

**The Implications of Successful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives in the  
NCAA**

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## **Introduction and a History of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the NCAA**

The discussion and debate surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts are prevalent in all facets of society. The topic has garnered more attention due to the recent social justice movement but can be a confusing term to many. Lyman et al. described diversity's being present in an organization when "its members reflect the many ways human beings can be different from one another" (Lyman et al. 2022: 193). Furthermore, they noted that equity is characterized by opportunities that "are equally available to all" (Lyman et al. 2022: 193) and inclusion occurring when all members feel "welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate" (Lyman et al. 2022: 193). Without any of these cornerstones, proper inclusion efforts will fall short as organizational members are not fully incorporated.

Seen by many as a solely political or social issue, DEI persists uniquely into the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), presenting novel challenges to those aiming to bridge inequality gaps by introducing more comprehensive DEI practices. While DEI covers several issues, racial and gender diversity are two of the main focuses. Racial tensions in the United States rose to the forefront of American media immediately following the unjust deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in 2020. However, racial discrimination has ties to the NCAA dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Legal segregation prohibited many African-American athletes from pursuing athletic or academic opportunities in predominantly white institutions (PWIs), "relegating African-Americans to playing in less formally organized settings" (Nwadike et al. 2016: 527). Even if opportunities for collegiate athletics were presented to African-Americans, they did not consist of equitable resources, structure, or support compared to those afforded to white athletes.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 was the first of many steps to combat discrimination in education, famously declaring that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (History – *Brown v. Board*). Despite the ruling, many southern schools neglected to desegregate as interpretations of “all deliberate speed” varied. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and federally funded programs” (Department of Labor). As such, federally funded colleges were mandated to integrate, although, the schools of the NCAA’s Southeastern Conference (SEC) were amongst the last to do so. The University of Florida’s football program became desegregated in 1968, four years after the Civil Rights Act and 10 years after UF’s law school was desegregated (White 2010: 485). In the fifty-five years since this event, segregation in the NCAA is nonexistent, but racial discrepancies continue to persist in all facets of collegiate athletics.

Importantly, these inequities exist outside of the playing field. Athletic trainers, an often-overlooked role in athletics, were found to be 78% white in the NCAA (Day et al. 2021: 4), representing a looming roadblock to racial equity. Furthermore, the lack of diverse and minority athletic trainers affects athletes psychologically which can ultimately affect their performance on the field. The trend continues in administrative roles, where African-Americans “held athletic director positions at 7.7 percent (DI), 3.4 percent (DII), and 4.3 percent (DIII)” (Loggins and Schneider 2015: 33). However, in the same year, African-American student-athletes accounted for 16% of the total NCAA athlete population (Demographics by Race/Ethnicity), spotlighting the deficiencies in administrative equity in comparison to athlete demographics. The implications of these studies, amongst others, prove that efforts relating to the advancement of racial diversity are necessary and will benefit all stakeholders associated.

Gender inequality represents a prominent roadblock to achieving widespread equity in the NCAA. Women's collegiate athletic programs have existed since 1896, but didn't have a national organization until the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was founded in 1971 (McFall and Perkiss 2019: 21). The AIAW was integral in the expansion of female collegiate athletic opportunities as it hosted national championships in six sports while gaining 278 member universities in its first year and 800 after a decade (McFall and Perkiss 2019: 22). While the AIAW didn't provide the same resources or exposure as the NCAA, it was an important step in increasing the notoriety of women's collegiate athletics. Ultimately, the AIAW's downfall was, ironically, the Title IX Statute aimed at spurring gender reform in higher education.

Passed in 1972, the Title IX statute says, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Office for Civil Rights). While Title IX did not explicitly mention collegiate athletics, it soon was adopted by the NCAA when "the potential for increased revenue for universities and intercollegiate associations" (McFall and Perkiss 2019: 25) was realized. The NCAA and AIAW were able to coexist, but eventually, member schools were forced to commit to only one governing body. The AIAW accused the NCAA of "institutional corruption" in a 1983 lawsuit, but the AIAW "disbanded, leaving the NCAA as the sole arbiter of national intercollegiate athletics" (McFall and Perkiss 2019: 25). After the AIAW was able to grow women's collegiate athletic opportunities at a rapid pace, the programs found themselves under the oversight of the previously male-focused NCAA.

