Racism in sports and its impact on managers and coaches

Sport & Tourism

ABSTRACT

This paper explores onracismin British sports. It will consider the extent to which racism in sports continues to prevail and the impact that racism may have on a sports coach or manager. This will include a brief review of the history of British sports, in particular, the presence of ethnic diversity in the British society and the involvement of this diversity in British sports.

The paper will also examine the main currents of sociological thought which have informed research in this field. It will consider some of the common perceptions of sports in the discussion of racism in sports and argue against the notion of any one body of thought being viewed as universal. The paper will point out that Success in sports is a result of a complex interplay of factors includingmotivationand access to opportunities and that the physiological differences between races have very little bearing on the performance of the individual.

INTRODUCTION

Sport is often known to many people as a place where normal problems of the " real" world cease to exist. Many believe the sports world to be a model of race relations. Through display via the television and any other media coverage, it is seen by most fans that it doesn't matter whether one is black or white, what matters in the playing field is one's ability. Hence, sport is seen by many as a paradigm of how an integrated society should look (Bradley 2006).

However, a closer look at sports reveals that this idyllic picture is misleading. Although majority of the players in professional sports are the African-Americans, this doesn't imply absence of racism. For example, the African - Americans are underrepresented in administrative ranks and coaching (Jarvie & Reid 1997). Also some popular arguments serve to contribute to prejudices, myths and stereotypes about different racial groups hence leading to theirdiscrimination.

In this analysis we explore on the extent to which racism in sports continues to prevail and the impact that racism may have on a sports coach or manager. We shall begin our analysis by defining what we mean by racism and conduct a review of the history of British sports, in particular, the presence of ethnic diversity in the British society and the involvement this diversity in British sports

WHAT IS RACISM?

Racism is defined as any form of discrimination which may be in the form of restriction, distinction, exclusion or preference of a group of individuals based on their race, colour, descent and ethnic origin. This has the effect of impairing or nullifying enjoyment, recognition or exercise on the same footing of fundamental rights in various fields of public life (CRE 2004).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The British society has long been characterized by ethnic diversity. This diversity is attributed to historical reasons such as invasion, expansion and the role of Britain as a haven for those fleeing from persecution (British

council 2003). In order to understand the relationship between ethnicity and sport, we must first review the history of Black and Asian immigrants into the UK.

The black presence in the UK can be traced back to the Roman times. During the 3rd century, a small group of the Roman army, an African division, was deployed at Hadrian's Wall and the Blacks entering Britain were limited to a small number by the Elizabethan parliament (British council 2003). Till the mid-20th century, Immigrationinto ports like London, Bristol, Cardiff and Liverpool was limited to a small number blacks, Asians, and Chinese people (British council 2003).

Blacks' involvement in British sports was first noticed after America gained its independence (1775-1783) (British council 2003). In boxing, for example, Randolph Turpin who emerged as the world middleweight champion in 1951, following his victory over the great Sugar Ray Robinson was known to be the black boxer of the era (British council 2003). In athletics, the British Caribbean gave a name to their sprinters towards the end of the 19th century up to the late 1950's. Cricketers too were there including Learie Constantine for Trinidad, who played between the wars in Lancashire (British council 2003).

IMPACT OF POST-WAR IMMIGRATION (1945-70)

After World War II, Britain experienced several waves of immigration, with 492 jamaicans migrating to Tilbury Docks in 1948 followed by the Asians and West Indians (British council 2003). By 1958, the number of West Indians and

Asians in Britain were about 125000 and 55000 respectively (British council 2003). These immigrants were largely welcomed by the NationalHealthService, and the transport, textile and service industries in efforts to rebuild Britain's shattered economy.

A final major phase of immigration occurred during the periods between 1968 and 1974 which saw over 70, 000 Kenyan and Ugandan Asians immigrating to Britain (British council 2003). By 1974, the number of Black and Asian immigrants in Britain was more than one million (British council 2003). Today, it is claimed that the official government figures for minority ethnic groups in the UK stands at around 3. 3 million Britons, a figure just below 6% of the British population (British council 2003).

RACIAL TENSIONS

With new immigrants in Britain, accommodating them then became a major problem with most of them settling in poor and inner-city areas. Prejudice and discrimination then became a feature of the immigrant experience. With immigrants concentrated in the poor and inner-city areas, racial tensions then became a feature of the British society with areas such as Notting Hill and Nottingham having the worst riot experiences of 1958 (British council 2003).

