

ANTI-RACISM IN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

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Chapter 2

Roadmap to Racial Equity in Youth and Interscholastic Sports: Advancement for Blacks in Sport as an Anti-Racism Framework in Sport Organizations

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Abstract

After the killing of George Floyd, individuals, and organizations from diverse backgrounds (re)committed to addressing racial justice issues in America. However, there is evidence the so-called racial reckoning may not have reached every area of society. For example, Black athletes are still overrepresented as players in selected sports and underrepresented among sport managers. The implications of the mismatches are far reaching and discussed in this book chapter. Derrick Bell's concept of Racial Realism helps explain why racism in sports persists and why the Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA) approach is needed in youth and interscholastic sport organizations, especially as the approach relates to young Black athletes. It is argued that Advancement for Blacks in Sports (ABIS), Inc., an anti-racism nonprofit organization, utilizes the EAB approach and serves as a model for organizations interested in anti-racism programming. The article calls for the expansion of EBA beyond collegiate sports.

Keywords: youth sport participation, racial disparities, White backlash, radical realism, interscholastic sport

After the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, individuals, and organizations from diverse backgrounds (re)committed to addressing racial justice issues in American social institutions, including in sports ("Natasha Cloud Rightfully Calls Out Bradley Beal; WNBA Fights for Real Change," 2021). However, there is evidence the racial reckoning that some claim took place more than a year ago, may not have reached every area of society (Lapchick 2020). For example, Black athletes are often overrepresented as players in sports such as football and men's basketball, and underrepresented among sport managers, including athletic directors and coaches. The implications of the disparities are several and far reaching.

First, young Black athletes, particularly Black males, may be less likely to be treated holistically. Sports are viewed as hyper-masculine and Black males, in particular, are often negatively stereotyped based upon various physical characteristics. Second, young Black male athletes may lack the support required to combat anti-Black sentiments from multiple sources. These sources may include institutional disparities and negative stereotypes and unequal treatment by sports fans, media, and administrators. Young male athletes may lack the emotional support required to cope with challenges they face as athletes and as students. Third, young Black male athletes will likely miss out on much needed advocacy and empowerment related to the historic and contemporary exploitation of Black labor, including with respect to monumental changes in name, image, and likeness (NIL).

Derrick Bell's (1992) philosophy of Racial Realism helps us understand why racial inequities persist in sports even after perceived periods of racial progress. Advancement for Blacks in Sport (ABIS), Inc. is a

nonprofit organization working to address racial inequities in sports and provides an ideal framework for mobilizing others to tackle the tough problem that is racism in America, especially as it relates to Black youth and sport organizations (weareabis.org). What is needed is greater racial equity in youth and interscholastic sports and the Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA) approach, while created for collegiate athletes, I argue, is appropriate for athletes in youth and interscholastic sports particularly Black male athletes in football and basketball (Cooper, 2016).

Race and Youth Sports Participation

According to a recent study conducted by The ASPEN Institute, about 40% of children between the ages of 6 and 12 played a team or individual sport in 2019. In 2018, about 35% of Black children between the ages of 6 and 12 played a team or individual sport compared to 38.9% in 2012. About 40% of White children between the ages of 6 and 12 played a team or individual sport in 2018 and 44% in 2021 (ASPEN Institute, 2021).

The pandemic halted many activities in America and around the globe in the early part of 2020. A 2021 report from The ASPEN Institute found about 44% of families reported that their local communities either merged, closed, or returned to limited capacity (ASPEN Institute, 2021). The report also found that Black parents were more worried about their child's sports leading to illness than White parents (ASPEN Institute, 2021). Almost 32.7% of Black youth reportedly less interest in the sport they played before the pandemic compared to 28.1% of White youth (ASPEN Institute 2021). Moreover, the reported showed that 42% of Black youth resumed sports at a lower level than they were playing before the coronavirus pandemic (ASPEN Institute, 2021). Finally, the report revealed more White parents (72%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their children's coaches than Black (53%) and Hispanic (59%) parents (ASPEN Institute, 2021). The cumulative data shows despite the pandemic, sports are remain important (albeit to varying levels across groups) and the race of parents and coaches may matter when assessing satisfaction with participation in youth sports. There are often racial differences between Black parents and children and the coaches. There is evidence that explains how this does not happen by chance, but rather by design.