Despite the widespread acceptance and integration of Title IX and its succeeding interpretations, gender-based inequalities are still prevalent in the NCAA. The coverage of female sports teams in not-for-profit media is important as it can provide guidance on a school's compliance with Title IX regulations. If schools fail to equitably spotlight their female and male teams, "girls are not afforded the necessary exemplars to emulate" (Cooper 2009), which can insinuate a lack of support for present and future athletes. Gender inequality continues into administrative roles, where women face outdated occupational trends that block their ability to progress into higher roles in organizations. As Loggins and Schneider noted, "women tended to hold positions as administrative assistants, life skills coordinators and academic advisers making it more difficult to move into executive positions" (Loggins and Schneider 2015: 33). Without proper adaptation and inclusion of novel DEI-based practices, gender discrimination will continue to exist and influence all members of the NCAA.

The history of racial and gender discrimination in America is well-documented, yet, they still can be found in the NCAA. A deeper look at both aspects' relation with the NCAA highlights major roadblocks to equity and deficiencies in practices utilized by member schools. The lack of equity relates to athletes, but also impact staff, faculty, administration, and prospective students. As this paper will highlight, the deficiencies in racial and gender equality in the NCAA are pervasive, but the overwhelming benefits of proper diversity, equity, and inclusion practices highlight the necessity of their implementation throughout the organization.

### **Racial Diversity in the NCAA**

As mentioned previously, the ties between racial discrimination and the NCAA are close-knit and are one of the main factors in the existence of racial inequalities found in the organization. One of the most prominent areas where gaps in racial equity exist is in athletic

training. Athletic trainers (ATs) are essential staff members because they “offer athletes injury prevention tenets, guide them in illness avoidance, promote well-being and screen for mental and emotional health concerns” (Day et al. 2021: 3). The frequency and intimacy of interactions between athletic trainers and their athletes puts ATs in a position to mentor the students and impact their lives outside of athletics.

The number of BIPOC ATs in head AT and assistant AT roles increased dramatically in the years between 2008 and 2018, resulting in a 30% and 123% increase, respectively. However, the frequency of these hires remained roughly unchanged, according to Day et al., highlighting a proportional increase of BIPOC and white ATs, rather than an influx of diverse hiring choices.

According to a report released by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) in 2018, “less than 21% of the membership self-identify as an underrepresented minority race or ethnicity” (Day et al. 2021: 4). In that same year, roughly 36% of NCAA athletes were non-white (Demographics by Race/Ethnicity), which highlights a failure to parallel the demographics of athletes when hiring staff.

Interestingly, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) reported having “more than four times the frequency (37.0% vs. 9.2%) of BIPOC head ATs at HBCUs as compared to non-HBCUs” (Day et al. 2021: 6) and “more than twice the frequency (30.1% vs. 12.8%) of BIPOC assistant ATs” (Day et al. 2021: 6). HBCU campuses, when compared to Predominantly White Institution (PWI), often include increased visibility for BIPOC faculty and staff. For African-American students at PWIs, a lack of representation amongst campus leadership can lead to “a higher perception of minority stress...feelings of loneliness and alienation” (Sadberry and Mobley 2013: 2-3).

African-American students without representation across campus may have high levels of minority stress, which, when compared to students with high social support, can result in higher chances of depression, interpersonal problems, and lower self-esteem (Sadberry and Mobley 2013: 13). Another study of Black athletes at PWIs showed that a lack of diverse representation on campus can lead to a “lack of sense of belonging in academic settings” (Jolly and Chepyator-Thomson 2022: 152). As such, BIPOC students and athletes will seek out classmates with similar backgrounds or experiences, leading to an “athlete bubble” where, in the words of an interviewee referred to as “Prince 1,” “athletes hang with athletes, Black people hang with Black people” (Jolly and Chepyator-Thomson 2022: 149).

