

# The effects of race in sport



Race in sport has had impacts on those who do not identify as white, and whether those impacts are positive or negative still spark some debates. Looking at many cases and statistics, it reveals that there is an underrepresentation of race in certain sports as well as overrepresentation in others. Hockey is largely seen as a one of the white-dominated sports where players from different races are underrepresented; in fact, 93 percent of players in the National Hockey League identify as white while 7 percent identify as other, and this shows an imbalance in representation. However, if we were to look at the National Basketball Association, the opposite is true. Fully 77 percent of NBA players are non-white athletes, while white athletes make up only 23 percent. What we are looking at here is how race is represented in different sports and what messages the race gap provides to society.

People tend to stereotype what types of sport athletes might participate in. For example, African-Americans are often stereotyped as “fast runners,” so people may assume that African-Americans participate in either football or track and field. This common stereotype/misconception may be due in part to the attribution theory: we attribute certain characteristics to people based on their looks, actions, and motives. Many people see track and field as being an African-American-dominated sport, while statistics show that during the 2015 NCAA track and field season, the percentage of African-American athletes was only 22 percent. With these stereotypes there becomes a lot of discrimination towards athletes off the playing field all because of the colour of their skin and the beliefs that some people have and express aloud in racist overtones. Many African-American athletes experience discrimination

and backlash on and off the court, as we see, in popular media with athletes such as Serena Williams, Colin Kaepernick, and many other athletes of colour.

Athletes of colour have always been a minority, but their numbers have been on the rise in the last couple of decades. We see how the underrepresentation of coloured athletes leads to discrimination and stereotyping. Some black athletes have brought politics into their sport because they felt that they were being underrepresented, that they needed to do something to show the world that they are here, and to show people the troubles that they have endured. In 1968, at the Mexico City Olympic Games, two African-American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, on the American track and field team made the podium wearing unzipped jackets to represent “ all the working-class people — black and white — in Harlem who had to struggle and work with their hands all day” (Carlos & Zirin, 2011). The men raised their fists to bring attention to the injustice towards black people in the United States. Their statement would bring light to many more oppressed black athletes wanting change, including American football player Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the American national anthem.

Athletes feeling the need for change, such as the aforementioned Colin Kaepernick, John Carlos, and Tommie Smith, have been known to make statements that become controversial and this has affected their careers, often negatively. Most of these athletes experience oppression, underrepresentation, and/or inequality. This seems to spur from racist overtones of people who make those athletes feel those negative emotions

and feelings because of the colour of their skin. These feelings may lead to suicide; in fact, the suicide rates in athletes tended to be higher at 2.2 percent of black football players than 1.4 percent of white football players (Rao, et al, 2015). The effect that racism has in everyday life and sport dramatically influences the people and players of certain ethnic groups, and this creates troubles for athletes belonging to minority groups, as well as spark feelings of inequality and oppression. Underrepresentation of black athletes and other minority group athletes proves to be a struggle even in today's society. Even after many years of fighting to be seen and heard, society is seeing just a part of the underrepresented athletes of today's sporting world.

#### Annotated Bibliography

Agyemang, K., & Singer, J. (2014). Race in the Present Day: NBA Employees Sound Off on..... Race and Racism. *Journal of African American Studies*, 18 (1), 11-32. Retrieved from..... <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43525532>

Kwame Agyemang and John Singer touch on how racism is present in everyday life and in professional sports including the National Basketball Association. They go into extensive detail on how Barack Obama becoming president led people to believe that racism and its issues are less prevalent than they were before Obama was elected for president. Talk of the NBA and its issues with race and racism and how these have been prevalent since the league's introduction is brought to light. The authors go on to say that the commissioner of the NBA and his executive team have implemented many policies in order to "control" the African-American athletes of the league,

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resulting from fear of that population. They also mention that it seems the NBA is “waging war” against the black athletes and hip-hop culture that made the league become what it is today. The NBA even changed their advertisements to regain their white contingency by replacing Chris Rock in commercials with an old white man. The authors also indicate that the NBA was slowly becoming whitewashed, culturally. Later, the NBA added all-white country music performers at an all-star game, and Agyemang & Singer also discuss the media’s role in getting white people to see black players as aggressive by focussing on the bad behaviours of some players off the court. This reinforced negative views that some people may already have about black athletes as portrayed through media and in general.

Beamon, K. (2014). Racism and Stereotyping on Campus: Experiences of African American Male Student-Athletes. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83 (2), 121-134. doi: 10. 7709/jnegroeducation. 83. 2. 0121

Krystal Beamon’s studies of how racism has brought forth a wealth of evidence for her to support the existence of racial discrimination against athletes in her excerpt about racism and stereotyping. She finds that it is difficult to discuss any area of athletics without noting the variable of race. She also talks about how the illusion that sports are free from racism may be interpreted from current player statistics. However, she finds that on closer examination, racism is actually evident. Although there is an overrepresentation of African-American athletes, she discusses the decision-making duties found in occupations such as ownership, leadership, and management positions and how they are still largely occupied by white males. This study examines the perception of racism by twenty former

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Division I NCAA student-athletes on Division I-A campuses. She presents the data in the form of narratives, as former student-athletes discuss race and sport and the role that racism played in their athletic careers. Beamon shows that even though many decades have passed since the civil rights movement, racism still lingers and negatively affects athletes' abilities on the playing field due to some of the stresses induced by degrading comments received from other athletes, coaches, or non-athletes.

