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College football

Minority coaches are making little progress NCAA president Brand wants more non-whites to be considered for top jobs at major schools.

Michael Marot / Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS -- Myles Brand wants to change the look of college football.

When he watches games, Brand, the NCAA president, often sees the same old picture: white head coaches patrolling the sidelines with coordinators who don't look much different from their bosses.

Brand has spent years using his bully pulpit trying to cajole and lobby athletic directors and university presidents to embrace diversity. Progress has been agonizingly slow, and that's disconcerting to Brand.

"I feel very frustrated about it, and I don't have the legal ability to dictate hiring decisions," he told the Associated Press. "We've put in place everything we can think of that would work." By any measure, the attempts have failed.

The numbers show college football still lags significantly behind the NFL.

Emmitt Thomas became the seventh black coach in the 32-team NFL after recently accepting the interim job at Atlanta. The 119-school Football Bowl Subdivision has six black coaches. Although the NFL adopted the Rooney Rule, which requires each team with a coaching vacancy to interview at least one minority candidate, the NCAA instead has relied on persuasive power.

Of the 17 vacancies in the former Division I-A this year, Houston's Kevin Sumlin and Navy's Ken Niumatalolo were the only coaches of color hired, increasing the number of minority head coaches to eight. Two schools -- Southern Methodist and West Virginia -- are still searching for new coaches.

Historical trends look worse. According to the most recent Black Coaches and Administrators hiring report card, only 12 of 199 vacancies between 1996 and 2006 went to blacks and only 27 black head coaches, including Sumlin, ever have been hired at FBS schools.

Sports sociologist Richard Lapchick, who issues annual grades based on diversity in the pro and college ranks, recently called football the most segregated sport in college athletics.

"Maybe this year we'll get to double figures, who knows," BCA executive director Floyd Keith said. "But I shouldn't be happy with double figures. It's still not right."

Keith has been outspoken about the need for a college version of the Rooney Rule. But Jim Delany, commissioner of the Big Ten, doesn't believe it would work because some candidates would refuse to take what might be perceived as a token interview.

Money matters

Economics are also a problem.

Delany said he believes the big-time money of pro and college sports has made it more difficult to attract first-time head coaches to entry-level positions at smaller schools.

"To take the Youngstown State job or the Temple job or the Kent (State) job or a Division III job or whatever, not to be disrespectful of those schools, but they're considered coaching graveyards," Delany said.

"If you're making \$30,000 or \$40,000 per year, you might take it, but not if you're making \$300,000 per year."

Ron Dickerson, a former Temple coach and one of the few black coaches to lead an FBS school, said the NCAA must mandate changes.

"I said that 15 years ago," said Dickerson, the interim athletic director at Alabama State. "The NCAA makes rules on everything else. They make rules on athletic eligibility and whether someone can enter into an institution, but when it comes to minority coaches or black coaches or female coaches, they're distant."

And he worries that athletic directors and presidents, who are also predominantly white, are more worried about losing money than doing what's right.

"I think we all know what the problem is, and it's the money people who give schools big bucks," Dickerson said. "Unfortunately, the presidents and athletic directors are not making those calls."

Still, some university leaders believe it's their responsibility to make changes.

Robert Foglesong, the Mississippi State president, spent 33 years in the U.S. Air Force and has brought some of his military lessons to the academic world.

"When I was flying a fighter in harm's way, I could care less about the color of skin of my wing man," he said. "I was concerned with whether they were protecting my wing. I wanted him or her to be part of my band of brothers or sisters, and that's the approach we're taking here."

Foglesong never wavered last year when Bulldogs fans grew restless after a third straight three-victory season. He repeatedly said coach Sylvester Croom was "his man." Now, Mississippi State has played in its first bowl since 2000 with the first black coach in Southeastern Conference history.

Buffalo is the only Division I school with a black athletic director, football coach and men's basketball coach. Its president, John Simpson, wants university leaders to make things right.

"I guess when you have this information and this situation where there are so few African-Americans in coaching and in athletic directors positions, when so many of our athletes are African-American, there should be some level of concern among my colleagues," Simpson said.

Others, such as Bowling Green president Sidney Ribeau, the chairman of the NCAA's subcommittee on gender and diversity issues, want conference officials to take the lead.

Delany thinks it would only risk more legal action. But if nothing changes, the NCAA, conferences and individual schools still could find themselves in court.

Legal pressure

In October, the BCA threatened to pursue lawsuits under Title VII civil rights legislation if the numbers don't improve. Keith's organization has pressed for more inclusiveness in interviews, more diversity in hires and more deliberation in searches.

He also criticized Texas A&M and Mississippi for not giving qualified minority candidates a fair chance this year. Those schools spent three days searching for replacements.

Keith isn't the only one who sees hastiness as a problem.

"My sense is we jump a little too quickly," Foglesong said.

"You see somebody or know somebody you think is logical to fill the position and gravitate to them, and that's not always a good thing. You need to look at the big tent, a broader group and let the system work."

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