

## PROTECTING YOUR POSSIBILITIES PODCAST WITH LUKE FEDLAM

### Episode 63: Representation of Black coaches in the NFL | Jan. 19, 2022

*The following is a transcription of the audio podcast recording. It is largely accurate but in some cases it is incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription errors.*

Luke: This is Luke Fedlam. This episode of the *Protecting Your Possibilities* podcast is a bit different from my usual episodes. In this episode, I'm talking about the lack of black head coaches in the NFL. And when I recorded the episode initially, I mentioned that there were two black head coaches remaining. Mike Tomlin with the Pittsburgh Steelers, and David Culley with the Houston Texans. Well, since I've recorded the episode, David Culley has been fired by the Houston Texans leaving one current black head coach in the National Football League, a league of 32 different teams.

The reason I did this episode, even though I know that it is different than my typical episodes, was because representation matters. And as we think about the protecting of possibilities that athletes have, part of it is preparing them for life outside of their sport. And representation - seeing that they truly can do anything and be anything in life. It matters. And it's important, and it's important for our young people as well as our professional athletes. And so seeing that we only have now one black head coach in the National Football League, is a conversation that we need to have. So I hope you enjoyed this episode. I know that is different, but it still matters. Thank you.

I'm sports attorney Luke Fedlam, and welcome to the *Protecting Your Possibilities* podcast. Each conversation we focus on sharing information and having conversations around how athletes can best educate and protect themselves or their life outside of their sports.

Thank you for tuning into the *Protecting Your Possibilities* podcast. I'm back. It's your host, Luke Fedlam. And I just got to start off by saying Happy New Year 2022. What a year, here we go. There is so much to talk about, that will be coming this year. I am excited. I got to start off by just saying thanks so much for rocking with me and 2021. I've gotten such great feedback from folks who listen, who download episodes, who sign up and subscribe to the podcast. I just got to say thank you really and truly from the bottom of my heart, it means a lot. And I you know, I do this really to just try to put good content that is understandable and manageable out there in these podcasts.

I really just want to be able to help. And so I've gotten great feedback. I've gotten some topic ideas that people want to hear in 2022. So please do feel free to continue to reach out to me, share your thoughts good, bad or ugly. But definitely share the things, the topics that you want to hear more about this year. Please do let me know. And we will work to figure out if there's an appropriate time that we can work those topics in.

But today as we look at, kind of, being in the middle of January, the start of a new year, the end of the regular season in the NFL and playoffs have just started. We also celebrate the life and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. It makes you want to look at where things stand right now,

especially with you know, kind of the juxtaposition between the NFL and really all that Martin Luther King Jr. fought for and talked about when it comes to equality in society.

It's interesting, right? Because there was an article in *The Washington Post* last week, where Troy Vincent, the NFL executive vice president of football operations, really talked about how there's a double standard in the NFL when it comes to retaining, as well as hiring, black coaches. And I think it is an interesting topic to acknowledge, because sometimes we get caught in just the hiring of black coaches. We know that the Rooney rule exists and that a minority candidate has to be interviewed whenever there is an opening in the head coaching position for an NFL team. But we don't often have conversation around the retention of black coaches.

It's interesting when we think about the recent history of black coaches in the league, especially those black coaches who have been let go, even after having, you know, somewhat successful seasons. And Troy Vincent talked about this. He talked about Tony Dungy when he was let go from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Jim Caldwell with the Detroit Lions, Steve Wilks with the Arizona Cardinals, you know, he even referenced Tyrone Willingham when he lost a job at Notre Dame and just talked about this double standard. And it's important to have this conversation around retention, right. Because, you know, we look at this year and the Dolphins, you know, terminating their head coach after a winning season. And you look at that, from the perspective of, you know, the Dolphins, I don't know what their expectations were for the year, but Flores finished nine and eight. And you know, in his three seasons, he was 24 and 25. Right. So it was a losing record, but you know, about 500. And in 2020, they were 10 and six. So, you know, you look at that, and you look at this idea of Coach Flores being terminated. And think about it from the perspective that the owner Stephen Ross, the owner of the Dolphins, is known as an absentee kind of owner, right? Not as engaged in the day to day operations, not as engaged in kind of just the team as a whole. In fact, I believe he's based out of New York, but he just happens to own the Miami Dolphins.

And it's really kind of a sad situation when you, when you see that. Because at this point, now when you look at the NFL, we have two black coaches that are left, we've got Mike Tomlin with the Steelers and the Houston Texans, David Culley. And when you think about that, yes, we're going to have conversation about, you know, will there be for all of the NFL head coaching positions that are currently available, will there be any black head coaches hired this year? And who knows? Right, we'll see kind of how that plays out.

But the challenge here is thinking about this notion of equality, and this idea of opportunity, and thinking about, you know, whether or not the Rooney Rule is working. Because the Rooney Rule says you have to interview someone, that doesn't mean that you have to hire them, it doesn't mean that they are going to be given just as fair a shot as anyone else when going through the interview process, but it's important to think about where we are today. Where we are in society. Especially when you think about, you know, looking at the NBA. And I think when you compare the NFL in the NBA, there are definitely significant differences when it comes to kind of this idea of racial and social justice being taken on by a league, the NBA and the NFL are so very different.

