

The Detroit News

Super Bowl shows moral character trumps race issue

By Anthony B. Bradley

I was raised to cheer for pro football teams with black coaches or black quarterbacks - no matter what. But when two black coaches squared off in Super Bowl XLI, I found myself free to care about the game rather than what it might mean to the civil rights movement.

It took 41 years but America finally bore witness to the truth that hard work and moral character contain more promise than racial entitlement.

Even with the National Football League's "Rooney Rule" (adopted in 2002) requiring teams to assemble a racially diverse candidate slate for head coach, one can still make the case that government-coerced affirmative action would not have been necessary. Neither Tony Dungy nor Lovie Smith actually needed the program.

A decade ago -- before Rooney -- Dungy became head coach of the Tampa Bay franchise and hired Smith as an assistant coach.

Nearly 70 percent of NFL players this season and 22 percent of the head coaches are black. These percentages actually exceed the percentage of blacks in America. That means that blacks in the NFL now fare better than they would if the league were operated under government-mandated

quotas based on population statistics (we comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population).

The NFL is not necessarily a model of racial virtue. It has admittedly been slow to diversify, seeing good black assistant coaches passed over, time and again, for head coaching positions. Yet a few risk-taking franchise owners, without being forced by the

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government, freely hired black coaches such as Art Shell and Dennis Green. They demonstrated a strong lesson drawn from economics: the best employees produce the best results regardless of race.

In addition, Dungy has been a major mentor of high-quality black coaches. Four of his assistants have gone on to head coaching positions.

In the end, it was hard work and moral character that catapulted Dungy, now leading the Indianapolis Colts, and Smith, who leads the Bears in Chicago, to the Super Bowl.

However, it remains far easier for blacks to become doctors and lawyers than NFL coaches. Black boys need to know that there

are 12 times as many jobs for blacks in law and medicine as there are in sports.

A successful career -- whether in football, law or medicine -- is best built on a foundation of moral character. This success is almost impossible to achieve in the midst of the self-sabotaging lifestyles lived out among so many blacks: the almost 5 percent incarceration rate, the 9.2 percent unemployment rate, the 11.8 percent high school dropout rate or the 69.3 percent of births we cause outside of marriage.

Dungy and Smith, with their laid-back personalities and outspoken Christian faith, have put the consequences of virtue on display.

"I'm proud to be the first African-American coach to win this," Dungy said after the game. "But again, more than anything, Lovie Smith and I are not only African-American but also Christian coaches, showing you can do it the Lord's way. We're more proud of that."

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