

Rite of Sankofa: Past, present and future experiences of HBCU college coaches

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Abstract

“The purpose of this presentation is to examine the contemporary value of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in college athletics. More specifically, to amplify the historical foundations of HBCUs in the hiring and development of Black collegiate coaches and compare them with today’s Black coaches. Sankofa, a Twi word from the Akan tribe that when translated means “go back and get it”. Loosely stated, Sankofa suggests that we learn from the past so that we can plan for the future. Extant literature documents (Hawkins, Cooper, Carter-Francique, & Cavil) and our own lived experiences (as college athletes and faculty) tell us that HBCUs are rooted in “faith, community, and service” (United Negro College Fund). In sport, HBCUs are rooted in talent, excellence, and consciousness of self. Legendary Black college coaches such as Clarence “Big House” Gaines (basketball), Eddie Robinson (football), Ed Temple (track and field), Nell C. Jackson (track and field), and C. Vivian Stringer (basketball) talents were birthed and philosophies were nurtured within HBCUs. Following the racial reckoning in 2020, the nation witnessed a migration of Black professional athletes (Cheryl Miller, Deion Sanders) and Olympic athletes (Duane Ross, Allen Johnson) acquiring coaching positions at HBCUs. Acknowledging this trend is important, and amplifying Black college coaches lived experiences can prove insightful on how their presence and representation serve to support the future of HBCUs and intercollegiate athletics with: (a) hiring and developing of other Black coaches, (b) fostering of a professional pipeline, (c) the valuation and narrative characterization of HBCUs, (d) the recruitment and retention of college athletes, and (e) college athlete academic engagement and degree completion.”