

NFL Leadership and Recruitment of Head Coaches: Addressing Systemic Barriers in the Hiring Process of Black Americans

Robert W. Crowley, Nova Southeastern University, USA
Bahaudin G. Mujtaba, Nova Southeastern University, USA

Abstract: The National Football League (NFL) is an entity in and of itself within the American society. The Constitution of the United States of America is a mere four to six pages, but it has evolved over the years and has been amended approximately twenty-seven times. Most recently in 1992. This constitution provides guidance for over 350 million people. The NFL Game Operation Manual is 200 hundred pages, and the NFL Constitution and bylaws are 300 pages. It outlines the structure, purpose to include how ownership is established, how teams are scheduled, and how players are contracted. There are 32 teams with front office personnel, players, and coaches. One can readily observe that the number of people that make up the NFL ownership, front office staff, and coaches is only a few hundred people.

Human resource management for any such organization is nonetheless a daunting process. This article seeks to understand and examine the hiring process within the NFL as it relates to the recruitment and retention of African American head-coaches. There seems to be systemic discriminatory practices in the selection of African American coaches, which seems to mirror the cultural and socio-political dynamics of society in terms of exclusion and inequality. There are a host of factors as to why such barriers continue to exist. The literature review reveals pertinent facts about that inequality, and the latter sections provide relevant implications and recommendations.

Keywords: National Football League, NFL, systemic barriers, Black American coaches, disparate impact.

Introduction

The National Football League has long dealt with a persistent challenge that stands in contrast to the demographic makeup of its players, which is the significant underrepresentation of African Americans in head coaching positions (Crowley, 2025). This disparity represents not merely a statistical issue but reflects consistent systemic barriers embedded within the league's hiring processes and organizational culture that human resources personnel within the NFL are acutely aware of. While 53-70% of NFL players identify as African American, the percentage of Black head coaches has historically been around 10-15%, with periods dropping even lower (Lapchick, 2023). The circuitous road toward equitable representation in NFL leadership has been hampered by policy initiatives, public dialog, and legal challenges. Most importantly, the implementation of the "Rooney Rule" in 2003 authorized that teams interview at least one minority candidate for head coaching vacancies and expanded to other personnel (Saunders, 2026). Despite this intervention and intention, progress has been less consistent and, at times, disappointingly stagnant. Consequently, relevant changes must be strategically designed and implemented to enhance the institution (Lawrence et al., 2022). As noted, the NFL's issues and systemic barriers mirror broader societal patterns where diversity decreases dramatically at higher levels of organizational hierarchies, particularly in prestigious leadership roles. The current attack on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) only serves to exacerbate such concerns, thereby increasing stress and health challenges (Mujtaba et al., 2025).

The literature review reveals systemic barriers that are consistent across various social institutions including the NFL (Crowley and Mujtaba, 2026). There are multiple studies that unequivocally demonstrate how these barriers are structural, institutional, and on a personal level (Minenko and Mujtaba, 2024). This persistent behavior and barriers create disadvantages for marginalized and protected populations. The disparities are real and constitute great harm to those who are excluded from participation on a fair, equal, and equitable basis (Mujtaba, 2025).

Disturbing developments, including Brian Flores' 2022 class-action lawsuit alleging discriminatory hiring practices, have brought renewed attention to these issues, creating both public pressure and institutional momentum for substantive reform. As the league navigates these challenges, the

opportunity exists to transform the NFL's approach to leadership development and selection in ways that could serve as a model for professional sports and beyond.

This article examines the multi-pronged barriers that have perpetuated this disparity, drawing on research from sports sociology, organizational psychology, and management studies. The goal is to contribute to the analyzing of historical patterns, contemporary challenges, and the potential pathways forward. The research goal is to create a more equitable and inclusive leadership landscape in professional football, the game most Americans love. The continued persistence of these disparities despite decades of awareness suggests that deeper structural and cultural factors are at play that require a comprehensive understanding before meaningful change can occur.

Literature Review

Having diverse coaches for shared leadership in the NFL is crucial for promoting innovation, creativity, and progress within the organization (Turner and Heng, 2023). A diverse coaching staff brings together individuals with unique experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds, leading to more informed culturally competent decision-making along with better representation of the players and fans they serve (Mujtaba, 2026a; NFL Diversity Report, 2023). This, in turn, can lead to improved team performance, increased fan engagement, and a more positive overall impact on the community.

Diverse coaches play a critical role in breaking down barriers, challenging the status quo, hiring mindfully using analytics, and creating a healthier and more inclusionary workplace for all (Mujtaba, 2026b). By hiring coaches from underrepresented groups, the NFL can demonstrate its commitment to fairness and opportunity for all current and prospective players (Scott, 2021). This can have a profound impact on young players from diverse backgrounds, who can see themselves reflected in their coaches and be inspired to pursue their own dreams. We know that seeing more minorities in positions of power and leadership can have a significant impact on the younger generation watching and eventually playing the game.

Furthermore, having diverse coaches in the NFL can help to address the issue of occupational mobility patterns, where ethnic minorities may face more barriers to advancement. By providing opportunities for coaches from diverse backgrounds to move up the ranks, the NFL can create a more inclusive and equitable work environment. This, in turn, can lead to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and improved overall performance.

The Early Pioneers

The history of African American head coaches in the NFL reflects both the persistent barriers to inclusion and the exceptional individuals who managed to overcome them. Fritz Pollard stands as the league's first African American head coach, leading the Akron Pros in 1921 during the NFL's infancy. Following Pollard's tenure, however, a stark and troubling gap emerged—one that would last for over six decades before another African American would assume a head coaching position in the league (Smith, 2021). This extended absence of Black head coaches cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader societal context of racial segregation and discrimination that characterized much of 20th century America. During this period, professional football, like many institutions, reflected and reinforced prevailing racial hierarchies. Even after the racial integration of players following World War II, leadership positions remained inaccessible to African Americans, perpetuating what scholars have termed "positional segregation"—where minority participants are excluded from central, leadership-oriented roles (Brooks & Althouse, 2013).

Art Shell's 1989 appointment as head coach of the Los Angeles Raiders marked the end of this 68-year period and represented a significant milestone. Shell's hiring, while groundbreaking, also underscored how exceptional a Black candidate needed to be to receive such an opportunity—Shell was a Hall of Fame player with deep organizational ties to the Raiders. His appointment, while progressive, did not immediately catalyze broader change throughout the league.

Modern Era Facts and Trends

The contemporary landscape of NFL head coaching demographics reveals patterns of initial progress followed by regression and stagnation. Following the implementation of the Rooney Rule in 2003, the league saw a gradual increase in African American head coaches, reaching a peak of eight (25% of all head coaches) in 2011 (Lapchick, 2023). This period of relative progress generated optimism that systematic change was taking hold. However, subsequent years witnessed a troubling reversal

of this trend. By the start of the 2022 season, the number had fallen to just three African American head coaches (Mike Tomlin, Lovie Smith, and Todd Bowles), representing less than 10% of head coaching positions—a figure starkly disproportionate to the approximately 70% of NFL players who identify as Black. This regression prompted renewed scrutiny of the efficacy of the Rooney Rule and raised questions about whether the policy had become a procedural formality rather than a catalyst for meaningful change (Reid, 2022). Additionally, the Florida Attorney General recently demanded that the NFL suspend the Rooney Rule, claiming “race-based hiring practices” (Saunders, 2026).