While PWI campuses may never become the psychological havens that HBCUs are to BIPOC students, greater diversity in hiring practices can assist in creating a more familiar and supportive space for minority students. Student-athletes typically interact with athletic staff, including athletic trainers, daily, which emphasizes the importance of having equitable representation amongst demographics in these roles. Not only will increased diversity and representation in these roles help to boost athletes’ perceived support, belonging, and engagement on campus, it will also assist in helping them make the most of their playing time. “Known benefits from racial and ethnic concordance of health care provider and patients include greater patient satisfaction of care...and increased utilization of needed health services” (Day et al. 2021: 8). When athletes are able to interact with staff members of similar backgrounds, they are more likely to utilize suggested training and rehabilitation practices, allowing them to preemptively avoid injury or return to the field as quickly as possible. While this is essential for any injury, it is especially crucial in the NCAA as athletes have limited eligibility. Shortened recovery times allow them to maximize this eligibility in a safe manner. While the presence of a

diverse athletic training team is greatly beneficial to student-athletes, it is important to incorporate diversity in all tiers of collegiate athletics, including coaching and administration.

The hiring of head coaches is one of the most polarizing and widely publicized events, especially at the Division I level. However, Richard Lapchick's study in 2009 found that hiring tendencies heavily favored white coaches; 89% of head coaching positions for men's teams and 90% of positions for women's teams were filled by white coaches. Further, an average 81% of assistant coach roles on men's teams and 83% of women's teams between the three divisions were filled by white coaches (Lapchick 2010: 82). More recently, head coaching positions in the NCAA have been filled by more diverse candidates but are still predominantly held by white coaches.

According to the 2020-2021 College Sport Racial and Gender Report Card, white coaches held an average of 86.97% of head coaching positions (Lapchick 2022: 54). These trends create a difficult environment for prospective BIPOC head coaches, as vacancies are likely to be filled by assistant coaches from within the organization. Unfortunately, this tendency predominantly favors white coaches as they make up the majority of assistant coaches in the NCAA, with an average of 73.5% of assistant coach roles across all three divisions being held by white people (Lapchick 2022: 55). As such, the road for BIPOC coaches to reach a head coaching role is littered with statistical improbabilities rooted in outdated hiring practices. Despite the spotlight on racial disparities in NCAA coaching roles, the trend continues into administration across the organization.

While there are many positions related to the successful administration of an NCAA athletics program, one of the most important roles is the athletic director. Athletic directors (ADs) have numerous roles in daily operations, including "compliance; conference issues and



responsibilities; university rules, regulations and responsibilities; compliance with Title IX, and, negotiating contracts” (Wong et al. 2015: 12). Athletic directors are charged with overseeing the entirety of a university’s athletic resources, teams, and athletes. With these wide-reaching and greatly impactful responsibilities, athletic directors must be able to represent and empathize with their student-athletes to make equitable decisions for the best of the program. Richard Lapchick’s research, mentioned above, also included the demographics of athletic directors, revealing a similar trend in the racial backgrounds of administrators.

Across the three tiers of NCAA athletics in 2021, athletic director positions were held by white administrators at rates of 90%, 92%, and 97% in Division I, II, and III, respectively (Lapchick 2010: 83). The rates decreased in the following years as white athletic directors eventually accounted for 77%, 83%, and 90% of athletic directors in each of the three divisions, respectively (Demographics). These statistics show that the vast majority of athletic directors are white, despite 61.4% of male athletes and 69.4% of female athletes in 2020-2021 being white (Lapchick 2022: 10). With the prominence of collegiate athletics rising in American society, it is important to create environments that are welcoming and inclusive of all, not just in appearance, but in practice too.

Without widespread efforts to be inclusive, “demographic differences become more salient and faultlines crack open, exposing the organization to negative work outcomes” (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich 2013: 661). Employees and other stakeholders may feel ostracized or become unmotivated to work for a company that they view to be biased and unwelcoming to all. This change in mindset can directly impact the quality of work conducted as marginalized groups become “less likely to contribute their unique perspectives and will disengage from their work” (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich 2013: 666). Discrepancies in DEI

practices throughout the NCAA are not limited to race and ethnicity; gender barriers and inequalities have been, and continue to be, major aspect of collegiate athletics.