Racial Disparities among Sport Managers

Longstanding racial disparities among sport managers, including athletic directors and coaches, across sports remain persistent across all levels of participation (youth, interscholastic, intercollegiate, and professional) (Lapchick, 2021). According to an article published on The Undefeated (theundefeated.com) by Jamal Murphy, former grassroots basketball legend and current head high school basketball coach Lou Richie was on a crusade to draw attention to the absence of Black coaches and the need for change (Murphy, 2021). Richie was apparently inspired to act after the killing of George Floyd. After a failed attempt to picket during a men's college basketball game, Richie exchanged his sign for a t-shirt with the message that read "Black Head Coaches Matter", and proudly wore it to a women's college basketball game. Richie commented,

Now I can walk in and people can still see it and people can still think about it. I can still tweet it and I don't have to worry about a police officer putting his hands on me or pulling his gun on me, because it's a peaceful protest, but it is a shirt and it's nonthreatening, so there's no way someone could ask me to leave with my shirt on...the hiring process needs to be more equitable and transparent. (Murphy, 2021)

Murphy's assertions are evident in a simple review of publicly available data. For example, a review of a website containing all high school Athletic Directors in the State of Louisiana, by the author, particularly in parishes with relatively large Black populations, found most Athletic Directors were both White and male (<https://www.lhsaa.org/lhsada>). The absence of Black coaches and Black athletic directors,

for example, may be due to several barriers. These barriers may include homogeneous social networks, which privilege White males. The graduation rate gaps between Blacks and their peers could also serve as a barrier for why the disparities exist given that many of the college and professional sport leagues either require or prioritize candidates with college degrees and coaching experience. Stereotypes regarding the inability of Black people to lead may also serve as a barrier to greater racial equity among coaches and athletic directors.

The underrepresentation of Black people as sport managers over time is well documented, including in youth, college, and professional sports. Dr. Richard Lapchick and his team at the University of Central Florida (UCF) have analyzed data on race and gender trends in sport leadership positions for several decades (Lapchick, 2021e). In a recent report, the researchers found ongoing racial and gender differences in both college and professional sports. For example, despite all the great athlete activism conducted by the predominately Black players in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), there remains a lack of diversity among coaches and senior administrators (Lapchick, 2021e).¹ Over 74% or 105 of WNBA players identified as Black in 2021 compared to 69% or 100 a decade earlier. Of the 12 head coaches, 7 or 58.3% identified as White in 2021 compared to 5 or 41.7%, which was largely unchanged from 2011 (Lapchick, 2021e). In 2021, over 66% or 10 of the owners were White compared to 13.3% or 2 of the owners who identified as Black (Lapchick, 2021e). A decade earlier all the owners were White (Lapchick, 2021e). Seventy-five percent or 9 of the CEO/Presidents in the WNBA identified as White compared to 3 or 25% Black CEO/Presidents in 2021 (Lapchick, 2021e). In 2011, all but one of the CEO/Presidents in the WNBA was White. Nearly 80% or 50 of Vice Presidents and Above in the WNBA identified as White in 2021 (Lapchick, 2021e). Over 90% or 34 of Vice Presidents and Above in the WNBA identified as White in 2011 (Lapchick, 2021e).

Black coaches and administrators were also underrepresented in the National Basketball Association (NBA) where during the 2019-2020 over 74% or 385 of the players identified as Black (Lapchick, 2021c). For the 2009-2010 season, almost 80% or 339 of NBA players identified as Black. Nearly 90% or 31 of the majority and controlling owners were White in the data analyzed for the 2019-2020 season (Lapchick, 2021c). Almost all the majority and controlling owners in the 2009-2010 season were White (Lapchick, 2021c). There were 0 Black majority and controlling owners in the 2009-2010 season and 1 in the 2019-2020 season (Lapchick, 2021c). Seventy percent or 21 of NBA coaches were White, according to the data analyzed for the 2019-2020 season which was relatively unchanged from the 2009-2010 season (Lapchick, 2021c). Forty-nine or 89.1% percent or 30 of NBA CEO/Presidents identified as White based upon the most recent data (Lapchick, 2021c). Eighty-eight percent or 30 of the NBA CEO/Presidents were White ten years earlier (Lapchick 2021c). Eighty-seven percent or 20 of NBA General Managers were White in 2009-2010 compared to 72% in 2019-2020 (Lapchick, 2021c). Previous literature on racial stacking, tasking, and stereotypes associated with Black intellectual and leadership abilities account for the ongoing observed disparities (Martin 2015).