Analysis of hiring cycles reveals additional concerning patterns. African American coaches often face shorter tenures and quicker terminations compared to their white counterparts (Savage & Seebruck, 2016). Research by Seebruck and Savage (2013) indicated that Black coaches averaged 2.9 years in their position compared to 3.7 years for white coaches. Furthermore, Black coaches have been disproportionately hired by struggling franchises, potentially setting them up for greater challenges and heightened scrutiny. When African American coaches are dismissed, they receive significantly fewer second opportunities as head coaches compared to their white peers with similar or even inferior performance records. Recent hiring cycles have shown modest improvements, with the number of Black head coaches increasing to seven by the 2023 season. However, this progress remains tenuous and falls short of proportional representation. The fluctuating nature of these statistics suggests that without addressing underlying structural issues, sustainable progress will remain elusive.

Comparison with Player Demographics

The stark contrast between the racial composition of NFL players and head coaches represents one of the most visible manifestations of the league's leadership diversity problem. While African Americans have constituted a majority (approximately 70%) of NFL players for several decades, their representation in head coaching has never approached even half that proportion (Lapchick, 2023). This disparity becomes particularly troubling when considering the traditional career pathway to head coaching positions. Many coaches begin their careers as former players, suggesting that the player-to-coach pipeline should theoretically produce a more diverse coaching population (Savage & Seebruck, 2016). However, research by Seebruck and Savage (2013) documented how this pathway often breaks down for African Americans, who face greater obstacles in transitioning from playing to entry-level coaching and subsequently advancing to coordinator and head coaching positions.

The disconnect between player and coach demographics reflects what scholars have termed the “*leadership categorization theory*” in action—the tendency for decision-makers to mentally associate leadership qualities with characteristics of the dominant group, thereby creating implicit barriers for those who don't fit established prototypes of what a leader “looks like” (Cavico et al., 2013; Rosette et al., 2008). In the NFL context, this has manifested in the persistent stereotype of white coaches as “strategic minds” and Black coaches as primarily motivators or position coaches focused on physical development, limiting their perceived suitability for head coaching roles requiring comprehensive strategic leadership (Crowley, 2025).

Understanding Systemic Barriers

The persistent underrepresentation of African Americans in NFL head coaching positions cannot be attributed to simplistic explanations or isolated incidents. Rather, as shown in Figure 1, this underrepresentation reflects a complex ecosystem of interconnected barriers operating at multiple levels—individual, interpersonal, organizational, and systemic. Understanding these barriers requires examining both explicit practices and the more subtle, often unconscious biases that shape decision-making processes.

In general, systemic barriers in professional sports refer to the deeply ingrained and interconnected obstacles that prevent individuals from underrepresented groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds, from accessing equal opportunities and achieving success in the sport (Mujtaba, 2023). These barriers can include biased hiring practices, lack of diversity in leadership positions, inadequate access to resources and training, and stereotyping and discrimination. Systemic barriers can also be perpetuated by cultural and social norms, such as the “old boy network” that can limit opportunities for those who are not part of the established network. In the NFL, systemic barriers can affect not only players but also coaches,

executives, and other professionals, limiting the diversity of perspectives and talent in the sport (Jeffers et al., 2025).

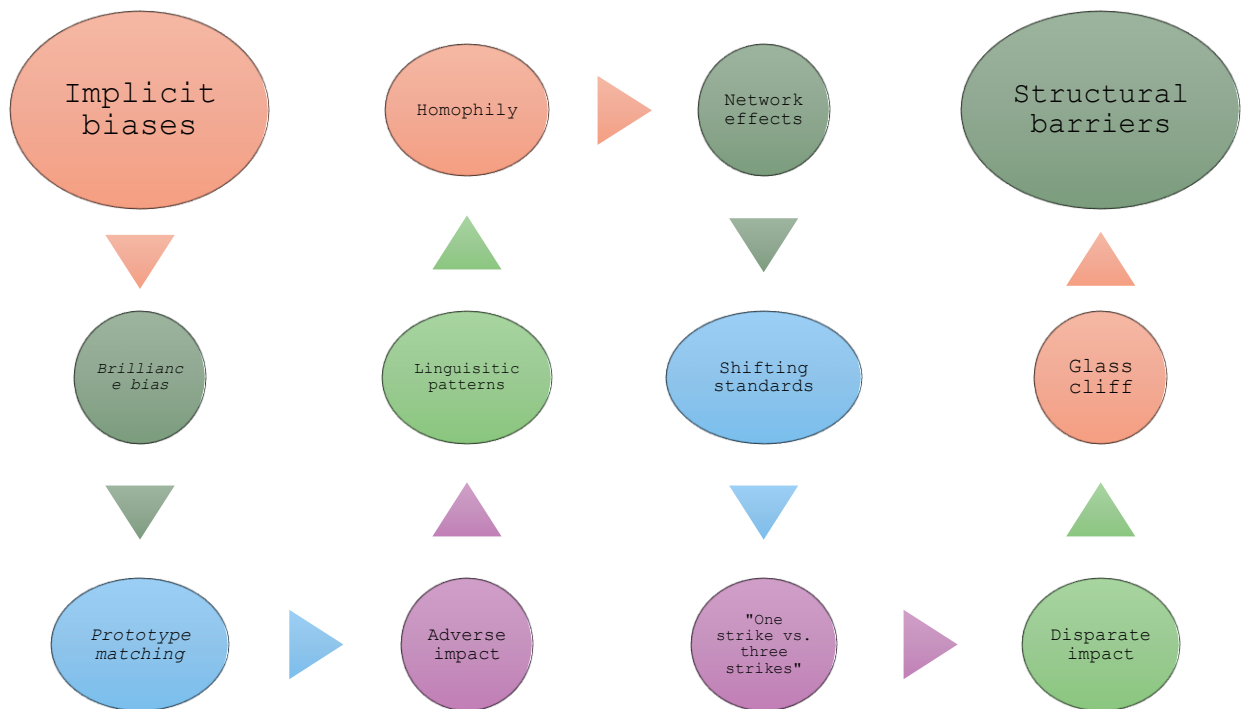


Figure 1: Barriers Impacting Black Candidates

Implicit Bias and Stereotyping

Research in cognitive psychology and organizational behavior has extensively documented how implicit biases—unconscious associations that affect judgment and decision-making—shape hiring outcomes across industries. In the context of NFL coaching, these biases manifest in several documented patterns. Studies by Rosette et al. (2008) have demonstrated how leadership prototypes in professional sports often unconsciously associate strategic thinking, intelligence, and decision-making capabilities—qualities deemed essential for head coaches—with whiteness, while associating physical prowess, emotional motivation, and execution—qualities associated with position coaches—with Blackness. These implicit associations create what researchers call "prototype matching" problems, where African American candidates, regardless of qualifications, are subconsciously evaluated as less matching the prototype of an ideal head coach. Experimental studies have shown that identical coaching résumés are evaluated more favorably when associated with white-sounding names versus Black-sounding names (Duru, 2019).

