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Does English football warrant the Rooney Rule? Assessing the thoughts of British Asian coaches

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Abstract

This article examines the Rooney Rule and offers the thoughts of British Asian football coaches working in English football in response to this policy implementation. The Rooney Rule, first piloted by English Football League (EFL) clubs during the 2016-17 season, makes it compulsory for all 72 EFL clubs to interview at least one black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) candidate (if an application has been received) for all managerial and first-team coaching roles. And, on 9 January 2018, the Football Association (FA) revealed that they had also adopted the Rooney Rule for all coaching jobs relating to the England national team. Because English football harbours so few BAME coaches, calls for the Rooney Rule to be introduced in English football had started to increase in volume, and led to its trial inception. But, is this policy welcomed or opposed among British Asian coaches? What fundamental barriers does this policy overlook? Is English football ready for the Rooney Rule? And, do British Asian coaches, a group believed to benefit from this positive action policy, deem that this rule is the answer to help facilitate positive change? With the aid of empirical research, this article critically examines and assesses the potential impact of the Rooney Rule and recommends additional inclusionary practices.

Keywords: British Asian, football, Rooney Rule, racism, exclusion

Introduction

Several recent studies have investigated the BAME exclusion from coaching and management positions within European football (Bradbury et al, 2011; Bradbury 2013; 2017). Bradbury (2014) research found that only 1% of senior coaching positions at elite level professional clubs and national teams across Europe are held by minority personnel. And, the Sport People's Think Tank (2017) reported that as of 1 September 2017 there were only 22 out of 482 positions held by ethnic minority individuals in senior coaching positions across the 92 professional English clubs. Port Vale academy manager, Sevvay Aslam, is the only British Asian individual to make this list. And, there are only three holders of the UEFA Pro-License who are of South Asian descent (*pers comms*). Put simply, British Asians are not only excluded from the playing field (see Burdsey, 2007; Kilvington, 2016; 2017) but also from coaching and management.

This under-representation was explicitly challenged as of the 2016-17 season as EFL clubs adopted a modified version of the Rooney Rule. Following its trial year, it was extended for the 2017-18 season and has since been adopted by the England national team. The Rooney Rule, a policy established by the National Football League (NFL) in 2003, aims to encourage more BAME candidates to apply for managerial and coaching roles. Named after Pittsburgh Steelers owner, Dan Rooney, this rule requires NFL clubs to guarantee an interview with at least one BAME applicant. Cashmore and Cleland (2011) highlight the disparity between playing and coaching roles in the NFL as, in 2002, only two black head coaches were employed although 70 percent of players were African American. A decade after its implementation, 17 African

American and Hispanic head coaches or general managers have been appointed by NFL teams. Prior to this policy, the previous 80 years witnessed just seven BAME appointments. This measure, which does not apply to the English Premier League (EPL), makes it compulsory for all 72 EFL clubs to interview at least one BAME candidate (if an application has been received) for all managerial and first-team coaching roles, as well as youth development positions requiring a minimum of a UEFA B coaching license.

The Rooney Rule attempts to improve the position of a given group because members suffer disadvantage as a result of their group membership. This policy therefore falls within the scope of Section 158 of the Equality Act (2010) as it allows employers to take proportionate special measures to overcome under-representation and discrimination. Although the term 'social equality' may provoke different meanings and connotations to different people (Lusted, 2017), I argue that equality, broadly speaking, is committed to providing opportunities for all, giving every person a chance to fulfil their potential, free from discrimination and prejudice.

Solow, Solow and Walker (2011) state that while many studies have explored the issue of racial discrimination against players in various sports, considerably less research has been conducted on the issue of discrimination in the hiring and promotion of coaches. That said, Bopp and Sagas (2012), Cunningham and Sagas (2005), Regan and Feagin (2017), Singer, Harrison and Bukstein (2010), among others, have investigated 'race' and employment in American sports. This article, however, attempts to shift the focus to a UK perspective by

examining English football and specifically focus on British Asian experiences. Although other forms of discrimination exist within football, such as gender, sex-based and class-based inequalities, which of course intersect with ethnicity and religion, this research has chosen to focus on racial discrimination.

