

PostEverything

## College football is rigged against black head coaches

Fewer than 8 percent of top coaches in the biggest football programs are black.



By Donald H. Yee December 9

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It's the holiday season, and in college football, that's also the season for hiring and firing head football coaches.

Except if you're a black college football coach hoping to be a head coach, it's mostly just the season for firing.

Last week, one of the few black head football coaches in the NCAA's Football Bowl Subdivision, [Ruffin McNeill at East Carolina University, was fired](#). His record was 42-34, along with a 30-18 conference record. The winning percentages, respectively, are 55 percent and 63 percent.

Around the same time, college football writers were [praising the University of Iowa](#) for its patience with head coach Kirk Ferentz, who is being lauded for his performance this year. Ferentz has an overall winning percentage of 60 percent, and a conference winning percentage of 56 percent. Ferentz is in his 17<sup>th</sup> season at Iowa. Before this current 12-1 season, his overall winning percentage was 58 percent — comparable to McNeill's.

Iowa, however, had to endure seasons where Ferentz won one, three and four games. McNeill never won fewer than five. As any knowledgeable college football fan knows, East Carolina's budget is not even half of Iowa's. McNeill's salary at East Carolina wasn't even within the top 60 in the country, while Ferentz has perennially been one of college football's highest paid coaches.

McNeill, clearly, was not treated with the same patience Iowa showed Ferentz.

Tuesday evening, [Bowling Green State University announced](#) that it had hired Mike Jinks, an associate head coach at Texas Tech University, to be the new head coach. With McNeill's firing and Jinks's hiring, there now are only 10 black head coaches among the 128 schools that comprise the Football Bowl Subdivision. That's just under 8 percent, in a sport where the vast majority of the best players are black. (There [were 12 black head coaches](#) before the season started, but three — a quarter — lost their jobs.)

If you're a white football coach aspiring to become a head coach, the climb up that you face equates to one flight of stairs. Of the current FBS coaches, 21 were elevated from within existing coaching staffs when the head coach either resigned or was terminated. Of those 21, 20 are white coaches. If you're black, you'd better hire a good Sherpa, because your climb up is Everest.

That is pathetic and sad. But completely predictable.

It's predictable because the entire decision-making apparatus is dominated by white men, who, as the numbers show, may possess a very, very narrow worldview. Let's start at the top: The NCAA has never had anyone but a white man as president. Of the [Power Five conferences](#), none has ever had anyone but a white man as commissioner.

A [study released last month](#) by the University of Central Florida's Diversity and Ethics in Sport Institute found that 86.7 percent of athletic directors at Football Bowl Series schools this academic year are white. The most highly paid college football coaches work in the Power Five conferences. Of a total of 64 head football coaches in those conferences, 57 — 89 percent — are white.

The corporate headhunting firms hired by universities to conduct head coaching searches are all run, at the top, by whites. The people who shape the news coverage, which is highly influential to the hiring process, are also mostly white. According to the [2014 edition of the Associated Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card](#), which evaluated more than 100 newspapers and websites, 91.5 percent of sports editors, 90.2 percent of assistant sports editors, 83.5 percent of sports columnists and 85 percent of sports reporters were white.

When these statistics are overlaid with numerous psychological studies on hiring practices and unconscious biases that suggest [we tend to favor those who are similar to us](#), it isn't too hard to see why a black coach is going to have a hard time becoming a head coach.

This situation will continue unless one of three things happens.

If the media chooses to awake from its slumber on this issue, change could happen. If ESPN chose to repeatedly investigate and agitate every night on "SportsCenter," it could cause change. But remember, ESPN isn't an independent journalism outfit — it's in business with college football. ESPN literally is a business partner. So it'll take a lot more than just ESPN.

If black coaches choose to be more openly vocal, change could happen. Many black coaches I've spoken with on this issue confront one significant perception issue, however: they don't want to be perceived as the "angry black man." Hence, they generally don't speak up. There are many, many talented and gifted black football coaches who are watching their careers pass with no consideration as a head coach.

Finally, if black college football players ever decided to boycott games, change *will* happen. We just witnessed the power of the football players at the University of Missouri. Their [involvement in a student protest](#) led immediately to the resignation of the chancellor and president.

If black football players decided to take a stand on this issue, and say, refuse to play the College Football Championship game, what could anyone do to them? Mark Emmert, NCAA president, couldn't physically force them to play — there's nothing he could do. Schools could revoke their scholarships, but that would only invite even more protests.

If none of those three things occur, then black college football coaches will simply have to be happy taking their 7 percent of the pie.

Meanwhile, who is rumored to be the next head coach at East Carolina? [One possible candidate](#) is Oklahoma offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley. He's young — and white. And who gave him his first shot as a coordinator?

A black man. Ruffin McNeill.