The "brilliance bias" represents another manifestation of implicit stereotyping that disadvantages Black coaching candidates. This bias associates innovative strategic thinking and offensive creativity—increasingly valued in modern football—with white coaches, while Black coaches are more often described in terms of their motivational abilities or disciplinary approach. Content analysis of media coverage and team announcements of coaching hires reveals these linguistic patterns, with white coaches more frequently described with terms like "innovative," "cerebral," and "strategic mastermind," while Black coaches are more often characterized as "disciplinarians," "leaders of men," or "motivators" (Braddock et al., 2012).

Network Disadvantages and Access Barriers

The hiring process for NFL head coaches relies heavily on informal networks, connections, and reputational information that flows through established channels of influence. There was research conducted by Mark Granovetter in the *American Journal of Sociology* (May, 1973), and the researcher talked about the strength of weak ties. It suggests that weak ties give access to novel

information. Whereas, within strong ties, there is no new information. Everyone knows the same things. In terms of the potential African American head coaches' weak ties are ineffective because weak ties don't penetrate the good old boy system, nepotism, or coaching trees. Nor are strong ties equitable in terms of inclusion. This reliance on informal networks—what sociologists call "social capital" creates significant disadvantages for African American coaching candidates who have historically had less access to these influential networks. In short, total exclusion. The concept of homophily—the tendency for individuals to associate with others like themselves plays a crucial role in perpetuating these network disadvantages. The concept of objectification is prevalent. With NFL ownership remaining overwhelmingly white (only two of 32 teams had non-white majority owners in 2023), the principle of homophily creates natural advantages for white candidates who share demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds, and social contexts with those making hiring decisions (Cunningham and Sagas, 2005). In the opinion of some researchers, affirmative action has exclusively been for white people. It manifests itself in glaring detail within the NFL.

The network effects manifest in concrete hiring patterns. Research tracking the career trajectories of NFL coaches reveals the importance of "sponsors" influential figures who advocate for candidates behind closed doors. White coaching candidates have historically benefited from more numerous and more powerful sponsors who can effectively advocate for their advancement. Additionally, certain coaching "trees" and organizational lineages have produced disproportionate numbers of head coaching opportunities, with these pipelines remaining predominantly white (Seebruck & Savage, 2013). The "coordinator pipeline" represents another critical access barrier. The most common pathway to head coaching positions in the modern NFL runs through coordinator positions, particularly offensive coordinator roles that have become increasingly prioritized. African Americans have been significantly underrepresented in these offensive coordinator positions, creating a bottleneck in the talent pipeline. In recent years, while Black coaches represented approximately 35% of position coaches, they constituted only about 15% of offensive coordinators, creating a structural barrier to advancement (Reid, 2022).

Unequal Standards and Double Binds

African American coaches frequently face what organizational researchers call "shifting standards"—wherein they must meet higher thresholds of performance and qualification compared to their white counterparts. Longitudinal analysis of coaching tenures reveals that Black coaches are often given shorter time limits to demonstrate success and face quicker termination decisions when facing similar on-field results as white coaches (Duru, 2019).

This phenomenon of unequal standards appears particularly pronounced in second chances and recovery opportunities after initial head coaching tenures. White coaches with mediocre or even poor records in their first head coaching opportunity are significantly more likely to receive second and third chances compared to Black coaches with comparable or even superior records. This pattern creates what researchers' term as "one strike" dynamic for Black coaches versus a "three strikes" reality for many white coaches (Lapchick, 2023). This illustrates that "second chance opportunities elude Black Coaches. Black coaches also navigate complex "double binds" regarding leadership style. Research on leadership perception indicates that African American leaders face conflicting expectations—they must demonstrate sufficient assertiveness to command respect while simultaneously avoiding being perceived as too aggressive or authoritarian, perceptions that can trigger racial stereotypes. This limited range of acceptable behavior constrains the language choices available to Black coaches compared to their white counterparts, who typically enjoy greater flexibility in leadership approaches (Rosette et al., 2008).

The Rooney Rule

The Rooney Rule, implemented in 2003 and named after former Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney, represents the NFL's most significant formal policy intervention to address racial disparities in "head coaching" opportunities (Mujtaba, 2022). The rule initially required teams to interview at least one minority candidate for head coaching vacancies, later expanding to include general manager positions and, more recently, coordinator and senior football operations roles. While revolutionary in its explicit acknowledgment of the need for structural intervention, the Rooney Rule's impact has been mixed, revealing both the potential and limitations of procedural approaches to addressing systemic inequality (Saunders, 2026).

Initial Success and Statistical Impact. The years immediately following the Rooney Rule's implementation saw some progress in diversity hiring. Between 2003 and 2011, the number of African American head coaches increased from 1 to 8, representing 25% of all head coaching positions—the high-water mark for Black coaching representation in the league's history (Lapchick, 2023). This period of growth suggested that the policy was effectively expanding opportunity and consideration for minority candidates. Research analyzing hiring decisions during this period indicated that the formal interview requirement was indeed creating meaningful exposure for candidates who might otherwise have been overlooked. Several Black coaches hired during this period, including Mike Tomlin (Pittsburgh Steelers) and Lovie Smith (Chicago Bears), were not initially considered frontrunners but impressed during interviews mandated by the Rooney Rule, suggesting the policy was achieving its intended effect of expanding the consideration set (Collins, 2007).

Procedural Compliance vs. Substantive Change. Despite these initial successes, the Rooney Rule has faced growing criticism for fostering procedural compliance rather than substantive commitment to diversity. Critics have pointed to numerous instances of "sham interviews" where teams appeared to fulfill the letter of the rule while having predetermined coaching selections. A predetermined decision in the Brian Flores interview with the New York Giants is proof positive of the sham interview (Crowley, 2025). The case of the 2003 Detroit Lions, fined \$200,000 for failing to interview any minority candidates before hiring Steve Mariucci, represented an early example of resistance to the rule's intent (Duru, 2019). As the rule became institutionalized, and systemic concerns emerged about teams treating minority interviews as obligatory boxes to check rather than genuine evaluations of merit. This pattern of procedural compliance without substantive commitment manifested in statistics showing that while interview opportunities increased, hiring outcomes began to stagnate and eventually regress. By 2020, the number of Black head coaches had fallen back to three, igniting questions about whether the rule had lost its teeth as teams found ways to comply without embracing its spirit (Reid, 2022). In other words, the perpetuation of exclusion is prevalent and continues.

The concept of "interview fatigue" emerged as veteran minority candidates reported being repeatedly interviewed across multiple hiring cycles without receiving offers, suggesting they were being used to satisfy the rules rather than being seriously considered. Case in point, Eric Bieniemy, a proven and effective offensive coordinator, has still not made the grade. Bieniemy a Super Bowl offensive coordinator has not been approved after several years of productivity. This dynamic created cynicism among some qualified candidates and teams alike, potentially undermining the rule's effectiveness and legitimacy (Braddock et al., 2012).