The paper will therefore begin by theorizing 'race' and racism, paying particular attention to tenets of Systemic Racism Theory (Feagin, 2006), as this will help us further critically assess and understand participant responses to the Rooney Rule. The work then provides background information as I shall discuss British Asian football histories before positioning these experiences within a contemporary coaching context. Following a brief methodology, the penultimate section, and focus of this article, attempts to gauge current feelings towards the Rooney Rule among British Asian football coaches. In short, this research aims to address the following questions:

- Is the Rooney Rule supported by British Asian coaches?
- Is football ready for the Rooney Rule?
- What barriers do British Asian coaches encounter?
- To what extent does this policy help alleviate and challenge the barriers that British Asian coaches encounter?
- What further measures do British Asian coaches feel would assist inclusion?

Understanding 'race' and racism(s)

It has been suggested that a Eurocentric or white-centric worldview exists within the United States and Britain and this is disseminated within major institutions (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This worldview is designed to be

internalized and taken as standard. 'Race' thinking, and thus racism, becomes unquestioned, common-sense and hegemonic. Feagin's (2006) Systemic Racism Theory is pivotal in critically understanding the extent to which racism is structurally embedded within institutions such as football. This theory illustrates that racism exists at a societal level as well as an individual level. In other words, if racism was magically eradicated from the consciousness of every individual, racism would still be manifest in the institutional structures that continue to marginalize, exclude and oppress minority ethnic communities, e.g. housing, education, legal system, healthcare, etc. Therefore, affirmative action policies, such as the Rooney Rule, can be significant steps in the fight against racism. Bradbury (2013: 309) argues that such positive action approaches act as a 'mechanism through which to address some residual patterns of institutional closure' as white hegemonic power relations are challenged and destabilised. Because the Rooney Rule specifically attempts to challenge institutional racism in employment, one could argue that certain tenets of Systemic Racism Theory, as the paper will now discuss, provide an ideal, and rigorous, conceptual framework to help critically understand and interpret participant responses.

The first of Feagin's six tenets of systemic racism is *white's unjust enrichment versus black's unjust impoverishment*. Feagin (2006) notes that whites have used their power to subordinate against blacks to gain a lasting advantage. Although black players began to filter into professional football during the 1960s and 1970s, other sectors of the game such as scouting, coaching, management and live fandom have remained whitewashed. Football protects its power to

define the cultural habitus of the dominant group and the ways in which cultural, social, economic and symbolic capitals can be attained.

Second, Feagin argues that the *racial hierarchy has divergent interests* as racial oppression is only challenged when it serves the interests of whites (Gillborn, 2009). Regan and Feagin (2017: 17) argue 'that women of color have often not been treated fairly in US society', adding that 'when women have finally progressed in the US it is white women who typically have benefited the most'. Burdsey (2007: 131), who has holistically investigated the exclusion of British Asian footballers, casts his critical gaze over one-day, British Asian targeted football inclusion events, noting that professional clubs are aware that British Asian supporters, a possible by-product of such events, constitute 'a large, untapped market and a potential source of considerable financial income'. Some anti-racist initiatives may be formed with ulterior motives to protect and maintain divergent interests.

The third tenet, *social reproduction and alienation*, notes that racial hierarchies have been formed due to economic resources and power. Hill's (2004) research demonstrated that over a 22 year period, only 19 black coaches were hired out of a possible 381 head coach roles in American Football's FBS (formerly called the NCAA Division IA). This social reproduction and alienation is mirrored within English professional football (Bradbury, 2017). With regards to the football industry, then, Bonilla-Silva's (2003) discussion of the 'white habitus' is useful to consider. Cashmore and Cleland (2016: 29) state that its existence 'regulates the practice and condition of whiteness with regards to

taste, perception, feelings and views on matters of race and racial inequality’.