Subsequent racial tensions were later seen during the 1979 and 1985 in parts of Liverpool, Bristol, and London as well as in many poor inner-city areas (British council 2003). Up to date, verbal abuse, harassment and oppression are still features of experiences of some minorities in Britain.

More insidious, are the stereotypes, racial comments and racist beliefs that continue to become prevalent in British sports.

RACISM IN SPORTS

Both the law and common morality require all citizens in the public sphere to be provided with equal opportunities regardless of the race, sex, gender, national origin, age, creed or disability; yet racism continue to remain a common feature of the day (Bauman 1997). Racism still remains prevalent in most fields of public life, sport is no exception.

Common arguments have often suggested sports as producing prejudices, myths and stereotypes that lead to discrimination and under-representation of certain groups of individuals in sports. Racial stereotypes remain firmly rooted in sports with a popular notion that the Blacks are in general more masculine and athletic than the whites (McDonald & Birrell 1999). Their over-representation in certain sports is indicative of this and the media representation emphasizing their inherent physicality reinforces this perception.

This has resulted in the view that the black and white are biologically different and that the dominance of the Blacks in certain sports is a result of their perceived genetic advantages, yet there is no convincing scientific proof of this (McDonald & Birrell 1999). These stereotypical notions do not recognize wide with-in group variations and falsely make fixed and unambiguous assumptions of biological divisions.

SUBTLE RACISM IN SPORTS

The tendency to providing an explanation of the success of Black in sports solely in terms of inherited factors, thereby devaluing their achievements, is indicative of subtle racism (Garland & Rowe 2001). The success of the Blacks in sports is often attributed to their physicality and a lack of cognitive endeavor while, on the other hand, the success of whites in sports is equated with dedication, intelligence, qualities of character, dependability and work ethics (Bradbury 2003). These apparent assumptions serve to reinforce some form of subtle racism in sports.

REVERSE RACISM

There is a general consensus that racism against the Blacks remains prevalent and that the white players rarely experience any form of racism in sports. This is however not true as there is a growing body of evidence that contradicts this belief. In fact, there are certain identity codes within the footballculturethat carry with it racial meanings.

An illustrative example is the song " I'd rather be a paki than a scouse" which is often sung to Liverpool fans by fans from Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal (Back et. al. 2001). The song is directed at Merseyside fans with the intention of demoting the status of those that come from Merseyside from being a normal English society to one that is frowned upon (Back et. al. 2001).

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Attempts have however been made to confront racial distinctions in the society. One of the frameworks established to challenge racism in the society

is the Critical Race Theory (CRT). This framework has some utility for anti-racism in sport. CRT is an important theoretical tool that provides antiracists with a framework that challenges narrow race thinking, orthodoxies and under-theorized approaches in sport, hence strengthening their praxis in what critical race theorists view as a racist world (Hylton 2008).

In simple terms, the CRT provides antiracists with a framework from which they can examine the prevalence of racism in the society where in the whites are privileged to the disadvantage of the blacks. It recognizes and acknowledges the voice of the blacks who are often marginalized in practice and mainstream policy (Hylton 2008). Two areas of convergence between anti-racists and critical race theorists are the focus onsocial justiceand transformation. The CRT challenges institutional arrangements in sport, both present and past, that subjugate, racially discriminate and oppress (Hylton 2008).

ETHNIC AND RACIAL DIVERSITY IN SPORTS

As we have identified in the previous sections, there is the popular notion of the blacks as more inherently superior in physical ability than the whites. This is evident in their over-representation in high profile sports. For example, distance running is dominated by Kenyans and an African American is 28 times more likely than a white individual to reach NBA and 15 times to reach the NFL (Turner & Rasmussen 2003).

The trend is also reflected within the contemporary British society where, despite accounting for less than 2% of the overall population, the Blacks

dominate with at least 50% of the British athletic squad, boxing champions, and first division basketball players (Turner & Rasmussen 2003). Also, one in five professionalsoccerplayers is more likely to be an African American (Turner & Rasmussen 2003).