Almost sixty percent or 967 of players in the National Football League (NFL) identified as Black during the 2020 season compared to 67% or 1714 in 2010 (Lapchick, 2021d). Similar to the WNBA and the NBA, Black people were underrepresented in head coach and senior administrator positions (Lapchick, 2021d). In 2010, 81% or 26 of 32 of the NFL head coaches were White compared to 87.5% or 28 of 31 in 2020 (Lapchick, 2021d). There were three Black head coaches in 2020 and six Black head coaches in 2010 (Lapchick, 2021d). One NFL CEO/President was Black in 2020 (Lapchick, 2021d). In 2010, there were no Black CEO/Presidents in the NFL (Lapchick, 2021d). Two of the thirty-one General Managers in the NFL were Black in 2020 (Lapchick 2021d). There were five Black General Managers in the NFL ten years prior (Lapchick, 2021d).

The findings were not much better for college sports where Black players constituted a substantial portion of the athletes in basketball (men's and women's) and football (Lapchick, 2021a). In 2019-2020,

1 Raw numbers and percentages are provided when included in the original source.

more than half of the male athletes in Division I basketball (53.2%) and 44.6% of football players were Black (Lapchick, 2021a). Ten years earlier, 58% of basketball players were Black and 42% of football players were Black (Lapchick, 2021a). Almost 42% of women's basketball players in Division I identified as Black in 2019-2020, whereas Black women made up 47.5% of all Division I basketball players in 2009-2010 (Lapchick, 2021a).

Contrarily, the report revealed 75.5% or 249 of Division I men's basketball head coaches were White 2019-2020 (Lapchick, 2021a). Almost 90% or 209 of Division I football head coaches were White during the same year (Lapchick, 2021a). A decade earlier, 78% or 242 of Division I men's basketball head coaches and almost 91% or 196 of Division I football head coaches were White (Lapchick, 2021a). Less than 25% or 75 of basketball head coaches were Black (Lapchick, 2021a). Only 8% or 19 of football head coaches were Black in 2019-2020 (Lapchick, 2021a). In 2009-2010, about 20% or 64 of basketball head coaches and less than 7% or 15 of football head coaches were Black (Lapchick, 2021a).

Less than 20% or 53 of Division I women's basketball head coaches were Black and only 14% or 46 of the Black head coaches were Black women (Lapchick, 2021a). In 2009-2010, 13.6% (42) of women's head coaches were Black and of that number, 11% or 34 were Black women (Lapchick, 2021a). Black women often have to deal with stereotypes that serve as barriers to become head coaches including the angry Black woman stereotype. Black women may also lack the representation required to access networks that have historically been closed to them (Black Female Coaches: A Players' Tribune Roundtable, 2021).

About 10% or 29 of the College Athletic Directors for Division I sports identified as Black in 2019-2020 (Lapchick, 2021b). Ten years prior, less than 7% or 19 of the College Athletic Directors for Division I sports were Black (Lapchick, 2021b). Almost 80% or 258 of the Senior Women's Administrators in Division I sports were White compared to 14.2% or 46 who identified as Black in 2019-2020 (Lapchick, 2021b). A decade ago, 84.5% or 262 of Senior Women Administrators for Division I sports were White and 9.7% or 30 were Black (Lapchick, 2021b).

The data clearly show that while much has changed much has remained the same. Black people are far more numerous among athletes than among those with decision-making authority. This is the case in both college and professional sports. It is also true for Black people when gender is considered. What is needed is greater equity in sports which may best be achieved by addressing the policies and private practices that perpetuate racial disparities in one of America's most beloved pastimes—sports.

After the killing of George Floyd, many athletic departments created new positions and initiatives to address ongoing racial inequities (Elfman, 2021). Some of the positions and initiatives addressed equity issues broadly, but few focused primarily on Black people and/or anti-Black sentiments. There was a clear backlash in the broader U.S. society that followed the increased attention concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion including elected officials and many ordinary White citizens. Perhaps this was best manifested in the misrepresentation of critical race theory and related efforts to ban the teaching of the history of race relations in America, especially the mistreatment of Black people through the operation of various social institutions as well as at the hands of ordinary White citizens (Ray & Gibbons, 2021).