The white habitus thus encourages solidarity and connectedness amongst whites and reinforces their behaviour, practices and performances. Whites remain in control of football and this maintains the exclusion of current and aspiring black and Asian coaches due to the institutionalised tendency of white decision-makers promoting and hiring white candidates over people of colour (See Cunningham and Sagas 2005; Sartore and Cunningham 2006).

Fourth, the *white racial frame* refers to whites’ collective memories and histories. This tenet is arguably a major factor in the continued exclusion of BAME coaches from English football. Feagin (2013) argues that the white racial frame refers to how whites consciously and subconsciously make sense of everyday situations pertaining to racial matters. Whites’ perceptions of BAME groups are influenced by cultural representations and stereotypes. For example, racial stacking has been identified in sports such as football, the NFL and baseball (Brooks and Althouse, 2000; Brooks, 2002). Stacking refers to the process of consciously or unconsciously applying racially motivated stereotypes to individuals/groups, and making decisions based on their perceived abilities. These stereotypes, embedded within the psyche of many white (and some non-white) coaches, scouts and managers, push or ‘stack’ athletes of colour within certain positions. It has been suggested that sport leadership positions are usually taken by individuals who have competed in central positions, such as a central midfielder in football or a pitcher in baseball (Brooks and Althouse, 2000). Because of stacking, black athletes have traditionally been employed in wide positions which are generally regarded as requiring less intelligence,

leadership, and interaction. As a result, black candidates 'are thus frequently viewed as less qualified to enter leadership roles beyond the playing field' (Regan and Feagin, 2017: 18).

Fifth, the *extraordinary cost of racism* is illuminated by many societal patterns. For instance, Feagin (2006) highlights that African American families suffer a reduced life expectancy, underachievement within education, and reduced economic net worth when compared to white Americans. Anwar's (1998) work similarly highlights that British Asian families, notably of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent, are considerably disadvantaged economically in comparison to their white counterparts. Cashmore and Cleland's (2011) discussion article, which explores the paucity of black football managers, highlights that educational underachievement, especially among black males, remains a persistent feature of British society and may contribute to the dearth of black managers in the game. Even when candidates of colour are qualified, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) note that people with "black sounding names" are 50 percent less likely to be called back for a job interview which thus leads to economic disparity between social groups. Likewise, Adesina and Marocico (2017) report that applicants with a Muslim sounding name are three times less likely to be called for an interview in comparison to those with a perceived 'white' or 'English' sounding name. For Hylton (2009: 41), this clearly illustrates that 'we live in a fundamentally racist and unequal society where processes systematically disenfranchise and limit the potential of black (and white) people. We therefore have a racist society that impinges on all aspects of our lives'.

The final tenet, *resisting systemic racism*, refers to challenging racism.

Affirmative action, or positive action, are examples of how systemic racism can be challenged. Regan and Feagin (2017) note that BAME coaches are more likely to be hired in men's basketball, and at the highest level of women's college basketball, when black head basketball coaches are placed in positions of power. This trend can be observed within football as BAME coaches are clustered at a few professional clubs who have, or formerly had, a black manager (Gibson, 2016). BAME individuals in powerful positions, such as managers or first-team coaches, are thus able to resist systemic racial discrimination by hiring and promoting BAME candidates.

Racisms are embedded within football, just like they are in every other sphere of socio-cultural life (Ansari, 2004; Burdsey, 2007; Hylton, 2009; Lusted, 2009). The exclusion of British Asian players and coaches within the higher echelons of football highlights an issue that must be analysed and addressed. Before we can offer British Asian thoughts on the Rooney Rule, however, it is important to provide background on the British Asian football journey and highlight factors which may have led to the paucity of coaches and managers.

British Asians, Football and Coaching

Although the Indian sub-continent has a relationship with football that stretches back over 130 years, there have been very few success stories observed within English professional football. Because visibility at elite level has been so minimal, embedded stereotypes remain, e.g. parents prioritise education,

religion outweighs sport, football is unpopular, physical sports are not suited to the 'Asian frame', etc. These common-sense rationales have been used to explain the exclusion of British Asians from English professional football.