Recent Modifications and Remaining Challenges

In response to regression in diversity hiring outcomes, the NFL has implemented several modifications to strengthen the Rooney Rule. Recent changes include requiring teams to interview at least two external minority candidates for head coaching positions and at least one external minority candidate for coordinator positions. Additionally, the league has introduced incentives in the form of compensatory draft picks for teams that develop minority coaches who are hired as head coaches or general managers by other organizations (Lapchick, 2023).

These modifications reflect an evolving understanding that interview requirements alone are insufficient without addressing broader pipeline and development issues. However, preliminary data on their effectiveness shows mixed results. While the 2022-2023 hiring cycle showed modest improvement with four minority head coaching hires, sustainable progress remains uncertain. Foundational challenges to the Rooney Rule's effectiveness persist. The rule addresses opportunity at the final stage of the hiring process but does not directly confront earlier pipeline barriers, implicit biases in evaluation, or the network disadvantages that shape which candidates are seriously considered. Furthermore, the rule lacks robust enforcement mechanisms beyond financial penalties that may be insufficient to motivate organizational change, particularly given the economic scale of NFL franchises (Duru, 2019). Most fundamentally, the Rooney Rule operates as an individual-level intervention for what research increasingly recognizes as an organizational and systemic problem (Mujtaba, 2022; Crowley, 2025). While creating interview opportunities for individual candidates represents an important step, sustainable change may require more comprehensive interventions that address organizational cultures, decision-making processes, and accountability structures.

Case Studies: Success Stories and Challenges

Examining specific cases of African American head coaches in the NFL provides valuable insights into both pathways to success and persistent barriers to advancement. These case studies illustrate how individual trajectories are shaped by broader systemic factors while highlighting potential models for change.

Tony Dungy: Breaking Barriers and Creating Legacy

Tony Dungy's career exemplifies both the exceptional qualifications often required of pioneering Black coaches and the transformative impact of success. After a playing career and rising through assistant coaching ranks, Dungy became head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1996. Despite consistently improving the long-struggling franchise and reaching the playoffs in four of his six seasons, Dungy was fired after the 2001 season following playoff disappointments, an example of the heightened performance standards often applied to Black coaches (Smith, 2021).

Dungy's subsequent success with the Indianapolis Colts, culminating in a Super Bowl victory that made him the first African American head coach to win a championship, established his legacy beyond question. Equally significant was Dungy's impact on the coaching pipeline: his staff members, including Lovie Smith, Herman Edwards, Mike Tomlin, and Jim Caldwell, all subsequently became NFL head coaches, creating what researchers identify as one of the few predominantly Black coaching trees in NFL history (Brooks & Althouse, 2013).

The "Dungy Tree" demonstrates the multiplier effect that can occur when African American coaches reach positions of influence and organizational authority, creating pathways for other minority coaches to thrive in the "pipeline." In this scenario, the pipeline was created by a Black coach. What the Dungy example proves is that "connective and strong ties" is essential to inclusion. This pattern aligns with research on organizational diversity showing that increased representation at leadership levels facilitates more diverse hiring throughout organizations. However, the exceptional nature of Dungy's success and influence also highlights the rarity of such pipelines in the broader NFL context.

Mike Tomlin: Sustained Excellence and Organizational Stability

Mike Tomlin's tenure with the Pittsburgh Steelers represents one of the most successful and stable head coaching careers in modern NFL history. Hired in 2007 at just 34 years old, Tomlin became the youngest head coach to win a Super Bowl and has maintained the Steelers' tradition of success with no losing seasons in his first 15 years—an unprecedented achievement (Lapchick, 2023).

Tomlin's case is instructive for several reasons. First, he benefited from the Rooney Rule in a direct but nuanced way—while not initially considered a frontrunner for the position, the mandated interview process gave him the opportunity to impress the Rooney family, the very architects of the diversity policy. Second, Tomlin joined an organization with a strong, stable culture and supportive ownership, factors identified by organizational researchers as critical for coaching success regardless of race. The Steelers' organizational stability and commitment to coach development created conditions that allowed Tomlin to thrive despite early skepticism from some media and fans (Smith, 2021). Tomlin's success challenges narratives about coaching "readiness" and experience requirements that often disadvantage minority candidates. Despite being relatively young and having served just one year as a coordinator before his head coaching appointment, Tomlin has outperformed many more experienced coaches hired during the same period. His case suggests that given supportive organizational contexts and genuine opportunities, the perceived "experience gap" often cited in discussions of coaching diversity may be more constructed than real.

Brian Flores: Legal Challenges and Systemic Responses

The case of Brian Flores represents one of the most significant legal challenges to NFL hiring practices. After being fired by the Miami Dolphins following the 2021 season despite producing winning records in his final two years, Flores filed a class-action lawsuit against the NFL and several teams, alleging racial discrimination in hiring practices. The lawsuit cited specific instances of what Flores described as "sham interviews" conducted to satisfy the Rooney Rule without genuine consideration (Reid, 2022).

Flores' legal action brought unprecedented public and legal scrutiny to the interview practices, decision-making processes, and potential biases operating in NFL hiring. The case highlighted how

even successful coaching tenures by African Americans could be terminated with different standards than those applied to white coaches with similar or inferior records. Additionally, Flores' struggle to secure another head coaching position despite his successful record illustrated the "second chance" disparity that research has identified as a significant barrier to sustained diversity in coaching ranks. The Flores case catalyzed several league-wide responses, including the strengthening of the Rooney Rule requirements and the introduction of the coach accelerator program designed to create more direct connections between owners and prospective minority coaching candidates. However, the lawsuit also revealed the limitations of litigation as a change mechanism in a system where hiring decisions involve subjective judgments protected by significant organizational autonomy (Duru, 2019).

Persistent Pipeline Challenges: The Coordinator Bottleneck

Beyond individual case studies, examination of the broader coaching pipeline reveals persistent structural challenges, particularly at the coordinator level. The increasing emphasis on offensive innovation in the modern NFL has made offensive coordinator experience prerequisite for head coaching opportunities, with approximately 70% of head coaching hires between 2018 and 2023 coming from offensive backgrounds (Lapchick, 2023). This trend has intersected with racial disparities in coordinator appointments to create a significant bottleneck. In 2023, African Americans constituted only about 15% of offensive coordinators despite representing approximately 35% of position coaches—creating a crucial pipeline gap. As of February 2025, there were no Black Offensive Coordinators.

Data demonstrates that the strongest route to the head coach position is gaining sufficient offensive coordinator experience. Historical patterns reveal how Black coaches have been disproportionately channeled into defensive coaching roles and particularly into coaching positions focused on secondary and linebacker units' positions that rarely lead to head coaching opportunities in the current NFL hiring climate (Reid, 2022). This coordinator bottleneck illustrates how seemingly race-neutral shifts in hiring preferences (toward offensive innovators) can interact with pre-existing racial stratification in coaching assignments to produce disparate outcomes. Race neutral processes sometimes corollate with the concept of disparate impact (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2017). It should be noted that treating people differently consciously (disparate treatment) or unconsciously (disparate impact) due to ethnicity or skin color is unconstitutional and illegal as per civil rights laws (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954; Cavico et al., 2013).