Racial Equity and White Backlash

The backlash aimed at the increased attention to anti-Blackness was not restricted to the classroom. News reports of ongoing anti-Black sentiments were published on many platforms and included the mistreatment of young Black athletes (Dow, 2021). For example, PIX11, a news station based in New York City, reported on November 22, 2021, that a young Black male baseball player left a New Rochelle prep school after the Assistant Athletic Director reportedly commented that he 'gained that speed by running from the police' (Dow, 2021). The racist statement assumed inherent criminality merely because the young man was Black. The young man, Tony Humphrey, was already committed to play for Boston

College (Dow, 2021). Humphrey joined the track team to become an even better athlete. He transferred from the prep school to an area public school. According to the news report, Humphrey experienced numerous encounters with racist treatment from peers and teachers dating back to his freshman year at the school (Dow, 2021). He stated how he shared his experiences with school administrators and no action was taken. In spite of the lack of support from administrators, Humphrey was supported by other students at the prep school who staged a walkout. The school sent out a letter indicating they were going to conduct an internal investigation and contended that ‘Such comments go against the very mission of the school to develop moral and ethical leaders. It is behavior that Iona Preparatory does not condone for its students and will not accept from its faculty and staff’ (Dow, 2021). The assistant Athletic Director resigned and the community was notified in the letter. This type of response often follows racially charged events such that the institutions affirm their values and denounce the alleged or confirmed comments or actions (Finley et al., 2018). In another example, an announcer in Oklahoma used the “n” word to refer to members of the Norman High School girls’ basketball team while they kneeled during the playing of the national anthem to draw attention to racial injustices in America (Osborne, 2021). The school superintendent issued a statement declaring, “We condemn and will not tolerate the disgusting words and attitudes of these announcers. This type of hate speech has no place in our society and we are outraged that it would be directed at any human being, and particularly at our students” (Osborne, 2021). Too often there remains a gap between the contents of a statement and the way individuals within the institution behave (Dow, 2021).

Derrick Bell’s Racial Realism

Many people still see sports as purely a form of entertainment and fail to appreciate that sport is a social institution that shapes and is shaped by the ongoing racism in America (Coakley, 2017). One consequence is that sports, including youth and interscholastic sports, are viewed as places where effort and talent matter most. Another consequence is adherence to the widely held belief that sports are a level playing field where race is insignificant (Wiggins & Miller, 2003). However, race is significant in the operation of all American social institutions, including in sport (Martin, 2015).

Legal scholar, Derrick Bell (1992), developed a concept that helps explain enduring racial inequities in sports, including the mistreatment of young Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports. Bell (1992) claimed Black civil rights leaders and many others made the mistake of making racial equality their goal. For Bell (1992), racial equality was not a realistic goal. Bell (1992) offered an alternative to racial equality. Bell (1992) proposed, Racial Realism. Bell (1992) defined Racial Realism as “a legal and social mechanism on which Blacks can rely to have their voice and outrage heard” (p. 364). Bell (1992) was unapologetic when he made the following statement:

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary “peaks of progress,” short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain White dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it and move on to adopt policies based on what I call “Racial Realism.” This mind-set or philosophy requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status. That acknowledgment enables us to avoid despair, and frees us to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph. (pp. 373-374)

Bell (1992) does not simply say that Black people will not gain full equality in America until some mythical or arbitrary point in time. Bell (1992) clearly states that it is outside the realm of possibility that Black people will gain full equality in the U.S. Bell (1992) accounts for moments that might be mistaken as evidence that full racial equality in America is possible. These moments, or what Bell (1992) calls ‘peaks of progress,’ might include the adoption of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments or the passage of Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, or even

the elections of President Barack Obama and Vice President Kamala Harris (Martin, 2021). There are many scholarly studies that address how these so-called victories were indeed “short-lived” and largely unsuccessful in addressing racial inequalities on a host of issues (Martin, 2021).

