The under-representation and racialised experiences of BAME coaches in men’s professional football in England

This item was submitted to Loughborough University’s Institutional Repository by the/an author.


Additional Information:

- This is a conference presentation.

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/34116

Version: Accepted for publication

Rights: This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Please cite the published version.
The under-representation and racialised experiences of BAME coaches in men’s professional football in England


Statistical analysis and semi-structured interviews (key stakeholders, elite level BAME coaches)

Dr Steven Bradbury
Loughborough University
s.bradbury@lboro.ac.uk
Presentation outline

1. The context
2. Quantitative findings
3. Qualitative findings
4. Concluding analysis
1. The context

BAME populations and professional football

- Professional football perceived as a ‘post-racial’, meritocratic, egalitarian space
  - ‘Race’ no longer matters, racial inequalities a thing of the past

- Professional football not divorced from social, cultural, political contexts
  - Reflective of and reflects back on racialized power relations

- Professional football a site of multiple racisms, receptive to/productive of racial meanings
  - Impact on different BAME groups, different ways, different levels of sport

- Professional football a site partial diversity and limited inclusivity for BAME groups
  - Limited mobility and racialised experiences across career transitions
2. Quantitative findings

Levels of representation of BAME coaches in professional football

- Consistently low levels of representation of BAME coaches at professional clubs
  - Around 4% to 5% between 2014 and 2017 (SPTT annual updates)

SPTT annual update 2017

- **4.6%** of senior coaching positions at professional clubs held by BAME coaches
- **18.5%** of professional clubs employ BAME coaches in senior coaching positions
- **41%** of all BAME coaches in senior coaching positions employed at four clubs
- **13%** of youth academy coaches from BAME backgrounds (mainly lower level part-time and sessional coaches)
3. Qualitative findings

3.1. Limited access to and negative experiences of high level coach education

Key issues

- BAME coaches positioned outside of ‘insider’ football networks
  - Outside employment or marginalised within culturally narrow club environments

- Intentional/unintentional racisms - coach educators/ex-players
  - Subtle, nuanced, codified racisms, inequitable treatment

Key impacts

- Slowed pace of developmental progression of BAME coaches
  - ‘Catch-up’ in achieving qualifications
  - ‘Catch 22’ in qualifications and experiences

‘I was at [the club] and I’d been there for a long while and I’d got so far with my badges and I wanted to go further. But every time I went to [head of coaching] there was always an excuse. There wasn’t a course, or the money, or the time. I should focus on something else. But I wanted to move up, but there was no chance. I just felt that I was being held back. And other coaches at the club, white coaches, they were getting the support, getting on the courses, getting their badges. Moving up the ladder, past me, and I was just stuck where I was’ (BAME coach)
3. Qualitative findings

3.2. Racisms and stereotypes within the professional coaching workplace

Key issues

- Existence of subtle, nuanced, codified racisms within clubs
  - Inappropriate language/behaviours/interactions/treatment

- Existence of racialised stereotypes – senior coaches/power brokers
  - Questioning aspirations, attitudes, behaviours, intellect, suitability, authority, competence, etc.

Key impacts

- Focus on assumed ‘racial self’ rather than actual ‘professional self’
  - BAME coaches framed in terms of ‘risk’ and ‘uncertainty’
  - ‘Safety option’ of White coaches, cultural familiarity/comfort

‘I’ve had black coaches say to me ‘this shit is still going on’. There are things that are said that have a racial connotation to it, and it’s racist, but it’s not obvious. It’s the way it’s put, little comments about your cultural background, how you do things, the way you conduct yourself. Stuff about not being organised, punctuality, being ‘laid back’ and so on. Even when it’s done in a joking way, it still frames you in a certain way, you know, as different, less important. And if you get a crowd of people who do things like that, then you haven’t really got a chance’ (BAME coach)
3. Qualitative findings

3.3 Over-reliance on networks based methods of coach recruitment

Key issues

- Operation of networks (not qualifications) recruitment framework
  - Personal recommendation, sponsored mobility, patronage
- Cumulative impact of stereotypes, centrality, captain-coach pathways
  - Opportunities to exhibit leadership/build contacts with power brokers
- Unconscious racial bias of sports media
  - Focus on ‘merits’ of white coaches, BAME absent from narratives

Key impacts

- BAME coaches outside consciousness/preferences of power brokers
  - Recruit ‘known’ coaches from white social/cultural networks
  - BAME coaches fewer opportunities, peripheral vs central

‘I think football is quite a unique environment or industry where more than any other job it's a lot about who you know. It's about friends in the game and calling on favours. The game is a lot like that. You only have to see how managers drag people about with them when they get new jobs. It’s pretty much the opposite of what you want it to be. You want it to be open and transparent, but football doesn't work like that. So without a proper recruitment process, advertising, equal opportunities, and all that, it’s still about who you know that gets you jobs. (BAME coach)
4. Concluding analysis

Institutional racism and hegemonic whiteness

- Multifarious application and experience of racisms and racialised exclusions
  - Different BAME, different racisms, different contexts, different stages of career

- Individual and systemic bias constitute a form of institutional racism
  - Mostly unintentional, unconscious, ‘embodied’, but deeply negative outcomes

- Institutional racism underpinned by invisibility, centrality, normativity of whiteness
  - Embedded within senior organisational tiers of professional football

- **Power of whiteness 1:** frames white privilege as cultural norm
  - Precludes recognition of beneficial membership of white networks

- **Power of whiteness 2:** frame under-representation/racial exclusion as ‘out-there’ not ‘in-here’
  - Wider societal exclusions or cultural properties of BAME coaches – not systemic/institutional

- **Power of whiteness 3:** allows institutional racism to be effortlessly reproduced/unchallenged
  - Maintains conceptual positioning of BAME groups as ‘fit for doing, not organising’ the sport
Useful references