Authors including Bains and Patel (1996), Burdsey (2007), Johal (2001), Kilvington (2016) and Ratna (2007) have showcased the British Asian passion for football and attempted to challenge the above rationales by investigating the exclusion of British Asian football communities. Although the experiences of British Asian football coaches have been documented, to some extent, studies have largely tended to focus on participation and fandom. This paper, however, attempts to specifically examine the barriers British Asian coaches encounter, highlight their response to the Rooney Rule, and offer new solutions.

Although former black players have started to make inroads into senior coaching and management positions in elite level football, British Asian individuals remain largely invisible. It is noteworthy that 'home-grown' black players have consistently accounted for around 15% of the 3,700 professional players within English football since the mid 1990s (Bradbury, 2001) whereas there have never been more than 12 British Asian players with professional contracts competing at any one time across the 92 professional clubs. Bradbury (2017) notes that minority coaches who have little connection to the professional game struggle to gain support from senior club staff to attend Higher Level Coach Education (HLCE) courses. While well-known black players are generally welcomed onto HLCE courses based on their prior status, coaches from a South Asian background are 'doubly marginalised by their lack

of prior professional experience as players and by their embodied (and negatively assumed), ethnic, cultural and religious distinctiveness' (Bradbury, 2017: 19). According to Bradbury (2017: 19), unlike black coaches within these environments, British Asian coaches encounter enhanced 'suspicion' and 'surprise' by white coach educators.

Bourdieu (1984) suggests that participating in sport depends on the economic, cultural and physical capitals that we possess. Tinning and Fitzclarence (1992) argue that ideologies are shaped through one's relationships with popular culture, media and institutional sites. We understand our valued bodies and how we can use them, and in what context, via a negotiation through 'today's image-heavy, postmodern and individualised world where self-worth and one's place in society are closely tied to the self-managed, but fluid, body' (Hill and Azzario, 2012: 265). British Asians are not considered the traditional embodiment of a football coach or manager. Because of this, due their paucity in football, and a lack of role models, individuals are racially framed according to external markers such as 'race', ethnicity and religion. These signifiers lead to signifieds which question and undermine the skill and ability of coaches, as well as players. In turn, British Asian coaches continue to be perceived as a 'gamble' (Bradbury, 2013; Kilvington, 2016) which preserves the status quo as clubs continue to operate 'patterns of institutional closure' by recruiting 'within the dominant (white) social and cultural networks of the professional football industry' (Bradbury, 2017: 12-13).

In sum, the ability, knowledge and experience of British Asian coach applicants is routinely, albeit often subconsciously, questioned by white (and non-white) coach educators (Bradbury, 2017; Kilvington, 2016). Positive action policies, such as the Rooney Rule, challenge institutional closure and promote 'a more progressive and inclusionary vision of the game than has been the case in the past' (Bradbury, 2013: 309). One may expect this policy to be supported by all communities, and especially those who are being empowered. This will be explored following a brief methodology.

Methodology

This section discusses the methodological processes that were enforced while conducting the research. A purposive sampling strategy, which 'allows the researcher to home in on people or events which there are good grounds for believing will be critical for the research' (Denscombe, 2003: 16), was utilised as 11 British Asian football coaches were interviewed using structured and semi-structured methods. The interviews took place between April 2016 and January 2018. Seven participants coach at academy level and four at grassroots clubs. It must be highlighted that all the participants are experienced coaches (one holds a UEFA A License) and most of whom aim to progress further in the game. In addition, although nine of the 11 participants had heard of the Rooney Rule and had some understanding of it, I explained the policy impartially in advance of the interview to limit any confusion. Anonymity was granted to allow the participants to express themselves freely without constraints.