Physical bondage was replaced by other forms of imprisonment ranging from sharecropping to mass incarceration (Du Bois, [1935] 1962). Black people struggled for many generations for their basic human and civil rights and also became the victims and survivors of various forms of lynchings (Brooks, 1988; Finley et al., 2018). Black men and women struggled to secure the right to vote and today continue to fight against formal and informal practices aimed at their disenfranchisement (Epps & Warren, 2020). Black people continue to face discrimination in housing, education, and employment. Black people continue to lag behind White people in America on virtually every social indicator despite electing the nation’s first Black president and first Black and woman vice-president (Martin, 2021).

Like many contemporary scholars studying the “new racism” or color-blind ideology, Bell (1992) argued, “Despite our successful effort to strip the law’s endorsement from the hated “Jim Crow” signs, contemporary color barriers are less visible but neither less real nor less oppressive” (p. 374). Moreover, Bell (1992) stated a truth forty years ago that rings true today. Bell (1992) commented, “Today, Blacks experiencing rejection for a job, a home, a promotion, anguish over whether race or individual failing prompted their exclusion. Either conclusion breeds frustration and eventually despair. We call ourselves African Americans, but despite centuries of struggle, none of us—no matter our prestige or position—is more than a few steps away from a racially motivated exclusion, restriction or affront” (p. 374). Far too much emphasis is placed on the belief that racial equality is possible and far less attention is devoted to the “discrimination that survived their best efforts to control or eliminate it” (Bell, 1992, p. 376).

Bell (1992) notes that there are some Black people that have already embraced what he called Racial Realism. Adherents to Racial Realism understand the “continued struggle can bring about unexpected benefits and gains that in themselves justify continued endeavor. The fight in itself has meaning” (Bell, 1992; p. 378). Bell (1992) tells the story of an older Black woman who defiantly confronted her oppressors. Ms. Biona MacDonald did not despair in her inability to dismantle or disrupt “Whites’ well-entrenched power” (Bell, 1992, p. 379). Indeed, her goal was not racial equality but “defiance and its harassing effect” that was empowering “because she placed herself in confrontation with her oppressors with full knowledge of their power and willingness to use it” (Bell, 1992, p. 379).

I argue many contemporary Black athletes from the grassroots levels and beyond embody Racial Realism. They understand there is power in the struggle, but they are not overly optimistic seismic racial change in America is possible during their lifetime or at any time. Despite this truth Black athletes continue to demand recognition of their humanity and worth and are increasingly making bold moves that include leveraging their positions as athletes to draw attention to racial inequalities affecting them personally and/or the Black community as a whole. Research shows how important it is for Black athletes to experience the world beyond their identity in a more holistic approach (Briggs et al., 2021; Jolly et al., 2020). The holistic approach to the Black athlete experience, especially in youth and interscholastic sports, is among the best ways to support them in their quest to win on- and off- their respective fields of competition.

Black Athletes and Holistic Approaches

A number of scholars have conducted research related to holistic approaches to athlete development, especially at the collegiate level. I argue much of what is included in their work is applicable to athletes in youth and interscholastic sports, particularly in the case of Black athletes (for examples see “An Examination of Culturally Responsive Programming for Black Student-Athletes’ Holistic Development at Division I Historically White Institutions (HWIs) by Shannon Jolly, Joseph Cooper, and Jepkorir Chepyator-Thomson and “They’re Just Here to Ball: Proposing a Multi-Level Analysis on the Impact of

Collegiate Athletics at Historically White Institutions on Black Male Collegiate Athlete's Holistic Identity & Transition Out of Sport," by Traujan Briggs, Allison Smith, and Joseph Cooper (2021)).

Jolly et al. (2020) engaged in a content analysis of culturally relevant programming at HWIs using critical race theory. The researchers found programs led by faculty often included more culturally responsive programming than programs led by the NCAA or its member institutions. An example of a faculty-led program included the Herman Sweatt Center for Black Males at the University of Texas-Austin. The purpose of the program was to increase graduation rates, enrollment in graduate school and improve access to mental health and wellness services for Black male athletes. An example of an institutional program that did not incorporate culturally relevant program was the NCAA's Life Skills program, which proved broad academic support and life skill development (Jolly et al. 2020).