Disparate impact can occur when a facially neutral employment practice disproportionately excludes a protected group, such as Black players, from employment opportunities (Mujtaba, 2022). To assess adverse impact on any protected group, human resource professionals and managers can use the Four-fifths rule, which emphasizes that a test has a disparate impact if the hiring rate for the minority group is less than four-fifths (80%) of the hiring rate for the majority group. Table 1 demonstrates a hypothetical scenario of assessing and keeping track of trends on hiring White and Black applicants (for example for an "offensive coordinator" position) to make sure there are no adverse impact on either group of candidates based on ethnicity or skin color since that would be illegal under existing laws.

Table 1: Hypothetical Disparate Impact Analysis using the 80% Rule

	Candidates Pool	Hired	Outcome
White Applicants	40	24	$24 / 40 = 0.6$ (60%)
Black Applicants	20	6	$6 / 20 = 0.3$ (30%)
Impact Ratio			$0.3 / 0.6 = 0.5$ (50%)
<i>Since the impact ratio of 50% is less than 80%, there is sufficient evidence to believe Black applicants are adversely impacted using existing criteria, processes, and procedures in the selection process.</i>			

Addressing this pipeline challenge requires intervention at multiple organizational levels, from entry-level coaching assignments through coordinator promotions and development opportunities.

Comparative Perspectives and Implications

The NFL's struggle with coaching diversity reflects broader patterns across professional sports and organizational leadership. As shown in Figure 2, Black Americans make up a significant portion of the players, but a much smaller portion of the head coaches. Examining this issue within its larger context provides valuable comparative insights and reveals the interconnection between sport-specific challenges and wider societal dynamics.

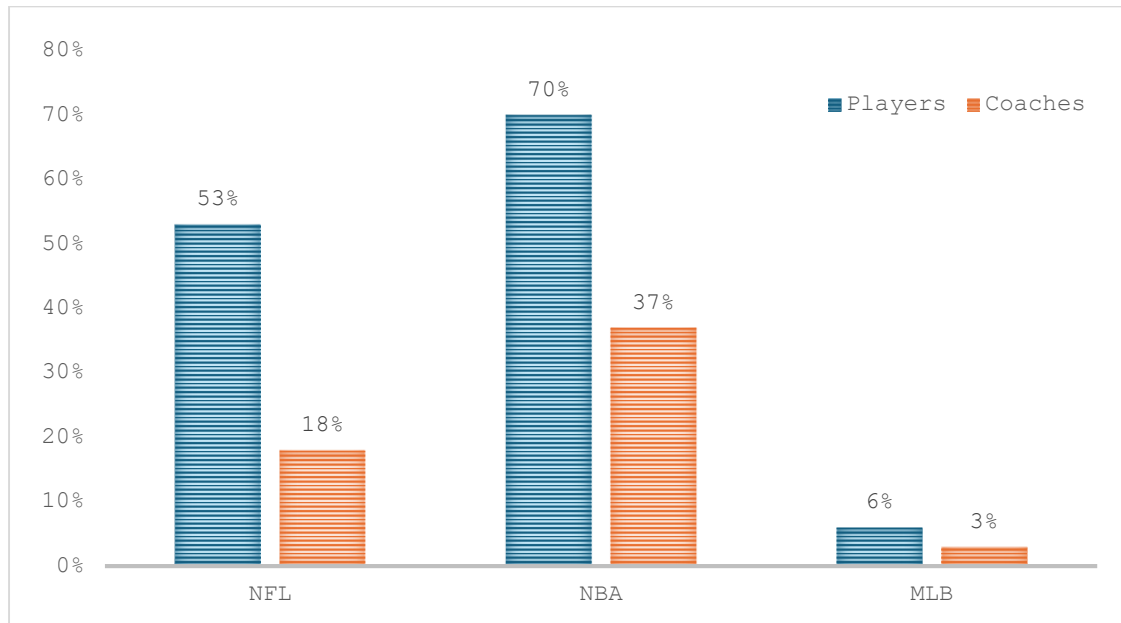


Figure 2: Black American Players vs. Coaching Percentages

(Created by the authors using data from Gough, 2024)

Diversity Patterns Across Professional Sports Leagues

Comparative analysis across major professional sports leagues reveals both common challenges and differing outcomes in leadership diversity. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has maintained consistently higher representation of African Americans in head coaching positions, with Black coaches constituting approximately 40% of head coaches during the 2022-2023 season—a figure much closer to the league's player demographics. This contrast with the NFL suggests that different organizational structures, cultures, and historical contexts can produce significantly different diversity outcomes even within professional team sports (Lapchick, 2023). Several factors may contribute to these cross-league differences. The NBA features greater African American representation in key decision-making positions, including more Black team presidents and general managers who influence coaching hires. Additionally, the pathway from playing careers to coaching appears more accessible in basketball, with former players more frequently transitioning directly into assistant coaching and head coaching roles. The NBA also implemented its own coaching diversity initiatives earlier than the NFL, potentially allowing more time for institutional change to take root (Brooks & Althouse, 2013).

Major League Baseball (MLB) presents a different comparative case, with Latino managers significantly underrepresented relative to player demographics (approximately 30% of MLB players identify as Latino, compared to 10% of managers). This pattern mirrors challenges observed in the NFL, suggesting that minority representation challenges can manifest differently across sports while reflecting similar underlying barriers of network access, implicit bias, and pipeline development (Lapchick, 2023).

Organizational Leadership Beyond Sports

The NFL's coaching diversity challenges mirror patterns observed across industries where leadership demographics often fail to reflect workforce diversity. Research in organizational management has documented similar dynamics in corporate leadership, higher education administration, and public sector management, where progress toward diverse leadership has often stalled despite increasing diversity in entry and mid-level positions, and people do not always speak about it due to fears of retaliation (Wingfield, 2020; Roberts and Mujtaba, 2024).

The concept of the "glass cliff" also appears relevant across contexts, the pattern wherein minorities and women are disproportionately appointed to leadership positions during periods of organizational crisis or decline (Lim et al., 2025; Uru et al., 2024). In the NFL, several African American head coaches have been hired to lead struggling franchises with limited resources or challenging organizational cultures, potentially setting them up for greater challenges than their white counterparts typically face (Braddock et al., 2012). These parallels suggest that addressing diversity in sports leadership may offer lessons applicable to other sectors. Sports organizations, with their public visibility and clear performance metrics, can serve as important laboratories for developing and evaluating diversity initiatives that might subsequently inform approaches in other organizational contexts.