### **Gender Diversity in the NCAA**

From the beginning of their inclusion in the NCAA, women have faced an uphill battle in achieving equality in every tier collegiate athletics. As mentioned previously, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) provided a viable opportunity for females to compete at high levels with the opportunity to win one of 41 national championships in 19 sports (McFall and Perkiss 2019: 25). However, the passage of Title IX inspired the NCAA's board members to discuss the creation of a women's division and national championships, which put the AIAW at risk. The NCAA, which already had a stronger foundation than the AIAW, had greater opportunity to expand common knowledge of their athletes, particularly on television. In 1981, the College Football Association (CFA), a lobbying group within the NCAA, agreed to a preliminary four-year NBC TV contract worth \$180 million (Zimbalist 2013: 7). Although this contract was exclusively for football, it had the potential to open the door to the televising of other sports in the future. The allure of the NCAA was a large contributor to the eventual dissolution of the AIAW but also marks the beginning of inequities relating to female athletics. The NCAA was originally focused on regulating men's sports and "issued sharp criticism of [Title IX], arguing that it would have the effect of undercutting men's sports" (McFall and Perkiss 2019: 25). This sentiment shows that ultimately, the NCAA began to offer women's athletics to profit, taking priority away from the athletes. As such, inequities along gender lines have persisted and are evident in all areas of the NCAA to this day.

Analyzing and identifying inequalities regarding athletes themselves is the first step in identifying deficiencies in the NCAA organizationally. One of the areas where these can be

analyzed is in the media created and published by member universities. Specifically, one must investigate not-for-profit media associated with the NCAA. As Coyte Cooper explains, “if inequitable gender coverage exists on NCAA athletic institution's home Web pages, there is little hope for the achievement of gender equity in non-NCAA and not-for-profit media outlets” (Cooper 2009). The NCAA and its affiliated universities are regulated by Title IX in nearly all aspects of daily operation, so it is safe to assume that they apply Title IX’s requirements to their media publications. Cooper’s study analyzed the publications from schools that participate in one of the major BCS conferences because “of the influence that major conferences have on intercollegiate athletics (Cooper 2009). The research gathered evidence combining all media, but also divided focus between advertisements, articles, multimedia, and photographs. The data was compared with female and male participation rates from the 2005-2006 academic year.

Cooper’s findings highlighted statistically significant differences in the frequency with which individual female athletes and female teams were featured. Overall, “females received 35.5% of the overall coverage,” compared to females consisting of 44.9% of individual athlete participation and 53.6% of team participation rates for the year (Cooper 2009). Alarming, the data highlights a bias against females, despite females accounting for nearly half of all intercollegiate athletes. In multimedia and advertisements, females saw the greatest gaps in treatment, as they received 2.5% and 15.5% of coverage, respectively (Cooper 2009).

Cooper’s findings have major implications, especially when correlating the coverage of female athletes to consumer’s perceptions. Specifically, young athletes who may view female intercollegiate athletes as role models may be negatively impacted. Role models, described as “cognitive constructions based on an individual’s needs, wants, and ambitions” (Gibson 2004) are integral to guiding individuals towards their goals or desired environment, which are often

held by the role models themselves. Without proper female athlete representation on university websites, youth athletes may lack a desire to follow in their footsteps because female role models “convey the message that success in this field is possible” (Ronkainen et al. 2019: 2).

When female athletes are portrayed at a rate inequivalent to their participation rate, there is less opportunity for them to be selected as role models due to trends in media coverage for women. Even while performing in a large Division I BCS conference, “the general public and sponsors will not react to marginal media attention” (Meier 2015: 977). Repetitive, conspicuous, and informative media coverage is the best way to highlight female athletes because, otherwise, “traditionally biased female sport coverage” (Meier 2015: 977-978) will be upheld and continued. In addition, the practice may convey that female athletics aren’t a priority at the school, leading prospective students and recruits away to other programs. The importance of female athletes as role models proves the relevance of Coyte Cooper’s research, but also highlights the need for gender-based inclusion to be present in administration.