Relatedly, Briggs et al. (2021) examined the predictors that impact holistic identity development for Black male athletes in high revenue generating sports at predominately White institutions. The scholars begin by citing some well-known facts. College athletics is big business—it is a multi-billion-dollar business. Briggs et al. (2021) cite the lavish salaries for coaches that in some cases make them the highest paid public employees in their respective states. "The power of the external environment—such as the media, professional sports leagues, corporate sponsors, and governing bodies (e.g., NCAA), --can (and do) penetrate the core of an athletic department and affect its values and assumptions" (Briggs et al., 2021, pp. 22-23.) Among the many consequences is the finding that these "factors appear to lead to BMCAs thoroughly immersing themselves in sports socialization, often leading to the development of a robust athletic identity but neglecting their academic identity" (Briggs et al., 2021, p. 23). For Black male college athletes who are among the 98% of college athletes who go pro in something other than sports this makes the transition out of sports difficult, to say the least.

In response to these realities, Briggs et al. (2021) offer a multi-level and multi-dimensional framework of holistic identity development and transition out of high revenue generating sports. Briggs et al. (2021) explored how Black male college athletes may be affected by predominately White institutions at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. At the micro-level the scholars explored identity, experiences, and expectations. On the meso-level, Briggs et al. (2021) examined such things as how college cultures position and stigmatize athletes. Finally, Briggs et al. (2021) examined policies, graduation rates, and academic readiness to better understand how Black male college athletes were affected by macro-level factors at their respective institutions. The authors concluded that Black male college athletes were affected by multi-level factors that contributed to their holistic development and transition out of sport.

It could be argued, as I do here, that similar patterns exist and persist in youth and interscholastic sports. Youth and interscholastic athletes, particularly Black male athletes in sports like football and basketball, are part of a broad pipeline or as William Rhoden (2007) has described it—a conveyor belt. The conveyor belt moves selected elite athletes from grassroots sports to the professional sports, all the while discarding athletes for any number of reasons. The factors affecting Black male college athletes do not magically emerge at predominately White higher education institutions but may be found at all-levels of sport, including in youth and interscholastic sports.

I argue Black male athletes in youth and interscholastic sports must also contend with their dual identities as a student and as an athlete. They must endure the same dumb-jock stereotypes that are so pervasive in college and professional sports, particularly as it relates to Black males (Simons et al., 2007). Historically, Black males, including Black children have been dehumanized and criminalized as captured in the Brute caricature among others (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Black athletes in youth sports and interscholastic competition also likely experience a sense of alienation given the demands placed upon them that often separate them from their non-athlete peers and sometimes the broader community (Beamon, 2010; Howard, 2014). The amount of time that youth and interscholastic competition takes, particularly for Black male athletes in sports like basketball and football, limits their abilities to

engage in other community-building activities.

Like their counterparts in college, Black youth, and interscholastic athletes, are affected by a host of factors at the meso- and macro-levels that negatively influence their holistic development. Friday Night Lights was a popular television series based on a book by H.G. Bissinger because it highlighted the significance of high school football in places like the Southeastern U.S. (Bissinger, 1990). We can see through these dramatizations and real-world experiences how youth and high school culture around sports and perceptions about athletes can affect their holistic development. Sports are by most definitions organized and controlled by one or more governing bodies (Coakley, 2017). Much like Black male athletes in college sports, Black male youth and interscholastic athletes are affected by policies, enrollment at under resourced schools, lower graduation rates (and related sub-par academic support), and associated challenges (Cooper, 2016).

In response to these alarming trends, Cooper (2016) presented six holistic development principles for enhancing the experiences and holistic development of Black male college athletes. It is my contention these same principles may and should be applied to addressing the challenges facing Black male athletes prior to their arrival on the campuses of predominately White institutions where they feel the same lack of belonging as in the case of Black male youth and interscholastic programs where Black males are overrepresented among the athletes in sports like football and basketball and underrepresented among the overall student population.

The six principles of what Cooper (2016) called the Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA) approach, included: “(1) self-identity awareness, (2) positive social engagement, (3) active mentorship, (4) academic achievement, (5) career aspirations, and (6) balanced time management” (1). These principles would support the holistic development of Black male athletes competing in youth and interscholastic sports and preparation for life after their athletic careers conclude. ABIS, Inc, is a nonprofit organization aiming to address racial inequities in sports and their approach to addressing the needs of Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports is one example of the EBA model at work.