Social Justice and Representation in High-Visibility Leadership

Professional sports occupy a unique cultural position in American society, with coaches and athletes serving as highly visible role models whose influence extends beyond the playing field. This visibility amplifies the importance of representative leadership in sports organizations, as coaching demographics send powerful signals about opportunity and advancement that resonate throughout society. The "see it to be it" principle, well-documented in educational and developmental psychology, suggests that visible representation in leadership positions plays a crucial role in shaping career aspirations and perceived possibilities, particularly for young people (Assefa and Mujtaba, 2025; Delapenha et al., 2020; Morais et al., 2014). When diverse leaders are visible in prestigious roles like NFL head coaching, this representation can challenge stereotypes and expand perceptions of what leadership looks like across domains (Wingfield, 2020). The NFL's struggles with coaching diversity have increasingly intersected with broader social justice movements, particularly following widespread racial justice protests in 2020. During this period, the league's public commitments to racial equity came under heightened scrutiny, with coaching demographics serving as a tangible measure of institutional commitment to stated values. This dynamic highlights how sports leadership has become an important symbolic arena where principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy are tested and contested in highly visible ways (Reid, 2022).

Recommendations and Pathways Forward

Addressing the systemic barriers facing African American coaches in the NFL requires a comprehensive approach, inclusive guidelines, negotiations, and training programs that move beyond isolated policy interventions to engage with multiple organizational levels (Alvarado and Mujtaba, 2023; Crowley and Mujtaba, 2026; Gradwohl and Mujtaba, 2025; Mujtaba and Garner, 2024; Mujtaba and Kuzak, 2023; Wesley et al., 2024). Based on research findings and observed patterns, several promising directions emerge to create sustainable change.

Strengthening Pipelines and Development Pathways

Addressing pipeline challenges represents a critical priority, particularly given the bottlenecks identified at the coordinator level. Specific recommendations include:

1. Targeted coordinator development programs focused specifically on increasing African American representation in offensive coordinator positions. This is a formidable road to becoming a head coach. These programs should provide structured mentorship, skill development, and exposure to offensive system designers traditionally subject to network-based knowledge transfer that has disadvantaged minority coaches (Collins, 2007).
2. Formalized "shadow" coaching opportunities that allow promising minority position coaches to observe and participate in coordinator-level strategic planning and game management. Research indicates that such apprenticeship models can help overcome informal network

barriers that have historically limited access to strategic knowledge (Brooks & Althouse, 2013).

3. Quarterback coach development initiatives specifically designed to increase African American representation in quarterback coaching roles, which have become a primary pathway to offensive coordinator positions and subsequently head coaching opportunities. Only about 10% of quarterback coaches were Black as of the 2022 season, representing a critical pipeline gap (Lapchick, 2023).
4. Partnership with college football programs to create early-career coaching development opportunities for minority candidates, building stronger connections between collegiate and professional coaching pathways. This approach recognizes that pipeline challenges begin before candidates reach the NFL level and require coordinated interventions across the football ecosystem (Duru, 2019).

Addressing Decision-Making Processes and Biases

Beyond pipeline development, addressing the decision-making processes and evaluation biases that shape hiring outcomes represent another crucial intervention area:

1. Structured decision-making protocols for coaching evaluations, that utilize consistent criteria applied across all candidates. Research from organizational psychology indicates that structured approaches to evaluation help mitigate the impact of implicit biases by reducing reliance on subjective impressions (Wingfield, 2020).
2. Bias awareness training for owners, general managers, and others involved in hiring decisions, focused specifically on the documented patterns of bias that affect coaching evaluations. While awareness alone is insufficient, it represents a necessary foundation for more substantive changes in evaluation practices (Rosette et al., 2008).
3. Data-driven performance evaluation that relies on objective metrics rather than subjective assessments when evaluating coaching effectiveness. Expanding the use of advanced analytics in coaching evaluation could help counter narrative biases that often disadvantage minority coaches by attributing success to different factors than those cited for white coaches (Braddock et al., 2012). Of course, while transparently keeping all hiring data for analysis, assessing for adverse impact using the 80% rule can be a good starting point.
4. Expanded involvement in the interview process beyond traditional decision-makers to include diverse perspectives in candidate evaluation. Research on organizational hiring indicates that more diverse hiring committees tend to produce more diverse hiring outcomes, suggesting that broadening the evaluation perspective could help counter implicit biases (Cunningham and Sagas, 2005).

Accountability Mechanisms and Organizational Culture

Sustainable change requires robust accountability systems and broader cultural shifts within organizations:

1. Regular equity audits of team hiring practices, development opportunities, and advancement patterns to identify disparities and monitor progress. These audits should examine not just final hiring outcomes but also promotion patterns, development investments, and opportunities for advancement at all coaching levels (Wingfield, 2020). The development of an oversight committee is necessary.
2. Strengthened Rooney Rule enforcement with more consequential penalties for procedural violations and pattern of non-compliance. Current financial penalties may be insufficient to motivate organizational change given the economic scale of NFL franchises; more significant competitive consequences (such as draft pick penalties) might create stronger incentives (Reid, 2022).
3. Public transparency reporting that makes diverse metrics and hiring patterns visible to fans, media, and other stakeholders. Increased transparency creates external accountability pressure and allows for more informed public discussion of diversity challenges and progress (Lapchick, 2023). Human resource management plays a significant role in achieving translucency in terms of the hiring process.

4. Integration of diversity outcomes into organizational performance evaluations for team executives and football operations leaders. This approach recognizes diversity as a core organizational performance metric rather than a separate initiative, embedding accountability throughout organizational structures (Collins, 2007).

League-Wide Structural Interventions

Beyond team-level changes, several league-wide structural interventions show promise, including the following suggestions:

1. Expansion of the accelerator program that connects minority coaching candidates directly with team owners and decision-makers. Early evidence suggests this program helps address the network disadvantages identified as a key barrier to advancement by creating direct relationships between candidates and those with hiring authority (Lapchick, 2023).
2. Fellowship programs that create entry points and development opportunities are specifically designed to identify and advance promising minority coaching candidates. These programs can help address early pipeline challenges by creating structured pathways into the coaching profession (Duru, 2019).
3. Centralized candidate identification and development managed at the league level rather than relying solely on team-by-team approaches. This coordinated approach could help address the fragmentation and network limitations that currently shape coaching development (Brooks & Althouse, 2013).
4. Financial and competitive incentives for organizations that develop minority coaching talent, potentially including salary cap advantages or draft considerations. While controversial, such incentives recognize the collective benefit of diverse leadership development and could help motivate organizational investment (Reid, 2022).

Summary

The persistent underrepresentation of African Americans in NFL head coaching positions represents more than a statistical disparity—it reflects deeper structural and cultural barriers that limit opportunity, undermine meritocratic ideals, and prevent the league from fully benefiting from its available leadership talent. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond simplistic explanations or isolated initiatives to engage with the complex ecosystem of factors that shape leadership outcomes in professional football.

The progress observed during certain periods demonstrates that positive change is possible when substantive commitment aligns with effective policies. We believe that if the proper metrics are put in place, there will be gains. However, the regression seen in recent years highlights the fragility of progress and the need for sustained, multi-level interventions that address both immediate hiring outcomes and deeper systemic barriers. The experiences of successful African American coaches like Tony Dungy and Mike Tomlin illustrate what's possible when opportunity aligns with ability, while challenges facing others highlight the work that remains to create truly equitable pathways to leadership.

