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### **In Recent Hiring Spree, Black Coaches Win Big—but Still Fall Short**

*By Libby Sander*

In the numbers-crazed world of sports, 13 out of 120 is hardly a statistic to brag about—except when it represents a twofold jump in the number of African Americans leading big-time college football teams. In that case, say advocates who have long protested the lily-white nature of college football's coaching ranks, it's a figure worthy of cautious celebration.

Seven African Americans have assumed head-coaching positions in Division I-A football programs since late November, joining the six others who already lead major-college teams. (In all, at least 20 new coaches filled head-coach vacancies in Division I-A this hiring season.) But even more than numbers, the recent hiring spree has served as an encouraging sign to those concerned about issues of diversity in college sports.

They attribute the changing culture to the visible success of black coaches in the NFL, a pipeline flush with talented assistant coaches in the college ranks, and a focus in recent years on the need for an inclusive hiring process. "It is historic," says Charlotte Westerhaus, vice president for diversity and inclusion at the NCAA. "We've doubled the numbers in one year. But this wasn't done overnight."

First came Larry Porter at Memphis and Willie Taggart at Western Kentucky, both of whom left assistant coaching positions at LSU and Stanford, respectively, for head coaching jobs.

But the wave garnered significant attention when three colleges in the power conferences hired African-American head coaches. In a one-week period, Virginia lured Mike London away from the top job at Richmond, Charlie Strong left his defensive coordinator position at Florida for Louisville, and Turner Gill departed the head coach's job at Buffalo for Kansas. Joker Phillips was also named head coach at Kentucky, where he was formerly a top assistant, and Ruffin McNeill left Texas Tech to take over at East Carolina.

In addition to the 13 African-American head coaches in Division I-A, there are now six African-American head coaches in Division I-

AA, two of whom are new. (Divisions II and III, meantime, have five African-American coaches between them for their combined 362 football programs.)

The grand tally? Twenty-four African-American head coaches at the NCAA's 583 football programs.

"We've turned a corner," Ms. Westerhaus says. "But we're not completely where we need to be."

#### Small Steps

Until this most recent hiring cycle, since 1982 African-American coaches had filled just 5 percent of the nearly 500 head-coaching vacancies in Division I-A, according to research by the organization Black Coaches and Administrators. (All but one of those hirings occurred after 1990.) Nearly half of the division's athletes are black.

By comparison, six of the NFL's 32 head coaches are black. And in the NCAA's other marquee sport, men's basketball, 23 percent of head coaches are.

Still, the latest hirings were good news for Richard Lapchick, director of the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida. For years, Mr. Lapchick and Floyd A. Keith, a former college football coach and the executive director of Black Coaches and Administrators, have tracked the path of African-American assistant coaches and coordinators into the head-coaching ranks. Six years ago, Mr. Keith's group began issuing a [hiring report card](#), meant to evaluate the openness of colleges' hiring practices. They have threatened lawsuits, pleaded with athletic directors and presidents to take more time and cast a wider net in their coaching searches, and even enlisted the help of a well-known former NFL coach, Tony Dungy, to persuade campus leaders.

"We've finally had a breakthrough year," Mr. Lapchick says. "All those things came together at the right moment." But there is room for improvement, Mr. Lapchick says. He would like to see colleges follow what he proposes calling the Eddie Robinson Rule, named after the late coach at Grambling State, in Louisiana. Modeled on the NFL's Rooney Rule, the measure would require colleges to include minority candidates in the interview process. One state, Oregon, has passed a law adopting such a rule for its public colleges and universities, and several others are reportedly considering similar measures.

"The pressures have to be kept up," Mr. Lapchick says, "so the momentum doesn't slow."

African-American Football Coaches in Division I

**Division I-A**

Ron English, Eastern Michigan U.

**Turner Gill, U. of Kansas**

Mike Haywood, Miami U., in Ohio

Mike Locksley, U. of New Mexico

**Mike London, U. of Virginia**

**Ruffin McNeill, East Carolina U.**

**Joker Phillips, U. of Kentucky**

**Larry Porter, U. of Memphis**

Randy Shannon, U. of Miami

**Charlie Strong, U. of Louisville**

Kevin Sumlin, U. of Houston

**Willie Taggart, Western Kentucky U.**

DeWayne Walker, New Mexico State U.

**Division I-AA**

**Nigel Burton, Portland State U.**

Trent Miles, Indiana State U.

Tony Samuel, Southeast Missouri State U.

**Latrell Scott, U. of Richmond**

Tom Williams, Yale U.

Norries Wilson, Columbia U.

**Bold** denotes coaches hired in the most recent cycle.

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