ABIS and the Excellence Beyond Athletics Approach

ABIS was officially established in September 2020. The author held membership and several leadership positions in the organization between August 2020 and November 2021. Grassroots basketball legend, Gary Charles, and other men’s basketball coaches were inspired to organize and address racial inequalities in sports after the killing of George Floyd. Floyd was killed on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, after being held down by several police officers as former police officer Derek Chauvin, kneeled on George Floyd’s neck until Floyd took his last breath. The group soon included many Black women’s basketball coaches and expanded to include individuals from every sector of the sports world. ABIS was intentional about including Black youth, including those involved in grassroots and high school sports.

According to organization’s official website, the organization recently celebrated its one-year anniversary and the following identified six keys to victory: a) Economic Stability, b) Education, c) Racial Equity Research, d) Voting & Civic Engagement, e) Student Athlete, and f) Grassroots & Community Outreach (weareabis.org). The latter two are most relevant to the discussion at hand. It is important to note an organization that boasts support from some of the most well-known individuals in sports and in popular culture thought it was important to center student athletes at all levels, including at the grassroots-level to maintain ties with the broader Black community.

Specifically, ABIS cites several target areas under the heading of “Student Athlete.” The target areas include, “Career Building, Mentoring, Marketing, Transition from Sport Program, Health and Safety Initiative, Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) and Standardized Test Elimination Advocacy (weareabis.org). Again, the organization is focused on advancing Blacks in sports and addressing racial inequities

and anti-racism. Under “Grassroots & Community Outreach,” the key to victory in this area includes empower and connecting grassroots leaders, advocacy for Black Lives Matter, and social justice activism. In their October 2021 newsletter, ABIS reported, “students interacted with over 20 companies spanning 15 industries. ABIS is invested in addressing racial inequities in sports from the grassroots level and beyond. Grassroots coaches associated with ABIS organized “Community Days” in their local cities across the country. Community-identified needs were met in cities such as Richmond, Virginia, Los Angeles, California, Atlanta, Georgia, and Little Rock, Arkansas.” The newsletter also highlights, Etop Uda-Ema, Director of Compton Magic. Uda-Ema is the founder of the American Athletic Union (AAU) powerhouse team that has produced many NBA and Division I players. He is described as “a grassroots pioneer working tirelessly to empower, support and elevate the same Compton, CA community that birthed his storied basketball program, the Compton Magic. Beyond the court he supports by giving back to the communities that made them” (weareabis.org).

In early 2021, ABIS launched the Historically Hidden Figures initiative. This initiative raises awareness about Black historical figures to educate Black youth and others about this important, yet often overlooked, history and to aid in their awareness of self (weareabis.org). This type of culturally responsive programming, which involved reading books about Black historical figures to elementary aged children by Black college athletes is important to the holistic development of Black people, including Black athletes at all levels of competition (Jolly et al. 2020).

ABIS also provided opportunities for positive social engagement with community-based events for Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports (weareabis.org). Black male youth in sports like basketball were actively mentored by Black male coaches. Bean et al. (2020) showed how important coaching strategies were to the development of high-quality youth sport programming and this even more so the case for Black coaches and their relationship to their Black male players given the historic and ongoing inequitable treatment Black male athletes face both as players and as coaches. Indeed, ABIS, has created several watch-lists to encourage colleges to hire more Black coaches in sports like men’s and women’s basketball, track & field, and volleyball not only because they were qualified and deserving of the positions but also because of the added value they bring to programs, particularly those where Black male athletes are overrepresented in high-revenue generating sports and underrepresented as students at these institution more broadly (weareabis.org). Similarly, efforts to expand the number of Black coaches in youth and interscholastic sports and in sports management is important for many of the same reasons. The Executive Board of ABIS once met with the Black Athletic Directors Association, which was comprised of self-identifying Black Athletic Directors from PWIs as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). One would be hard pressed to find enough Black sport managers at elite youth and interscholastic programs to form such a group and that must change.

ABIS hosted a fundraising golf outing in 2021. With some of the funds raised, the organization gave out two \$10,000 scholarships. While the scholarships went to currently enrolled college students, the organization’s generosity highlighted their commitment to academic achievement. Members of the organization have also supported the academic achievement of Black athletes playing youth and interscholastic sports (weareabis.org). Furthermore, ABIS has explored partnerships with several corporations to focus on expanding knowledge and access to careers in and around the sports world beyond being an athlete. Initially, the program would target college-aged students but I content it could be replicated to address the needs and interests of students in youth and interscholastic sports.