Brooks, S. & Blackman, D. (2011). Introduction: African Americans and the History of Sport New Perspectives. *The Journal of African American History*, 96 (4), 441-447. doi: 10. 5323/jafriamerhist. 96. 4. 0441

Scott N. Brooks and Dexter Blackman talk about the importance of sports to the American society and how sport is evident in the everyday lives of Americans. They find that while most people understand that the probability of a child becoming a professional athlete is slim, Americans still dream of becoming the "one who went pro." The authors go on to examine how black athletic achievement has often been excluded, infantilized, or pathologized. They include experiences of white racism in fields of competition while also talking about how black leaders viewed athletics and African-American athletes as a contribution to the "advancement of the race." The authors mention how the history of African-Americans in sport was not and is still not, a steady movement from exclusion to inclusion. Jackie Robinson is mentioned as an example of a black athlete who helped break down the race barrier in sports, and they show the progression after his re-integration into major league baseball. As well, Brooks and Blackman show the history and the movement of African-American athletes from being segregated, only

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able to compete against each other, to where we are now and how the movement has not been steady but a slow process that has come in bursts.

Carlos, J., Zirin, D. (2011) *The John Carlos Story: The Sports Moment That Changed the World*. Chicago, United States: Haymarket Books.

*The John Carlos Story*, as told by John Carlos and Dave Zirin, describes Carlos' struggles as an African-American athlete at the 1968 Mexico City Summer Olympic Games. Carlos and his fellow teammate, Tommie Smith, took to the podium to protest against their home country of the United States for how they felt it and its people were treating them and all African-Americans and hard-working people who had nothing to show for their efforts. Carlos and Smith stood on the podium with their jackets unzipped to represent all the poor people in America, they covered up the United States flag because they felt that the country was being unjust toward its African-American population, and they raised their arms, Carlos his right and Smith his left, in the air while wearing black gloves to stand up and make a voice for the black people in America and around the world who had been, and were being, oppressed. *The John Carlos Story* is meant to show what the black communities of America, especially the poor black communities, experienced and felt as they were pushed aside by everyone, including the government. The story also shows how being black in America was often onerous, especially during the sixties and seventies.

Cunningham, G. (2003). Already Aware of the Glass Ceiling: Race-Related Effects of Perceived Opportunity on the Career Choices of College Athletes.

*Journal of African American Studies*, 7 (1), 57-71. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819011>

In *Already Aware of the Glass Ceiling*, George Cunningham brings to light the underrepresentation of racial minorities in coaching and upper management positions within much of the sporting world today. He gives us the example of the National Basketball Association, of when seventy-eight percent of player are African-American, while only-thirty four percent of teams are headed by an African-American coach. Cunningham suggests that people without power in organizations (e. g., women and racial minorities) cannot advance to upper level positions because of artificial barriers (i. e., the “ glass ceiling”). Cunningham provides evidence has that there is considerable, theoretical, and empirical support for the presence of a “ glass ceiling” in the career progress of women and racial minorities. His research reveals that the perception of few career opportunities (the glass ceiling) was positively associated with actual turnover and turnover intentions, and negatively associated with job satisfaction, organizational loyalty, and job involvement. George Cunningham’s thesis about the glass ceiling and how race-related effects of perceived opportunity on the career choices of college athletes was that all these studies indicate that it is related to poor work outcomes and that African Americans are more likely than whites to have a glass ceiling serve as a barrier to their career mobility.

Forsyth, J., & Paraschak, V. (2013). The Double Helix: Aboriginal People and Sport Policy in Canada. In Thibault L. & Harvey J. (Eds.), *Sport Policy in Canada* (pp. 267-293). University of Ottawa Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjk9x>. 11

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Janice Forsyth and Victoria Paraschak talk about *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* and how the process was prolonged and set in motion by a formal declaration of support from the federal-provincial/territorial ministers responsible for sport. The writers describe three policies dealing with access and equity issues for underrepresented groups in sport. They see the Aboriginal sport policy in a significant way as it is the one of the main instruments guiding Sport Canada's efforts to tackle the limiting factors that could halt Aboriginal people from gaining access to and maintaining their involvement in sport. Their theoretical work about the double helix consists of the anatomy of a double helix, with its parallel strands stabilized by cross-links: the parallel strands represent the mainstream and Aboriginal sport system, each operating independently of the other, while the cross-links represent the sites where the two systems connect. Though the double helix proposed by Forsyth and Paraschak is not the only way to portray the relationship between the two systems, it was, nevertheless, a central unifying concept throughout discussions related to the development of *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport*. The model Forsyth and Paraschak served as a digressing element forming the way people see the two sport systems in relation to one another, while at the same time providing an effective way of communication about the existence of an alternative sport system, like the sites where Aboriginal sport connects to the mainstream sport model.