As discussed previously, the athletic administration environment is particularly difficult for minorities to emerge, but it is an area where positive changes are beginning to occur. Richard Lapchick’s study from 2009 found that “Women hold AD positions in 8, 13 and 27% of the Division I, II and III institutions, respectively” (Lapchick 2010: 83). As one might assume, these numbers have increased in recent years, showing a renewed focus on greater inclusivity. The 2020-2021 College Sport Racial and Gender Report Card noted that women now hold 14, 24.2, and 33% of AD positions in Division I, II, and III, respectively (Lapchick 2022: 56). While these numbers are promising and indicate that positive change is occurring, female athletic directors are still far from achieving many statistical feats claimed by their male counterparts.

The “Power 5,” an informal grouping of the five most dignified and powerful NCAA Division I conferences, have 65 member universities but only four have a female athletic director (Blinder 2019). One such AD, Heather Lyke of the University of Pittsburgh, was the school’s first female AD upon her hiring in 2017. The norm of having a male in the position became so engrained after 106 years that “a university official had to edit the statements she had prepared because they used masculine pronouns” (Blinder 2019). This simple yet alarming fact proves the harmful assumptions associated with pervasive inequalities. These issues may seem extreme and more pertinent to members of the “Power 5,” but they also occur here at Sacred Heart University.

On September 8, 2021, SHU announced Judy Ann Riccio as their new athletic director after she served three months as interim AD. She became SHU’s first female athletic director in the school’s 58-year history. On a national scale, Riccio became the 57<sup>th</sup> female Division I athletic director and only the 36<sup>th</sup> female AD with a Division I football team (Doyle 2021). The hiring of female athletic directors like Heather Lyke and Judy Ann Riccio represent the progressive mindset held by colleges and universities nation-wide. In the past, “women tended to hold positions as administrative assistants, life skills coordinators and academic advisers making it more difficult to move into executive positions within athletics” (Loggins and Schneider 2015: 33). Now, with more consideration being placed on Title IX and social justice efforts, more opportunities are given to women to lead intercollegiate athletic organizations.

The hiring and introduction of more women into senior leadership roles represents positive change in terms of gender diversity in the NCAA, but it also sets forth an opportunity for organizations to benefit. As schools become more inclusive and diversified, their reputation for having strong DEI values will grow. This reputation is crucial, as it “will help the organization attract the best available talent and skill in the market both domestically and

abroad” (Armache 2012: 104). Universities will be able to draw in coaches, staff, and players of all backgrounds as DEI efforts are prioritized and experiential differences are encouraged. Not only will these individuals be attracted to the allure of an accepting workplace, but they’ll “feel empowered to make decisions affecting their work” which will ultimately lead to a reduced likelihood to possess an intention to leave the organization (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich 2013: 679, 681).

The NCAA has a demonstrated history of prejudice against females, which has affected their inclusion in the organization in the present. NCAA Division I BCS organizations were found to asymmetrically highlight their female athletes and teams, which can lead to harmful psychological feelings and reduced likelihood for female athletes to be chosen as role models by youth fans. Additionally, women continue to be in the minority in NCAA administrative positions, holding the highest percentage of athletic director roles (33%) in Division III (Lapchick 2022: 56). Failure to accept and create a fully diverse organization leads to greater possibility for employee turnover, minimized employee identification with the organization, and a reduced ability to recruit human capital. The effects of poor DEI practices, relating both to gender and race, highlight the necessity to incorporate DEI in the NCAA, which can be done through numerous practices.

