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Rams defense: Large and in charge

Rams offense: In control
Racial imbalance of black coaches persists

SPORTS

The racial imbalance of black head coaches in college football continues to be unacceptable

By Dave Johnson
KRT WIRE SERVICE

NEWPORT NEWS, Va.

Surely by now, Willie Jeffries believed, things would be better. He never expected change to come overnight, but it's been 26 years.

In January 1979, Wichita State hired Jeffries as its head football coach. The reason anyone outside Kansas noticed was because no Division I-A program had hired an African-American head coach. He was a pioneer — not in the same vein as Jackie Robinson three decades earlier, but still a pioneer.

Twenty-six years have passed since his hiring, and college football has made minimal progress in hiring black head coaches. Of the 117 teams in I-A, only three employ a black head coach. While the racial balance on the field is nearly 50-50, only 2.6 percent of the head coaches are black.

"I thought there'd be around 20 of them by now," Jeffries said from his office at Grambling State, where he recently resigned as athletic director. "I kind of calculated it. I didn't think we'd get one a year, but maybe one here and there and maybe two in some years. But the success rate hasn't been what I hoped it would be."

Or, it's fair to say, even close. There are not 20 black head coaches in I-A today — in fact, there have only been 19 ever. That list begins with Jeffries, who coached five seasons at Wichita before moving on to I-AA South Carolina State, and ends with the current three: Washington's Tyrone Willingham, UCLA's Karl Dorrell and Mississippi State's Sylvester Croom.

The numbers are indisputable. The question is, why are they so embarrassingly low?

"If there's an obvious reason, it might have to do with the history and pipeline," said Virginia athletic director Craig Littlepage, the only black AD in Atlantic Coast Conference history. "Many of the first African-American head football coaches were appointed to jobs that were not the cream of the Division I-A crop. Some of the early results were mixed, and that fueled the perception that others might not be successful."

"Head coaches are usually hired when they've been head coaches or coordinators at other schools. We'll see a change in the head-coaching numbers when we see more coordinators being hired. Too many times coordinators come from the head coach's inner circle. So things might

not change quickly."

In evaluating the history of black head coaches, three things stand out:

Only four of the 19 coached at the same school for more than five years.

Five were fired after three years or fewer.

Many of the jobs (Ohio, Las Vegas, Northwestern, Eastern Michigan, Wake Forest, North Texas, New Mexico State, etc.) were no-win situations.

Only Willingham and Dorrell, whose teams met recently, have a winning career record.

Here's more sobering news: In 1997, there were eight I-A African-American head coaches. In 2004, there were five. Now, it's down to three. The news is even bleaker in Division I-AA, where if you exclude historically black colleges such as Hampton University, there were no African-American head coaches last season.

"Things are clearly getting worse," said Richard Lapchick, who gave college football an F in his latest Racial and Gender Report Card. "Unless the NCAA steps up, and they've done so before with academic reform and the Native American mascot issue and Title IX, we're going to see more of the same in college football. When they do step up, I

think we'll see a dramatic change."

Lapchick, who heads the sports business management program at Central Florida and serves on the Black Coaches Association's Board of Directors, wants the

NCAA to follow a model recently adopted by the NFL. Under pressure to promote more minorities on the sideline, the NFL requires teams with head-coaching vacancies to interview at least one non-white candidate. There were two black head coaches in the NFL at the time. Now, there are six.

Yet the NCAA has no plans to follow suit. "We're different from the NFL in that we're a membership organization, so that may not be the most appropriate strategy for us to consider," said Charlotte Westhaus, vice president for diversity and inclusion with the NCAA.

"When there is an opening for a head coach, there is a huge rush to fill that position. We want to help our membership take a step back and make sure diversity and inclusion aids them in getting excellent results with a head coach."

Hampton University coach Joe Taylor, who serves on the BCA's board of directors and is a past president of the American Football Coaches Association, has an idea why that discrepancy exists. "Football is the engine that drives the train," he said. "That's the biggest revenue-generating

and the most-visible sport. And because of that, people tend to be not as flexible in terms of who's going to run those programs. Basketball is certainly very valuable on the college campus, but it's prob-

ably a little less stringent.

"The people making the decisions, they probably feel a little more at ease because it's not as big in terms of (scholarship) numbers and probably doesn't generate as much revenue as football. They probably feel a little more comfortable there."