As the NFL continues to navigate these issues, the opportunity exists to transform the league's approach to leadership development and selection in ways that could serve as a model for professional sports and beyond. By confronting implicit biases, strengthening development pipelines, creating robust accountability systems, and fostering more inclusive organizational cultures, the NFL can work toward a future where coaching demographics better reflect the rich diversity of talent that defines the league on the field (Jeffers et al., 2025).

The journey toward more representative leadership in the NFL connects to broader questions about opportunity, meritocracy, and inclusion in American institutions. By addressing its coaching diversity challenges in comprehensive and substantive ways, the league has the potential to contribute not just to more equitable outcomes in professional football, but to more inclusive leadership models across organizational contexts. The persistence of these challenges demands continued attention, innovation, and commitment from all stakeholders invested in creating a more equitable playing field for leadership talent regardless of race or background. The bottom line is ownership and their ability to recognize inequity and unequal treatment. In the year 2024, the NFL

was projected to make over 20 billion dollars. The average team is estimated to be worth 5.7 billion dollars. Due to such high costs serving as an entry barrier, it is going to be difficult to change the posture of ownership in NFL.

The NFL can promote diverse coaches by implementing various strategies, including, but not limited to, establishing clear diversity and inclusion goals, providing training and development programs for underrepresented groups, utilizing diverse interview panels, and considering non-traditional coaching backgrounds. Additionally, the NFL can expand its hiring network to include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions. The Rooney Rule, which requires teams to interview at least one minority candidate for head coaching and senior football operation positions, can also be strengthened and expanded. Furthermore, the NFL can create a pipeline for diverse coaches through its fellowship programs, internships, and assistant coaching positions, ultimately leading to more diverse and inclusive coaching staff.

REFERENCE

- Alvarado, Alexa and Mujtaba, B. G. (2023). The Evolution of LGBTQIA+ Personnel in the American Workplace. *Journal of Business Diversity*, 23(1), 90-101. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jbd.v23i1.6040>; Link: <https://doi.org/10.33423/jbd.v23i1>
- Angelou, M. (2009). *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Random House. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/3924/i-know-why-the-caged-bird-sings/9780812980028/>
- Assefa, E.A. and Mujtaba, B.G. (2025). Exploring transformational leadership in education by leveraging diversity and technology for inclusive practices. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 21(4), 356-375. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-10-2024-0112>
- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Opinion (May 17, 1954). Records of the Supreme Court of the United States; Record Group 267. *National Archives*. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/brown-v-board-of-education>
- Braddock, J. H., Smith, E., & Dawkins, M. P. (2012). Race and pathways to power in the National Football League. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(5), 711-727.
- Brooks, D., & Althouse, R. (2013). Racism in college athletics: The African American athlete's experience (3rd ed.). *Fitness Information Technology*. <https://fitpublishing.com/books/racism-college-athletics-0>
- Cavico, F. J. and Mujtaba, B. G. (2017). Diversity, disparate impact, and discrimination pursuant to Title VII of US civil rights laws: A primer for management. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 36(7), 670-691. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-04-2017-0091>
- Cavico, F. J., Muffler, S. C. and Mujtaba, B. G. (2013). Appearance Discrimination in Employment: Legal and Ethical Implications of “Lookism” and “Lookphobia”. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 32(1), 89-119.
- Collins, B. W. (2007). Tackling unconscious bias in hiring practices: The plight of the Rooney Rule. *NYU Law Review*, 82(3), 870-912.
- Crowley, R. (2025). 36°30: A Question of Citizenship. Group of AMZ Publication: USA Book Author. https://books.google.com/books/about/36_30.html?id=I-qh0QEACAAJ
- Crowley, R. W. and Mujtaba B. G. (2026). Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Public Governance: The Transformation of Black Entertainment and Athletic Excellence in the United States. *Public Governance, Regulation and Law*, 2(1), 1-19. [https://doi.org/10.61093/pgrl.2\(1\).1-19.2026](https://doi.org/10.61093/pgrl.2(1).1-19.2026)
- Cunningham, G. B., & Sagas, M. (2005). Access discrimination in intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29(2), 148-163.
- Delapenha, C., Espinosa, C., Fabre, J., Lemon, P., Gibson, N. and Mujtaba, B.G. (2020). The SAS Institute’s Human Resources Practices in Diversity and Inclusion. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 8(3), 249-265. 10.4236/jhrss.2020.83014.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1994). *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Modern Library ed.). Signet. <https://egps.org/files/uploads/DuBois.pdf>
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg & Co. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Souls_of_Black_Folk
- Duru, N. J. (2019). *Advancing the ball: Race, reformation, and the quest for equal coaching opportunity in the NFL* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

