

**Invited Testimony of
Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.
President and Founder, Rainbow PUSH Coalition**

**House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives**

**Wednesday, February 28, 2007
“DIVERSITY IN SPORTS: THE CHALLENGE AHEAD”**

Two African-American head coaches led their teams into the Super Bowl, with the dean, Tony Dungy and his Indianapolis Colts, coming out victorious. The Chicago White Sox won the 2005 World Series led by people of color - a Latino manager, Ozzie Guillen, and an African-American general manager, Ken Williams. And in 2006, the New York Mets almost duplicated the feat, losing only in the seventh game of the National League championship, while being led by a Latino general manager, Omar Minaya, and an African-American manager, Willie Randolph.

The times they are a-changing. In 2005, the annual Racial and Gender Report Card produced by Richard E. Lapchick of the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport gave athletics a B-minus, the first time for a score above C or worse. The National Basketball Association continues to set the pace in terms of opportunity and diversity, but now Major League Baseball and the National Football League are closing the gap. Baseball even marked its first Latino owner, when Arturo Moreno purchased the Anaheim Angels.

But progress is still uneven. Most shocking is the failing grade issued to Division 1A College football. Lapchick fails the major colleges that we root for every day for the dearth of people of color as university presidents, athletic directors, conference commissioners and head football coaches. Forty-five percent of the players in these

colleges are African-American. Five percent of Division 1A head coaches were. And worse, exactly zero conference commissioners.

This year, Lapchick reports, "The overwhelming majority of the most powerful people in college sport is still white. In Division IA, this includes 94.9 percent of the presidents, 85.7 percent of the athletics directors, 93.3 percent of the faculty athletics reps and 100 percent of the conference commissioners."

This is, ironically, despite the fact that 2006 marked the greatest improvement in the Division IA athletics for diversity. As Lapchick notes, "We have reached a new all-time record for athletic directors, with 12 African-Americans, four Latinos and a Native American, for a total of 17 athletics directors who are people of color on the 119 campuses, for 14.3 percent of the total. These are the 119 institutions that play intercollegiate sport at the highest level. The 14.3 percent in Division IA stands in stark contrast to other NCAA institutions, where only 6.7, 7.7 and 3.9 percent of the AD positions in Divisions I, II, and III, respectively, are held by people of color. The large institutions have taken the lead."

In Division II and III, there are more women coaching male teams than people of color. We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.

At Rainbow PUSH, we've pushed to break down these closed doors for a long time. The reason is simple. In athletics, we all play on a level playing field, where the rules are clear and the same for everyone. Excellence excels; race doesn't matter. So we had to get past

the myths that African-Americans weren't smart enough to be quarterbacks, head coaches or general managers. Once we break down the barriers, quality - as exemplified by Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith in the Super Bowl - rises to the top.

And sports do matter. When we root for a football team, we focus on the color of the player's jersey, not the color of his or her skin. We root for our guys, and against the other guys - whatever their race, religion or sexual preference. With the barriers broken down, athletics provides a wonderful lesson in the strength of diversity, in the value of equal opportunity, in our ability to rise above our divisions to come together behind one team.

Major league football and baseball still have a ways to go, but they've made great progress. Division 1A college athletics still hasn't moved very far down the field; and the lower divisions are simply fumbling the ball. But what Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith and Willie Randolph and Ozzie Guillen and Arturo Moreno have made clear is that the era of excuses is over. There are excellent potential owners, managers, conference commissioners and head coaches eager to lead. They simply need to be given an opportunity. Extend the level playing field to the sidelines, the locker rooms, the office suites, the league meetings . . . and we will make America better.

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College athletics still dropping the ball

(<http://www.suntimes.com/news/jackson/253997.CST-EDT-jesse13.article>)

February 13, 2007

BY JESSE JACKSON

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