ABIS, primarily through its legal team, has focused on the ways in which institutions, such as the NCAA are structured and may harm the physical and mental well-being of athletes, particularly Black male athletes in big-money sports. Working with elected officials, ABIS supported a college athlete bill of rights and other local and state legislations to compensate college athletes for their name, image, and likeness (NIL), and to promote and protect their mental health and well-being. Similarly, ABIS has expressed concerns about these issues as they pertain to athletes participating in youth and interscholastic sports.

Much like at the college-level, youth, and interscholastic sports “requires institutions to change the nature of their conditions, facilitate more positive relationships from community building and sense of belonging, and enhance academic and educationally purposeful engagement expectations for Black male student athletes” (Cooper 2016).

ABIS, a collection of individuals and organizations from all areas of sports from grassroots sports to professional leagues, is one example of the Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA) approach in action, which could be modified and expanded to meet the needs of Black athletes more comprehensively in youth and interscholastic sports. The group employs an anti-racism framework for sport organizations to follow.

Road map to Racial Equity in Youth and Interscholastic Sports: ABIS as an Anti-Racism Framework in Sport Organizations

Any road map to diversity must focus on equity and be willing to disregard equality as a goal. The focus must be on racial equity and anti-racism. For far too long, American society has treated Black people unjustly, including Black people in sports. Addressing past and contemporary injustices against Black people, including in sports, will require accounting for these past wrongs in ways that require race-specific as opposed to universal or race-neutral solutions. Hence, efforts to create a more racial equitable environment for Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports will require consideration of the EBA approach and a willingness to adequately study, monitor, and address ongoing anti-Black racism, which may manifest in outbursts from non-Black fans and backlash from White coaches and administrators among other ways. It requires being intentional about training and hiring Black coaches and managers in youth and interscholastic sport organizations. It means not joining calls to not to teach about racism in primary and secondary schools but leading the charge to ensure that Black athletes in elementary and high schools see themselves reflected in course content in authentic and positive ways. It requires seeing Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports not only as athletes but as total persons. It means that everyone connected with Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports must give more than lip service to the phrase Black Lives Matter and make an ongoing commitment to creating more equitable spaces for Black athletes in youth and interscholastic sports that are transformative and mutually beneficial for individual Black athletes and the organizations for which they compete.

The implications for such commitments to an anti-racism framework in sports may prove invaluable for young Black athletes, especially young Black male athletes in big money sports. An anti-racism framework in youth sport organizations increases the likelihood that young Black athletes will be treated holistically. An anti-racism framework in youth sport organizations will also increase the chances that young Black athletes receive the support required to combat anti-Black sentiments from multiple sources. Moreover, young Black athletes will find the advocacy and empowerment required to redress historic and contemporary exploitation of Black labor including unauthorized uses of their name, image, and likeness (NIL).

ABIS has shown how focusing on racial equity and anti-racism can yield positive outcomes for the Black community. ABIS embraces many of the principles outlined in the EBA approach. The organizations use of a holistic and anti-racism framework can set us on the path towards the realization of a fairer society where institutions such as sports represent a more leveled playing field without the expectation that the permanent subordination of Black people and athletes will change anytime soon. Derrick Bell’s (1992) Racial Realism reminds us that while the subordinate status of Black people in America is permanent and racial equality is an unrealistic goal, there is power in continuing to fight in the broader ongoing struggle for Black liberation for greater racial equity. Racial Realism also points to the fact that the EBA approach should be more widely used to create programming and practices that intentionally allow young Black athletes to become their best selves all the while living in in a society that may not see the best in them.

Future research should focus on the collection and analyses of relevant data to evaluate the effectiveness

of the EBA approach among young Black athletes. Ideally, the research would be conducted by an independent evaluator, preferably a scholar who identifies with the historic and contemporary struggle of Black people in America, including Black athletes. The scholar should also center racism and not treat racism as a mere byproduct of some other processes. Such studies should enhance our understanding of the effectiveness of the EBA approach as an anti-racism framework for improving the experiences and outcomes of young Black athletes in sport organizations.

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