Frisby, W., & Ponick, P. (2013). Sport and Social Inclusion. In Thibault L. & Harvey J. (Eds.), *Sport Policy in Canada* (pp. 381-403). University of Ottawa Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjk9x>. 15

Wendy Frisby and Pamela Ponc adhere to the thought of issues that should be considered if and how sport in Canada can become more inclusive. Ponc and Frisby recommend practices for promoting social inclusion as a starting point for re-envisioning new possibilities for Canadian sport, such as not thinking in terms of commonalities that will always exclude some, but, instead, in a way that accepts the diversity amongst us that is based on different historical relations of power, privilege, and the right to contest social norms. As well, they want to see inclusive programs which would combine education with sport and recreational activities, introduce sport that immigrant and refugee youth might have found familiar and popular in their countries of origin, and the use of these as programs to build confidence to learn new sports and recreation activities. Sport and Social inclusion shows how there is a realm of public policy problems that cannot be successfully taken on by traditional approaches, and this is because of problems such as social exclusion which are highly complex. They also contend new approaches - that delegate the government to encourage a more "bottom-up" approach, the sharing of information, and working across organizational boundaries - are crucial to accomplishment, and governments in Canada have key roles to play in promoting social inclusion in sport.

Hughey, M. (2014). Survival of the fastest? *Contexts*, 13 (1), 56-58. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24710833>

"Survival of the fastest?," by Matthew Hughey, provides detail on how media narratives seize upon the notion that black dominance in sport is a biologically determined trait that is intensified by Darwinian winnowing during slavery's harsh conditions. The black "super-body" is constructed by <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-race-in-sport/>

the media of all the black superstar athletes, including Michael Jordan, Michael Johnson, and Calvin Hill. Hughey shows that the media makes, or at least tries to make, people believe that black dominance in sport is purely biological due to slavery's harsh times and Darwin's theory of natural selection. Hughey mentions many different interviews with black sports stars, such as O. J Simpson, in which some athletes stated that blacks are built differently, and they are the way they are because their ancestors developed the strength to endure a lot. Hughey says that what makes the thought of the claims so "obvious" is that it is what people are thought to believe about race, biology, and athleticism. His main points prove that there is no hard evidence that black people are more biologically advanced than people of different races, but the thought of that is a social construct so solidified that we start to believe there is a "better" race.

Rao, A., Asif, I., Drezner, J., Toresdahl, B., Harmon, K. (2015) *Suicide in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Athletes: A 9-Year Analysis of the NCAA Resolutions Database* Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4547116/>

Ashwin Rao and others gathered results from a nine-year study period in which there were thirty-five cases of suicide identified from a review of four hundred and seventy-seven student-athlete deaths during the 3.77 million individual participant seasons. The writers noted mental health concerns of student athletes as an area requiring more attention, citing a gradual increase in suicide rates. They found that the overall suicide rate was 0.93/100,000 per year. Also, they found that suicide represented 7.3 percent (thirty-five out of four hundred and seventy-seven) of all deaths mortality <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-race-in-sport/>

among National Collegiate Athletic Association student athletes; as well, that the annual suicide rate in male athletes was 1.35/100,000 and in female athletes was 0.37/100. The incidence of suicide in African-American athletes was 1.22/100,000, and in white athletes the rate was 0.87/100,000. The highest rate of suicide occurred in men's football (2.25/100,000), and football athletes had a relative risk of 2.2 percent of committing suicide compared with other male, non-football athletes. Their results concluded that the suicide rate in NCAA athletes appeared to be lower than that of the general and collegiate population of similar age. They concluded that male athletes have a significantly higher suicide rate compared to female athletes, while football athletes appear to be at greatest risk.

Sartore, M., & Cunningham, G. (2006). Stereotypes, Race, and Coaching. *Journal of African American Studies, 10* (2), 69-83. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819115>

Melanie Sartore and George Cunningham showed that the purpose of their investigation was to examine the influence of stereotypes held by society along with the presence of discrimination in intercollegiate sports. They did this by investigating whether or not sport-related racial stereotypes influenced promotability ratings of applicants. They also found that, despite the presence of numerous social and governmental forces in place to diversify organizational workforces, there still remains a disproportionate overrepresentation of whites within the upper ranks of organizational hierarchies. Sartore and Cunningham found upon further examination that past and current percentages of African-Americans occupying head coaching positions in many different sports are dramatically lower than their white

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counterparts, and those percentages demonstrate that despite small increases in a select sport such as basketball, African-Americans and other minorities continue to be underrepresented within head coaching positions of high-profile intercollegiate sports. They later note some very popular stereotypes of blacks in sports: African-Americans are often perceived to be physically superior but intellectually inferior. In their end notes, the researchers suggest that the most pervasive stereotypes of African-Americans are structured around evaluations and assumptions of African-Americans' temperaments, physical abilities, and intelligence.