### **DEI Initiatives**

Incorporating a lasting DEI plan into an organization may seem difficult, but there are several ways to increase equitability and inclusivity related to race and gender. One such practice includes the use of social media, like Twitter and Instagram, as they have become “important [tools] for amplifying messaging and broadening reach in the interest of garnering wide-ranging support” (Havey et al. 2022: 2). The popularity of social media, especially in teens and young

adults, shows that it can be a viable medium through which DEI new efforts are introduced as “nearly 90% of young adults ages 18-29 utilized social media” in 2015 (Zeligman et al. 2022: 329). The NCAA, realizing social media’s importance, previously pioneered a social media campaign “to create a dialogue on diversity and inclusion” (Kluch and Wilson 2020: S35). The campaign lasted five days, with each day focusing on different themes, such as breaking athlete-related stereotypes, spreading diversity statistics, and the sharing of inclusive action plans (Kluch and Wilson 2020: S39). The campaign was ultimately a success, generating over 25,000 social media posts, reaching over 64 million people on Twitter, and pushed the campaign’s hashtag “#NCAAINclusion” to trending in the United States (Kluch and Wilson 2020: S41). All of these measures highlight the effectiveness of social media and represent only the first step in integrating greater DEI policies.

Despite the success of the campaign, many may argue that social media is unable to create tangible change in the NCAA. Social media’s ease of use connects users of all backgrounds and education levels, but can also benefit those unwilling to do the “dirty work” involved in activism. This tendency, termed “slacktivism,” describes “feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact” (Morozov 2009). Those opposing the widespread use of social media may point to slacktivism as the reason for the NCAA’s campaign reach, rather than being achieved through users genuinely interested in progressing DEI efforts.

To avoid slacktivism, perceived or real, it is imperative that organizations who conduct social media campaigns integrate the material into all aspects of operation. Member organizations, and the NCAA, will only truly be committed to the incorporation of DEI initiatives if they can expand efforts to be visible year-round, instead of focusing effort during a designated week once a year. This idea continues into the creation and support for university

mission statements, which can provide guidance on a university's stance regarding DEI initiatives.

Carter Rockhill et al. conducted research surrounding Power 5 institute's mission statements to investigate the inclusion of DEI in these statements and to find a correlation between published statements and actual steps taken by the university. A university was found to create a "reality" when two out of five key leadership positions, including university president, AD, football coach, and men's and women's basketball coaches, were filled by non-white coaches. It is important to note that mission statements are purely guides and "the mission statement of an organization could express intent to increase DEI; nevertheless, their behavior...could contradict those intentions" (Rockhill et al. 2021: 401). A thorough analysis found that many Power 5 schools failed to make tangible progress to support their mission statement. In instances where an institution and its athletic department had separate missions that both mentioned DEI, 79% failed to meet the above criteria for achieving racial DEI (Rockhill et al. 2021: 419).

Notably, 12 schools failed to mention any diversity aspect and 49 didn't mention race and DEI. As such, these institutions "refrained from creating an illusion of valuing (racial) DEI... removing an expectation that they will hire racially diverse candidates" (Rockhill et al. 2021: 419). Attention may be drawn to the schools who failed to act upon their published mission statements, but a spotlight must also be shone on those who failed to include any aspect of DEI from the beginning.

While the results of Rockhill et al.'s research is astounding, it only covers schools belonging to one of the Power 5 conferences. As such, the research provides only a small glimpse into the efficacy of NCAA member's mission statements and perceived valuation of DEI



initiatives. This could introduce further research, as Division II and Division III are characterized by greater diversity in administration, particularly for women, which could result in finding stronger correlation between mission statements and diversity-related practices in place.

The findings gathered from this research highlight the issues surrounding the correlation between publicized inclusivity initiatives and the status of steps taken to achieve such initiatives. In order to introduce DEI on a larger scale, schools must work to make their mission statements a reality. When this occurs, the universities will prove that DEI is valued in the organization, rather than using DEI initiatives to “mimic other established programs regarding content” (Rockhill et al. 2021: 420).

As alluded to above, hiring practices are one of the most effective ways to increase the presence of DEI in an organization. Adapting hiring practices to include candidates of more diverse backgrounds benefits all involved; universities can prove their commitment to DEI, minorities are provided the opportunity to break down historical barriers, and campus communities gain from a more diverse population.