Although it was hoped that all interviews would be semi-structured and face-to-face, geographical, time and economic constraints denied this. Six were semi-structured and conducted via telephone while five of the interviews were structured, taking place via email. Participants were all asked several set questions including racialized barriers to coaching, their thoughts on the Rooney Rule, and what measures could be enforced to challenge BAME coach exclusion. The semi-structured interviews returned richer data as these formats permit open-ended questions which not only encourage dialogue but also allows the interviewer to probe further into areas of interest. The aim was to achieve an 'intensive insight' rather than an 'extensive perspective' (see Deacon et al, 1999).

This work also draws on quantitative methods in the form of a ten-question survey which was distributed to BAME coaches in London, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire who attended coach inclusion workshops between October 2016 and October 2017. Participants completed the survey in person. Anonymity was offered however all coaches decided to waive this and provide their name and contact details. This survey relates to wider and ongoing research I am conducting which explores BAME coach barriers to football.

This research embraced a constructivist grounded theory coding method in a bid to explore actions and processes. One could suggest that this coding paradigm compliments this study as I am interested in understanding the actions and processes which have excluded BAME coaches from professional football. For Charmaz and Bryant (2011: 292), 'Grounded theorists code their

data for actions and study how these actions might contribute to fundamental processes occurring in the research site or in the participants' lives'. Flick (2009) notes that coding should begin immediately, i.e. after the first interview. This 'allows time to ask analytic questions about the code and data that emerge from the material at hand, not from a preconceived coding framework' (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011: 303). Here it is postulated that one's research route is not fixed, hence, the emerging codes steer the researcher along the most important paths. Therefore, transcriptions and coding, when necessary, were generally completed in the days following interviews. Theoretical saturation marks the end point when recurrent themes and codes are repeated.

Finally, providing a critical reflection of the 'self' is paramount. Gobo (2011: 22) describes this as 'the self-aware analysis of the dynamics between researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field, and the way in which the researcher's positioning impacts on the research process'. The researcher does not exist independently outside the study but is in fact located within it. For Denscombe (2003: 169), 'people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions'. Despite interviews being conducted via email and telephone, my 'self' and my 'whiteness', in particular, has impacted on the data and it would be naive to pretend otherwise. Reflexivity allows us to understand that there are not only alternative discourses out there but, the researcher themselves can affect and shape the results. Not asking antagonising questions, keeping the

questions simple and attempting to remain neutral in interviews are just some of the ways that can help mitigate these methodological limitations.

The Rooney Rule and British Asian coach responses

The Rooney Rule attempts to combat institutional racism, a form in which gatekeepers ‘do not consciously discriminate against minorities, but fail to challenge old assumptions and stereotypes, meaning a pattern of operations continues’ (Cashmore and Cleland, 2011: 1599). One may assume that positive action policies such as the Rooney Rule would be welcomed by those who are being empowered. Yet, survey data acquired from 15 British Asian coaches, some of whom had no coaching qualifications while others had achieved a UEFA B Coaching License, illustrated that just over half either agreed or strongly agreed with its implementation while six were ambivalent. Only one participant strongly disagreed with the rule.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
British Indian	3	1	1	0	1
British Pakistani	2	0	3	0	0
British Bangladeshi	0	0	1	0	0
British Asian Other	1	1	1	0	0
	6	2	6	0	1

Table 1.1. British Asian coach responses to the Rooney Rule

By no means are these results representative of all British Asian football coaches due to the small sample size, however, the data does provide us

with a snapshot of opinions in response to the rule. It illustrates that there is a slight favouritism to the policy. The survey, which asked a range of other key questions, also uncovered that 12 out of the 15 participants believed that a lack of networks was a key barrier to inclusion, the most frequently selected barrier of those listed. The Rooney Rule arguably attempts to challenge this barrier as it provides an opportunity to present oneself and network in the process. Thus, it is perhaps surprising then that only 8 out of the 15 coaches outright supported this policy.