- Gough, Christina (March 12, 2024). Players in the NFL in 2023, by ethnicity. *Statista*. Share of NFL players by race 2023 | Statista
- Gradwohl, C. and Mujtaba, B. G. (March 2025). Training and Development at Deloitte: Best Practices in Retaining Top Talent in a Volatile Job Market. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 15(1), 133-151. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v15i1.22698>
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2776392>
- Jeffers, C. N., Romulo, M. D., Duncan, S., & Mujtaba, B. G. (2025). Talent Management and Monetary Benefits' Impact on Netflix and Stock Performance: A Case Study of Innovative HR Practices. *Financial Markets, Institutions and Risks*, 9(3), 1–16. [https://doi.org/10.61093/fmir.9\(3\).1-16.2025](https://doi.org/10.61093/fmir.9(3).1-16.2025)
- King, M. L., Jr. (1963). *Strength to Love*. Harper & Row. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/strength-love>
- Lapchick, R. (2023). The 2023 racial and gender report card: National Football League. *The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport*. <https://www.tidessport.org/>; <https://operations.nfl.com/updates/football-ops/nfl-releases-2023-diversity-and-inclusion-report/>
- Lawrence, E., Weisfeld-Spolter, S., Tworoger, L., Yurova, Y. and Mujtaba, B.G. (2022). An informed practice for leading change collaboratively. *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 36(6), 19-22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-10-2021-0191>
- Lim, R. Y., Salamzadeh, Y., Mujtaba, B. G., and Vardarlier, P. (2025). The Impact of Responsible leadership on Triple Bottom Line Performance, amid the mediating roles of Workforce Diversity and Organizational Inclusion. *Journal for International Business and Entrepreneurship Development*, 17(2), 237-262. [10.1504/JIBED.2025.10072137](https://doi.org/10.1504/JIBED.2025.10072137)
- Minenko, M. and Mujtaba, B. G. (2024). Diversity Audit at Starbucks: Assessment of Workforce Demography, Inclusion Initiatives, and Corporate Culture. *Business Ethics and Leadership*, 8(3), 173-183. [http://doi.org/10.61093/bel.8\(3\).173-183.2024](http://doi.org/10.61093/bel.8(3).173-183.2024)
- Morais, U. P., Pena, J. Shackel, K., Sintilus, L., Ruiz, R., Rivera, Y., and Mujtaba, B. G. (2014). Managing Diverse Employees at Starbucks: Focusing on Ethics and Inclusion. *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 4(3), 35-49.
- Mujtaba, B. G. (2026a). Developing Workforce Agility, Adaptability, and Cultural Competence in Contemporary Organizations. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 14(1), 408-434. [10.4236/ojbm.2026.141023](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2026.141023)
- Mujtaba, B. G. (2026b). Mindfulness Practices and Artificial Intelligence Convergence Implications: Insights from Dr. Arvind Gudi on Transforming Learning and the Workplace. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 7(1), 24-34. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2026.7.1.31028>
- Mujtaba, B. G. (2025). Performance and disparate impact assessment based on gender in 'managing human resources' course. *International Journal of Law, Justice and Jurisprudence*, 5(1), 89-97. [10.22271/2790-0673.2025.v5.i1b.166](https://doi.org/10.22271/2790-0673.2025.v5.i1b.166)
- Mujtaba, B.G. (2024). The rationale for affirmative action (AA) being overturned by SCOTUS: an informational perspective of its pros and cons for the American dream. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 43(4), 670-692. Link: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-08-2023-0261>
- Mujtaba, B. G. (2023). Affirmative Action Initiatives in Education and Employment: Its Necessity Then, Now and in the Future. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 24(1), 46-54. <https://doi.org/10.1353/gia.2023.a897700>; <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/897700>
- Mujtaba, B. G. (2022). *Workforce Diversity Management: Inclusion and Equity Challenges, Competencies and Strategies* (3rd edition). ILEAD Academy: Florida.
- Mujtaba, B. G., Gudi, A., and Chinta, R. (2025). Mindfulness Benefits and Practices for a Healthy Workforce: Learning from the Design and Management of the Mindfulness Society in South Florida. *Organization Development Journal*, 43(1), 57-78. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15835172>
- Mujtaba, B. G. and Garner, T. D. (2024). Exploring negotiation and mediation options before arbitration or litigation: Which alternative dispute resolution is best for settling workplace conflicts. *International Journal of Law, Justice and Jurisprudence*, 4(2): 50-63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/2790-0673.2024.v4.i2a.125>

- Mujtaba, B. G. and Kuzak, J. (2023). Creating an Anti-Harassment Policy for Workplace Sexual Discrimination. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 11, 51-60. 10.4236/jhrss.2023.111004
- NFL Diversity Report (March 2023). *2023 NFL Diversity and Inclusion Report: Occupational Mobility Patterns in the National Football League*. Volume XII. <https://operations.nfl.com/media/5qwhe0ba/2023-nfl-diversity-inclusion-mobility-report-march-2023.pdf>
- Reid, J. (2022, February 10). What the NFL must do to advance Black coaches now. *Landscape*. <https://andscape.com/features/what-the-nfl-must-do-to-advance-black-coaches-now/>
- Roberts, T. J. and Mujtaba, B. G. (2024). Retaliation in the Modern Workplace and Federal Laws in the United States of America: Cases and Reflections About the Undermining of Employees' Legal Rights. *Journal of Business Diversity*, 24(1), 70-78. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jbd.v24i1.6911>
- Rosette, A. S., Leonardelli, G. J., & Phillips, K. W. (2008). The White standard: Racial bias in leader categorization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(4), 758-777.
- Saunders, A. (March 26, 2026). *Florida attorney general threatens to sue the NFL over "race-based hiring practices."* People.com. <https://people.com/florida-attorney-general-claims-nf-rooney-rule-discrimination-demands-league-suspend-it-11934735>
- Savage, S. V., & Seebruck, R. (2016). RACE, SUPERVISORIAL CHANGE, AND JOB OUTCOMES: Employability Resilience in NCAA Division I College Basketball Coaching. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 57(3), 415–436. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26155694>
- Scott, Kris (April 1, 2021). Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Three Emergent Teams in the NFL. *Platform Magazine*. <https://platformmagazine.org/2021/04/01/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-three-emergent-teams-in-the-nfl/>
- Seebruck, R., & Savage, S. V. (2013). Race, social standing, and legitimation in the coaching profession. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 37(4), 315-339.
- Smith, M. (2021). How to fix the NFL's coaching diversity problem. *The Undefeated*.
- Turner, Ernie and Heng, Tan Swee (2023). *Shared Leadership Disciplines: A Better Way to Lead & Coach*. Candid Creation Publishing: Singapore.
- Uru, F.O., Vardarlier, P., Mujtaba, B. G., and Yozgat, U. (2024). Breaking the Lock through Gender Responsive Workplace Practices in e-Commerce at GittiGidiyor. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 14(2), 156-181. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v14i2.22363>
- Wesley, S., Jackson, K. N., Martínez Ramos, D., Vanbeber, S., & Mujtaba, B. G. (2024). Marriott Hotel's Practices in Mitigating Discrimination Through Inclusionary Employee Resource Groups. *Journal of Business Diversity*, 24(1), 41-56. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jbd.v24i1.6897>
- Wingfield, A. H. (2020). *Flatlining: Race, work, and health care in the new economy*. University of California Press. <https://www.ucpress.edu/books/flatlining/paper>
- X, M. (1998). *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (A. Haley, Ed.). *Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group*. <https://pluralism.org/publications/malcolm-x-alex-haley-autobiography-malcolm-x-new-york-ballantine-1973>

Biographies

Robert W. Crowley holds a master's degree in education with a Specialization in Sports Management, Master of Science in Law and Policy, and a Doctorate in Organizational Leadership with a Minor in Urban Education. I was born two years after the 1954 Landmark decision in *Brown I vs. The Topeka Board of Education*. As such my whole development as a conscious/woke African American male was under the influence of the Civil Rights movement. Therefore, I developed a serious interest in equity and equality through education. My attention to the National Football League is not without good reason. It has been documented that between 65-70% of all NFL players are people of color. I have noticed that in 2023 that the percentage was around 53%. This discrepancy represents another anomaly worth further investigation. The overwhelming concern for this writer is the hiring process that has excluded the hiring of African American Head Coaches that would reflect the number of African American Players. This is the energy that has caused me to explore the causal factors beyond the surface level of apparent racism.



Bahaudin G. Mujtaba is Professor of management, human resources, and international management. Dr. Mujtaba has served as a professor, director, and department chair at the Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University since 2002. Bahaudin was given the prestigious annual “Faculty of the Year Award” twice at NSU. Bahaudin is a certified trainer on topics such as “Situational Leadership” by the Paul Hersey organization, “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” by the Covey Organization, and a “Cultural Competency” trainer through the National Multi-Cultural Institute (NMCI). He has been involved in leadership, management development, and cultural competency education since the late 1990s. Bahaudin worked with Publix Super Markets, Inc. in retail management and as a senior management development specialist in their human resources department for sixteen years. Bahaudin’s research and writing interests are in the areas of human resources, leadership, sustainability, international management, and higher education.