All right, when we look at just the NBA, you know, I believe was last year in 2020, we saw a significant hiring just in one offseason of black coaches in the NBA. I believe I was just reading some statistics earlier, that the NBA almost doubled the percentage of black coaches from 23% to 43%. In one offseason, and that is incredible progress. When you think about that, that's

really something that's significant. It's meaningful, especially when we look at sports generally, where very high percentage of the players are black.

Thinking about kind of some of those challenges and the relationships between coach and player. You know, it's meaningful to have the conversation. Looking at it last year in the NBA, there were eight open head coaching jobs at the end of the regular season, and seven black head coaches were hired. Black coaches in Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, New Orleans, Orlando, Portland, Washington. That is truly significant. And it's important, I think, to have this conversation, specifically with the NFL coming off of this season where a head coach was fired because of the emails that came out from years prior where that head coach, Coach Gruden, used racist, homophobic, misogynistic language in emails when talking to another team's executive. I mean, that's significant.

In fact, in particular with the Raiders, when Gruden came in to the Raiders organization and was hired at an astronomically high contract, when you look at other black professionals in the front office, there were significant changes. In fact, when you look at the statistics of black players, the percentage of black players on the Raiders, there was a significant decline over the years that Gruden was involved. So that's something to think about. That's something to recognize and thinking about the importance of having representation in professional sports at the head coach level has a lot of meaning.

And so I think when we kind of look at where we're at now, coming off the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday thinking about his life, his legacy and all that he worked for, and as we get ready to head into Black History Month in February, these are conversations that have to happen. These discussions need to occur. It is not always easy to have conversations about race, but it's important that they're had, and they can be had in a professional, fact-based way, as well. And the facts are, that in the NFL, there are only two black head coaches. And that's a shame. There are plenty of qualified candidates.

Now, as we know, there are openings, there are numerous head coaches who were fired, it always happens, you know, after a season, I think we'll see if there any other terminations that occur. And so the NFL has a chance to make a change. But we'll see. We'll see what it looks like over the next few weeks and the hires that are made. And we'll see if the NFL decides to make change here.

Now, this is interesting, because when you also look at owners, the owners of NFL teams are predominantly white men. I don't know if you can quote me or not, I haven't looked it up. But I think if I remember correctly, there's really only one majority owner in NFL that is a minority, and that is Mr. Khan down with Jacksonville. Don't get me started on Jacksonville - obviously, there's a lot that they need to work on. But I will say just as a side note, you know, usually in these in these conversations in the podcast, I don't get too involved in the performance of sport, but I will say Jacksonville has you know, the number one pick Trevor Lawrence from this past year's draft, they get the number one pick in next year's NFL draft, they had some injuries. I think with the right moves at the head coach and staffing levels, the Jacksonville Jaguars can be competitive. They showed glimpses, very few glimpses, but they showed a couple glimpses of what they're capable of even especially kind of throwing the entire NFL playoffs in the AFC into a complete whirlwind by upsetting the Colts on the last game of their regular season. You know, they have the ability to have an interesting team. Again, they have the only minority owner in the NFL, and it will be interesting to see what various owners who have head coaching vacancies will do as it relates to the hires that they make.

But again, I think that as often as folks want to talk about the product of football on the field, I think we have to look at what is happening at the head coaching level at the GM levels as we look at the NFL, especially compared to a league like the NBA, and have that conversation.

So again, you know, I'm looking forward to this year and all that we have forthcoming this year. A lot of great conversations to be had, you know, you know me, I'm going to have conversations about name, image and likeness. There is a lot that is happening in this NIL space. We have seen some big moves by groups of alumni of different schools putting together collectives and funds that are going to be specifically used for student athletes to have name, image and likeness opportunities and make money, which is very clearly a push towards helping the schools with recruiting. There is gonna be a lot to talk about there. You know, we do have the Winter Olympics, not too many people talk about the Winter Olympics. But you know, there are going to be some good conversations around protecting athletes and thinking about endorsements and opportunities that come from being involved in Olympic sports and actually having the opportunity to represent our country performing at the Olympics.

We're going to be able to talk about so much over this coming year. And I'm excited that you are listening that you are sharing this podcast that you're commenting with me around topics that you want to hear all of this as meaningful as we think about how to protect athletes. That's really what this podcast is all about. And that's really why I do the work that I am so blessed and so fortunate to be able to do every single day.

So again, happy New Year. Thank you so much for tuning in to this first episode of 2022. I'm looking forward to all the episodes yet to come having great conversations with great guests, talking about topics that are important to protecting athletes, and helping set them up for success outside of their sport. Alright, until the next episode, I'm Luke Fedlam, the host of the *Protecting Your Possibilities* podcast. Thank you so much for tuning in. Please do feel free to share this podcast with others in your family, others in your network. I really truly appreciate it and I look forward to talking to you again soon. Until then, take care and have a great day.

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