

Racism in professional sports

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Racism is a problem that has existed in our society for many years. The roots of racism date back to when slavery was considered normal, and even further back than that. Racism happens all the time, everyday and everywhere. It is a complex issue which occurs at many different levels. In the world of sports racism is happening more often and becoming more of a concern. The first major example is of Jackie Robinson. Robinson is considered a leader in the black community for breaking the color barrier in the sport of baseball.

Although Robinson went through a great deal of prejudice, many black athletes today face similar problems. The National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, and many other associations are dealing with this problem even still today. Racism doesn't only occur on the field. Today the management side of sports is more racist than the on field part. Racism is a problem that existed in sport when it first originated and continues to exist even in the world of sport today. Racism started in the beginning of sport when there were two separate leagues, the white league and the black league.

It was in 1947, when Jackie Robinson stepped into the white world of baseball, that people noticed this was occurring. At the time no one was concerned with this because everything was segregated back then. " The verbal taunting, physical abuse, and death threats unleashed on him and his family had the 27 year old on the verge of mental breakdown (Guss, 1997). Robinson got through it by ignoring all those comments and using it as the reason he would play, to prove everyone wrong.

He realized that he represented an entire race of people and if he were to explode he would condemn himself and his entire race. " I suffered then because I hoped to provide a better future for my children and for young black people everywhere, and because I naively believed that my sacrifices might help a little to make America the kind of country it was supposed to be"(Guss, 1997). Despite all the negativity, Robinson excelled in the majors by winning the 1947 Rookie of the Year award and helping lead his team to the World Series.

Robinson's perseverance throughout his career is what paved the way for black athletes to make a stand and prove to the world that they can compete with white athletes. After Robinson's career was over the opportunity for black athletes to play on the same level as white athletes had increased greatly. Although Jackie Robinson was discriminated upon half a century ago many black athletes today have to go through similar racism. In Major League Baseball racism is still a concern.

Even though today African Americans are given an equal opportunity to compete, there are still certain people and players that disagree with this. In the same day and age that Albert Belle can earn \$10 million per year, indicating that players are paid based on talent rather than skin color or personality, African Americans failed to make any progress (Guss, 1997). A big controversy that occurred during the 2000 baseball season included Atlanta Braves relief pitcher John Roker. In an interview with Sports Illustrated Roker made many derogatory, sexist, and racist remarks about the city of New York and the people who lived there. For his actions he was

given a 22 game suspension and a reputation in society and throughout baseball as a racist([http://www. spn. go/profile/prifiles. com/mlb](http://www.spn.go/profile/prifiles.com/mlb)).

Another example of racism in modern day baseball involves Marge Schott. " In an interview with Primetime Live, Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott repeated her belief that everyone uses the word nigger. She argued that racism is an invention of the press. Schott had been suspended from baseball for allegedly declaring that 'I'd rather have a trained monkey working for me than a nigger,' and remarking 'Hitler was good in the beginning but he went too far'(Steinberg, 1992).

Schott was punished for her remarks with a \$25, 000 fine, a suspension for one year, and removal from the Reds day to day operations. Baseball chairman Bud Selig wants to make it clear to everyone associated with baseball that racism will not be excepted in this business. From John Rocker to Marge Schott the world of baseball has been altered by their remarks. It was thought that there was racist thoughts in Major League Baseball, but these two actions brought it to the forefront. The chairman definitely made the right move by suspending and fining these two.

By doing that he shows that " racist utterances have no place in the national pastime"(Kirshenbaum, 1993). The National Hockey League is a sport that has been dominated by white players for its entire existence. There is an extremely small percentage of black players in the NHL today. Mike Greer of the Edmonton Oilers is one of these few black players. During one of the games last season Greer was being given a hard time and players kept

yelling racial slurs at him. Another incident that occurred was between Marty McSorley and Donald Brashear.

Donald Brashear, like Greer, is one of the few African Americans in the National Hockey League. The incident that occurred between these two was that McSorley hit Brashear in the face with his stick. This happened toward the end of the game, in which MrSorley was immediately thrown out of the game. NHL Commissioner Gary Bettmann acted quickly by hitting McSorley with a suspension for the remainder of the regular season, which only had twenty three games remaining. This was the longest suspension for any player due to an on ice incident.

On top of that suspension the case was taken to court. " Although McSorley was found guilty by a Canadian court he received only an eighteen months probation, and the offense won't appear on his record if he completes the time without violating the terms of the probation. McSorley is also forbidden to play against Brashear in Canada or the U. S. during the probationary period. As an unrestricted free-agent it's possible no one will sign the 17-year veteran; if they do, he must meet with NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman before being reinstated"(Hardesty, 2000).

Race is an issue everywhere and it always going to be," says Pro Bowl running back Ricky Watters. " It's sneaky now. The owners have to be politically correct now. It isn't fashionable anymore to be a racist. Now they have to kind of go behind the scenes, but believe me it's still there. It's not really something you can explain. It's just a feeling. Just look at how many black head coaches were hired this year"(Guss, 1997). This quote was in

response to the year of 1997 when Sherm Lewis, offensive coordinator for the Green Bay Packers who is African American wasn't even interviewed for a head coaching job.

This is an issue because teams usually look for successful coordinators to be the head coach of their team. Sherm Lewis had just led his team to a Super Bowl appearance, while having his offense lead the league in points and yards per game. On top of this Dan Reeves, former coach of the New York Giants, was offered a head coaching position for the Atlanta Falcons after going 31-33 his last four years. It makes you wonder why a successful offensive coordinator with four Super Bowl appearances under his belt would not get interviewed while another man with a poor record would be given a head coaching job.

As NFL's all time sack leader Reggie White puts it, " There is racism in the NFL. There are teams who have problems with black coaches and black quarterbacks"(Guss, 1997). Racism does exist in every aspect of life. From earlier times to more recent times it is obvious that racism is a part everyday life. When Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in sports in 1947 he had imagined that by today things would have changed significantly, and to some extent they have. Even though African Americans are now allegedly offered similar treatment in sport, they are still treated differently.

In all sports there is a very small percentage of African American coaches and managers. In some cases the black coach has had a much better resume, but still not given the job. This is the world we live in today. Racism is still a problem and will continue to be until their are changes made in the

front office. As Hank Aaron says, " It's a closed society in many ways. We will still have some problems in sports, no question about it. I want people to realize that we still have a long way to go"(Guss, 1997).