Their overrepresentation is even more notable in athletics. Until the 1960s, most of the sprint champions came from the white group (Turner & Rasmussen 2003). Today, however, sprinting is dominated by the Blacks who hold 95% of the top times globally (Turner & Jones 2010). Majority of the gold winners at the Atlanta games of 1996 were the Blacks. Also, almost all of the runners who have broken the 10-second barrier for 100 metres have been the Blacks (Turner & Rasmussen 2003). On the contrary, however, they have underachieved inswimmingrelative to the whites. Inevitably, people draw conclusions from what they see, resulting in popular mythology and stereotypical views about the blacks.

Research into group or individual differences have in general concentrated around the issue of nature vs nurture (Sugden & Bairner, 1999). That is, the extent to which difference between groups can be explained from the biological perspective or as a result of environmental conditions such as access and opportunity. Where emphasis is placed on the environmental factors, the assumption is that the difference can be modified. Where emphasis is on the biological factors, it is assumed that the differences are stable and unchangeable (Sugden & Bairner, 1999).

However, actual evidence for genetic superiority in sports is scant and often flawed. The running superiority in Blacks has been speculated as a result of

less subcutaneous fat and larger muscle mass (Daryl & David 2010). This has also been used to explain their lack of success in swimming due to buoyancy. However, had this theory of buoyancy been valid, then we would have more women superior to men, and endomorphs to ectomorphs (Daryl & David 2010). Clearly, this is not the case.

In the actual sense, success can be attributed to the adaptive qualities resulting from strenuous training and cultural values (Roche 1998). There is need for an approach that recognizes that a range of factors must come into play including motivation and access to opportunities. The physiological differences between races have very little bearing on the performance of the individual.

IMPACT OF RACISM ON SPORTS COACHES

Racism in sports certainly creates insurmountable problems as they exert powerful influences on a person's perception, sports coaches are no exception. For example, sports positional roles may be allocated depending on racial stereotypes. Racial stereotypes, within the sport dynamics, are apparent through stacking, a phenomenon where athletes are assigned certain playing positions by the coach based on the supposed racial attributes such as power and speed rather than actual achieved performance (Turner & Jones 2010).

More often, the Blacks have been relegated to positions associated with physical rather than mental prowess, while the white athletes have been relegatedleadershippositions (Turner & Jones 2010). Research has shown

that the stacking of the Black players to positions that emphasize physical rather than mental prowess, especially in games such as rugby and soccer, has become a common occurrence in the UK (Turner & Jones 2010).

Public pronouncements of managers and coaches have tended to perpetuate crude racial stereotypes. For example, in 1993, Ron Noades-chairman of Crystal Palace at the time- made some racial remarks in an infamous television documentary about his football team which was predominantly black (Bose 1996). As quoted in Bose (1996: p. 84), Ron stated that " when you are getting into midwinter in England, you need a few of the maybe hard white men to carry the artistic black players through". While manager at Queens Park Rangers (QPR), Jim Smith was noted claiming that the black players used very little intelligence and that their success in sports was due to their sheer natural talent (Cashmore 2003).

These stereotypes are further perpetuated by the media through their reporting that emphasizes on the physicality rather than qualities such as effort, courage, and intelligence. The most notable example can be seen when the tabloid press picked on Linford Christie's photograph in a tight fitting shorts and ran a crude sexual reference to his anatomy, based on the stereotype that blacks were more masculine and physically fit than the whites (British council 2003).

Racism in sports is also evident through the underrepresentation of blacks in management positions. Despite the large representation of blacks in British sports, it is apparent that management and leadership positions are rarely made available to them. Only a few of them hold management positions, for

example John Barnes who was previously the Liverpool winger is now in charge of managing Celtic (British council 2003). Similarly, very few positions are made available to the Black and Asian referees, with an exception of Uriah Rennie, who is currently on the Football League list (British council 2003).

CONCLUSION

As identified above, racial stereotypes remain firmly rooted in sports with the popular notion that the Blacks are naturally athletic and more masculine than the whites. These stereotypical notions do not recognize wide with-in group variations and falsely make fixed and unambiguous assumptions of biological divisions.

Moreover, these stereotypes are further perpetuated by the media through their reporting that emphasizes on physicality before qualities such as intelligence, courage and effort. In addition, public pronouncements of managers and coaches have tended to perpetuate crude racial stereotypes. More often, the Blacks have been relegated to positions associated with physical rather than mental prowess, while the white athletes have been relegated leadership positions. Also some popular arguments serve to contribute to prejudices, myths and stereotypes about different racial groups. Clearly, racism is still a feature of the British sports.

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