Dungy faces one of the protégés he groomed when the Colts play Smith's Chicago Bears in Super Bowl XLI at Dolphin Stadium. It will be the first meeting between Black head coaches in the Super Bowl, which guarantees a Black coach will lead his team to the title for the first time in NFL history.

For that reason, Dungy said next week's historical match-up represents "a win-win" situation.

It's also the high-water mark in a decades-long struggle for Black coaches who have had to overcome discriminatory hiring practices to land jobs at the top level.

"I realize the position we're in," Smith, 49, told reporters in Chicago after the Bears beat the New Orleans Saints to get to the Super



Coaches Lovie Smith, Bears, and Tony Dungy, Colts, to make history in Super Bowl XLI.

Bowl. "It's hard to put into words, but I know a lot of great coaches who came before me that didn't get this opportunity."

Smith was a college assistant until 1996 when Dungy, then head coach at Tampa Bay, hired him to coach linebackers. Of the 45 questions Dungy was asked at Monday's news conference, 20 were related to his role in fighting through obstacles to create opportunities for himself and other Black coaches.

COACHING TREE

Dungy is the league's only active coach to lead his team to the playoffs seven consecutive seasons. He is at the top of a coaching tree that saw a fourth former assistant land a top job on Monday when Mike Tomlin became the Steelers' first Black head coach. Herm Edwards (Kansas City) and Rod Marinelli (Detroit), who is White, also have worked for Dungy.

"An opportunity like this, to get to the big game, has been a long time coming for him," said Colts lineman Anthony McFarland, who also played for Dungy in Tampa. "I wish it would have happened for him years ago in Tampa. But he's got it now, and it couldn't be any better."

The attention on Dungy and Smith leading to the Super Bowl should raise concerns about the overall low number of minority head coaches, said Floyd Keith, executive director of the Indianapolis-based Black Coaches Association.

There were seven Black head coaches among the NFL's 32 teams this season, and two — Dennis Green (Arizona) and Art Shell (Oakland) — since have been fired. In college, there were only five among 119 Division I-A schools. The University of Miami made Randy

Shannon the sixth after the season.

"I don't know if we'll ever match a day in the NFL of this magnitude," Keith said Monday. "I don't know if you can adequately describe it, but you just appreciate it. It should send a message that color should never be a barrier. The issue is the quality. But some of the breakthroughs in the NFL, we're not seeing in college."

Shannon's hiring was a

significant step, but more need to be taken, said Florida State associate athletic director Bob Minnix, a member of the BCA's board of directors.

EVALUATING COLLEGES

Minnix said the BCA has started to circulate a report card that evaluates hiring practices of college athletic departments. It serves a purpose similar to that of the NFL's so-called "Rooney

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