The following discussion will build on the quantitative data by critically exploring British Asians' qualitative responses to questions surrounding the Rooney Rule. The remainder of this section has been divided into five subsections, i.e. key themes that emerged from the interview data. First, the interviewees reflect on the positives of the Rooney Rule and its ability to challenge the white racial frame. Second, the participants highlight whether this policy is perhaps somewhat premature. Third, the discussion explores whiteness and focuses on selection panels. Fourth, the question whether the policy is merely 'tokenistic'. Finally, the discussion closes by acknowledging whether the rule could be perceived as 'reverse racism'.

'The Rooney Rule can open doors'

For some coaches, the Rooney Rule was welcomed and strongly supported. It was noted that this policy enables access and an opportunity to present your skills, knowledge and coaching ethos. But, in the simplest terms, 'it gets you in the room'.

The Rooney Rule can open doors. It can change the football culture and increase the chances of BAME coaches to work at elite level.
(Participant 4, 13 April 2016)

It gets you in the room and once you're in the room it's down to you and what you can do. You would then hope that if you are the best candidate and the best coach, you would get that job over anyone else. I'm not naive to think that that's always the case but with the Rooney Rule, I'd like to think that the chance of getting the jobs is increasing.
(Participant 8, 22 August 2016)

I agree with the Rooney Rule because if a BAME coach has the same qualifications, experience and demonstrates the same motivation they should be given the opportunity to have an interview and clubs should embrace it and make the decision based on ability and the connection with the individual. (Participant 6, 18 April 2016)

For Bradbury (2017: 15), elite level football clubs traditionally operate 'a series of "racially closed" networks – rather than qualifications – based approaches to coach recruitment'. This is encapsulated in the following oral testimony:

I apply for semi-pro jobs the majority of the time and I never get an interview. I've applied for two or three hundred jobs. I've got an A License. I've managed a national team. I've got a letter of recommendation from [current international manager]. I can tell you how it works. A job comes up. I email. They acknowledge my email. A couple of weeks later I'm told that I've not been selected. The only time I have ever managed in England has been because I've known the chairman personally. (Participant 11, 15 January 2018)

The door of the interview room was closed but because of the Rooney Rule it is ajar for at least one BAME candidate to walk through. It could be suggested that the policy should naturally help challenge the traditional process of 'white-to-white' networks. Rich emphasises the importance of networking as, for example, 'over 80 percent of Americans ... Get their jobs through acquaintance contracts. Racially homogenous friendship networks can segregate people out of important networks, and thus out of important opportunities' (2013: 144). Not only does the policy open the door, it provides candidates an opportunity to challenge stereotypes which permeate the white racial frame while helping destabilise the social reproduction manifest within football (Feagin, 2006). Moreover, as several interviewees suggested, it allows applicants to garner a connection and rapport with the selection panel. This may help combat selectors' common misconceptions and stereotypes regarding black and Asian coaches:

Being a South Asian, they [selectors] think is he knowledgeable, technical and tactically up to date? ... I think peoples stereotypes and perceptions of people from certain ethnic groups needs to be changed. (Participant 9, 24 August 2016)

People may automatically assume because of your appearance or your background that you can't coach or that you don't know about the game, you don't have experience in the game and therefore you're not going to be able to coach. Those stereotypes manifest and cause barriers. (Participant 8, 22 August 2016)

These unconscious perceptions, which could be categorised as inferential racism, are founded on the collective memories and histories of the white racial

frame (Feagin, 2006). Because British Asians have traditionally been associated with stick sports such as cricket and hockey, football is falsely, but commonly, perceived to be an unimportant subculture among British Asian communities (Bains and Johal, 1998; Burdsey, 2007; Kilvington, 2016). In turn, the British Asian 'body' is perceived to be paradoxical to 'football bodies'. Put simply, inferential racism (common-sense assumptions and stereotypes) leads to institutional racism (under-representation in coaching positions). As Omi and Winant (1986) argue then, these ideological beliefs reinforce structural consequences and therefore shape the social order. The Rooney Rule therefore empowers British Asian coaches by offering them the chance to gain a rapport with the panel and discuss their coaching experiences, skills and philosophy first-hand.