One of the ways the NCAA can adapt their current hiring practices is to introduce a form of the NFL’s “Rooney Rule.” This rule is a representation of affirmative action and requires “NFL teams to interview at least one minority candidate for any head coaching vacancy” (DuBois 2016: 208). The rule doesn’t mandate or control the final hiring decision, rather, it expands the pool of potential candidates considered for an open position. According to Cynthia DuBois’s research, “a minority candidate is 19.6-21.3% more likely to fill an NFL head coaching vacancy in the post-Rooney era than the pre-Rooney era” (DuBois 2016: 227). Using data from The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), the implementation of the Rooney Rule in 2003 had a possible correlation to an increase in minority head coach hirings in the NFL. The

2003 NFL season featured three African-American head coaches, but after the season, Lovie Smith and Dennis Green were hired to raise the number to five. Later, after the 2005 Super Bowl, Romeo Crennel was hired and the NFL reached a peak of six African-American coaches (Lapchick 2005: 1).

It is difficult to clearly connect the implementation of the Rooney Rule to the sudden influx of African-American coaches in the NFL, but disregarding the relationship altogether would be a mistake. By requiring organizations to interview at least one candidate of minority background, the NCAA would create greater opportunities previously closed to certain demographics. Cynthia DuBois and Richard Lapchick's research highlight the potential efficacy of the introduction of a Rooney Rule to the NCAA, which would be the first of many steps to increasing the overall role of DEI initiatives in the organization. As diverse candidates are hired at increasing rates, universities would be proving their valuation of DEI to peers and consumers, garnering trust and respect. The use of social media in conjunction with updated hiring practices can help to spread awareness about DEI and specific initiatives undertaken by an organization, further highlighting the positive effects and results of proper DEI implementation.

## **Conclusion**

The overwhelming presence of one race, ethnic group, or gender in collegiate athletic administrations is not inherently an issue or cause for concern. Rather, it is crucial to investigate the impact that these environments can have on staff, faculty, and athletes involved. Without a thorough understanding of these impacts, calls for increased diversity, equity, and inclusion practices may fall on deaf ears.

Racial diversity in the NCAA is increasing as minorities are receiving greater opportunities to fill head coaching and administrative roles. The presence of BIPOC faculty and

staff on campuses has an immediate effect on young athletes, who benefit from having racial and ethnic representation in campus leadership. This would “allow Black student-athletes more opportunities to have positive role models” (Sadberry and Mobley 2013: 15), increasing athletes’ social support and benefitting their overall emotional well-being.

Similar initiatives can be applied to gender diversity, which is a prevalent topic in the NCAA. Increasing the visibility of female athletes and teams in not-for-profit media publications will allow universities to prove their commitment to gender-based DEI while positively impacting the psyche of youth fans. Putting female athletes and administrators in visible positions allows them to be chosen as role models, which can excite fans and consumers and urge them to support future DEI initiatives.

NCAA members are well on their way to full integration of DEI policies but many still have a long way to go. Including DEI-based verbiage in mission statements is an easy way to appear committed to inclusion of such initiatives, but many Power 5 schools failed to properly integrate practical DEI solutions. To bridge this gap, the introduction of a “Rooney Rule” may provide universities the opportunity to interview more diverse hiring candidates, thus presenting an avenue to increase diversity within an organization.

Overall, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in the NCAA have grown tremendously since the NCAA’s inception, thanks in large part to federal legislation and social movements. However, the findings and research presented above show that more work is required to achieve an equitable landscape in terms of both race and gender. White males have historically dominated head and assistant coaching positions and administrative roles, which presents a roadblock to ethnic minorities and non-males. Diversity within an organization has been proven to benefit employees’ well-being and the organization’s reputation while

introducing diverse mindsets, experiences, and ideas. Without proper DEI initiatives, the NCAA will continue to create a legacy of exclusion while failing to represent the entirety of athletes and students associated with the organization. Moving forward, it is imperative to incorporate DEI initiatives in all stages of the NCAA and its member organizations to ensure that such practices become widely accepted.

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