

Mailbag

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plicated. However, no matter at what level, athletics boils down to four major areas -- organization, motivation, physical talent and performance. By and large, the head coach plays a big role in only two of those areas -- organization and motivation.

Designing a game plan or developing a strategy to win is not a difficult thing to do for a person who has played a sport and been exposed to different strategies. The difficulty comes in relaying the strategy to the team and motivating the players to carry out that strategy. For example, it does not take a genius to figure out that a team would need to bolster its pass defense to defeat the Miami Dolphins. However, this must be translated into on-the-field strategy and then relayed to the players in an organized fashion.

This is done by delegating responsibility to assistant coaches, who in turn relay the game plan to the players. The head coach must then motivate the players to carry out their assignments and to play up to and above their capabilities.

If a sound game plan is formulated, the game plan is relayed to the players, the players are motivated and have the physical talent and mental toughness to carry out the game plan, then a team will be successful. If there is a breakdown in any of these areas, then there is the increased possibility that a team will not be successful.

Coaching, as with most activities, is a profession in which the more one does it the better one gets. Certainly most people who have played a sport for a number of years can make the transition from player to coach. One learns certain things about a sport after playing for a number of years and is then able to teach these things to others. What is not so easy is putting organizational and motivational skills together with this exchange of knowledge. This distinguishes a head coach from an assistant coach.

To think that blacks inherently lack the ability to organize and motivate is utterly ridiculous. This is what those who say that blacks lack the necessary tools to be head coaches are saying. That should be a slap in the face to every black professional athlete.

Inconspicuously absent from the debate on this matter have been the very people that this issue concerns the most -- black athletes. There comes a time when one must take a stand, when one must take a risk and put the comforts of success and money on hold. After all, today's athletes will be tomorrow's pool of potential head coaches. As it stands now, black athletes have no future in professional sports once their playing days are over.

Until the athletes speak out, the owners can ignore the problem because, in their minds,

there is no problem if those who are most directly affected do not speak out.

Blacks are as capable of being head coaches and managers as anyone; thus, one can only conclude that the reason that there are so few blacks in these positions on the professional level is racism. The professional leagues, simply put, do not want black head coaches or managers.

As owners and general managers realize that the inability excuse no longer works, they have come up with even feebler excuses. For example, they say that blacks are unwilling to pay their dues or in other words are unwilling to come up through the ranks. However, a Dennis Green or a Tony Dungy in the NFL, a Bernie Bickerstaff or a Gene Littles in the NBA, a Willie Stargell or Bob Gibson in major-league baseball would certainly dispute that argument.

The key is opportunity: If blacks have not been given the opportunity to come up through the ranks, then a judgment on their willingness to do so cannot be made.

Moreover, coming up through the ranks is not necessarily a prerequisite to becoming a professional head coach. Larry Bowa and Lou Pinella in baseball are examples of players who became major-league managers soon after their playing days were over. Numerous NBA head coaches have been hired from the college ranks, and recently an NFL team considered a 26-year-old for a head coaching position. There is no excuse for the lack of black coaches on the professional level. Professional sports, along

with many other professions, has shut blacks out of top management jobs due to one thing and one thing only -- racism.

There are those who would argue that athletics should not be a battleground for America's racial problems.

We as blacks cannot afford to let racism flourish unabated on any front. Blacks make up a large percentage of the players in the NBA, NFL and major-league baseball, but due to racism they have no hand in the decision-making process. Even beyond this, we as blacks cannot allow society to continue to treat us as inferior. Professional athletics reaches millions of Americans and gives them the impression that blacks do not have the skills to coach or to perform in leadership roles. Are we to sit still and allow ourselves to be treated as second-class citizens? The answer is an emphatic no -- not in the business world and certainly not in the athletic world.

There is no doubt that racism has been the reason that there are so few blacks coaching on the professional level. There is no doubt that blacks are as qualified as any other race of people to coach on the professional level. As has always been the case, blacks must force the issue. We must make things change or they will never change. It is time for Black America and black professional athletes to take a stand.

We cannot allow another generation of black Americans to grow up without the opportunity to coach and manage in professional sports.

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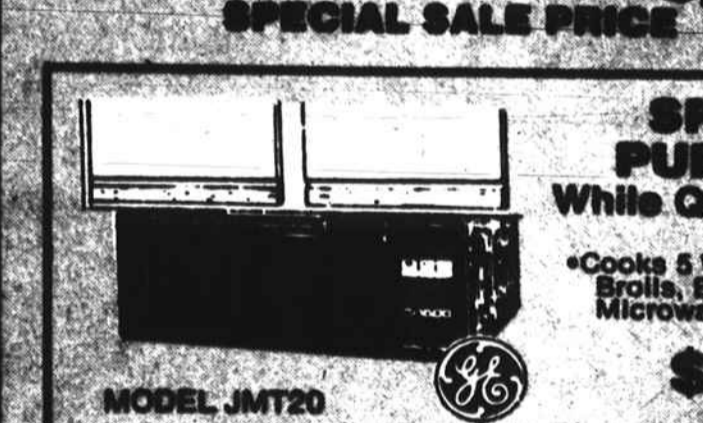
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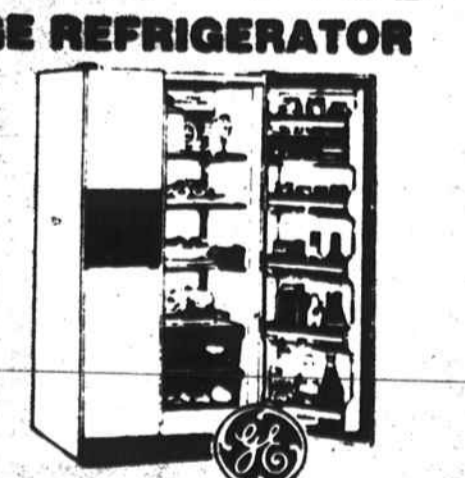
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