There's also the pipeline issue. In D-I basketball, 37 percent of the assistant coaches are black. In D-I football, it's only 24 percent. The best way to get a head-coaching job is to work through the ranks as an assistant. And in football, a lower percentage of blacks are in the profession.

Of the nine full-time assistant positions, the average ACC staff has 2.3 African-Americans. Miami has the most with four; Boston College and Florida State the least with one each. The only black coordinators are Virginia's Ron Prince, North Carolina's Marvin Sanders and Miami's Randy Shannon.

"There aren't enough African-Americans in the pool to pick from," Jeffries said. "If I could make a recommendation to a young black athlete who wants to get into coaching, it's stay on as a graduate assistant. That's the best way."

WSSU Rams defense gets the kinks out, playing great

Steven Gaither
ARGUS SPORTS EDITOR

Maybe it was the tough schedule. Maybe it was just some early-season kinks that needed working out. Whatever the reason, the Rams offense has come alive again and not a moment too soon.

The Rams offense that was on display throughout the early weeks of the season was not the one that the fans at Bowman-Gray Stadium came to see.

Their running game was pretty much ineffective and they turned the ball over way too many times against South Carolina State.

Against Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), they fumbled four times, and lost three of them. Without the turnovers, the Rams would have run away with that game. "If we eliminated the turnovers, imagine what the score would have been like," said Martin Hicks, who has fumbled three times in the last four games. "We have to hang on to the ball and take care of it, and everything will be fine."

Hicks has come up with big games to help get the Rams back on the winning track. After averaging less than three-yards per carry in the first three games, the two-time defending CIAA rushing champ has exploded, pushing more than 500 yards and seven touchdowns in the last three games. "I really wasn't playing my best the first few games," said the senior. Running back Jed Bines



Photo by Garrett Garms

Rams are optimistic about playing for the CIAA title.

missed the Virginia Union University (VUU) game because of an ankle injury. Although the Rams ran away with the game, the team was happy to have Bines back against longtime-rival Fayetteville State University (FSU). "Getting Jed back was a big spark for this team," said head coach Kermit Blount. "Jed came out and ran the football very hard, and I think, sent a message." FSU defenders definitely got the memo as Bines ran for 180 yards against them in a 26-24 win.

The defense has been playing good all season, highlighted by their shutout against VUU. After playing second fiddle to the offense last year, it is the defense that has kept this team close in most of their games.

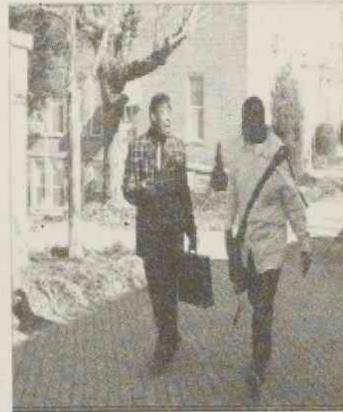
Defensive back Nathaniel Biggs has made some big plays this season, intercepting three passes. Linebacker Levern Bynum has been a star on special teams blocking two kicks against the Vikings.

Keep an eye on the passing game. Monte Purvis is getting better every game. He was very effective on the game-winning drive against ECSU, hitting four of five passes to set up the Matt Hind field goal. He has begun to develop some chemistry with his receivers, especially senior Bradford Herring (19 rec. 2 tds).

Where would the Rams be without Matt Hind? The senior has been pulling double duty as both kicker and punter, and hit two game-winning field goals. Although he has had a few extra points blocked, he's been perfect on field goal attempts (7-7).

Make no mistake about it; the Rams want to leave the CIAA on top. They have to feel optimistic about their chances of playing for the CIAA title, but I'm sure coach Blount will not allow them to look past any opponent.

Watch out for the Rams, they are armed and dangerous.

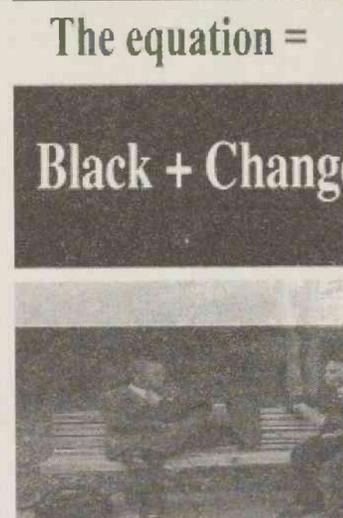


Change(chanj) to put or take in place of something, substitute

Black (blak) beautiful, powerful

The equation =

Black + Change



BMC

Black Men For Change