Unstable foundations: Is football ready for the Rooney Rule?

Despite the considerable increase in African-American and Hispanic head coach appointment in the NFL since 2003, Solow, Solow and Walker (2011) argue that the Rooney Rule, which is a valuable public statement of action and equality, 'is not a particularly effective method for increasing the number of minority head coaches'. They suggest that the NFL should direct its efforts to increasing the number of BAME personnel entering the coaching progression and moving up the coaching ranks.

Similar criticisms were noted by several interviewees. A number of participants suggested that the foundations for BAME coaches have not yet set, adding that

Rooney Rule candidates who are not suitably qualified may be harmed as a result of this policy:

It might hurt or damage the confidence of the coach. If they are interviewed for a role and then ignored because they aren't qualified enough for the certain role it could have an adverse effect on their development (Participant 3, 13 April 2016).

Hence, one could suggest that more emphasis should be placed on ensuring that pathways into coaching are accessible for all communities. The Coach Bursary Programme (CBP), or COACH, funded by the English Premier League (EPL), English Football League (EFL), League Managers Association (LMA), PFA and the FA, must be emphasised here as it intends to increase the number of BAME coaches in football, in all structures of the game. Successful applicants of the COACH programme have the opportunity to gain coaching qualifications and coaching experience with opportunities to observe elite coaches and benefit from mentoring schemes. As of October 2015, three years after its inception, the programme has seen 168 BAME coaches (70 percent black and 30 percent Asian) receive 228 COACH bursaries. The Rooney Rule alone will not dramatically increase diversity within coaching and management spheres unless it is supported by other approaches. As Bradbury (2013: 309) argues, positive action approaches offer a direct and immediate solution, however, such approaches will only succeed if they are 'delivered as part of a more holistic package of educational, policy orientated and legislative action'. Programmes such as COACH equip minority candidates with the skills and experience needed to seriously challenge for elite level coaching roles.

Whiteness and selection panels

Putnam (1999: 27 in Cashmore and Cleland, 2011: 1599) postulates that white board members tend to 'pass over qualified blacks and hire whites with whom they are familiar ... and to conform to their long-held ideal about what a successful coach should be'. Bradbury (2017: 22) adds that professional football clubs tend to overlook potentially problematic minority candidates, instead favouring 'safe' white options with whom 'club owners and senior executive staff have greater levels of social, cultural and professional familiarity and comfort'. Considering that 'less than 1% of senior governance positions at professional clubs, league associations, and national federations across Europe and at UEFA are held by minority staff', it is somewhat unsurprising that whiteness is social reproduced within hiring (Bradbury, 2017: 12). Several participants commented that they felt like 'outsiders', on the periphery of the game, and have struggled to gain entry. The game has traditionally been whitewashed and, as a result, British Asian coaches have struggled to challenge this white-to-white social reproduction.

Within basketball, however, black players have used their new-found power to resist white-cloning reproduction (Regan and Feagin, 2017). Basketball has demonstrated that diverse selection panels increase minority appointments. Moves to increase diversity among selection panels was advocated by several research participants. Some suggested that it was important to have someone 'in the room' who may understand them and relate to them in some way. Singer, Harrison and Bukstein (2010: 282) illustrate that the presence of

marginalised groups on selection panels can be fundamental to the hiring of minority head football coaches because:

If search committees are lacking in the area of racial diversity (i.e., the committee is homogenous, consisting of all or mostly all whites and/or individuals who adopt a color blind, race neutral perspective), the perspectives and insights of racial minorities as well as whites who embrace diversity, particularly race consciousness, are muted when the search committee is discussing head coaching candidates, and making recommendations on which ones to invite for an interview.

Diverse selection panels are thus less likely to make decisions based on centuries old, white-crafted narratives which have been found to disadvantage minority ethnic groups within the hiring process (Kulik and Roberson, 2008; Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 1999). They will help destabilise popular notions of minority coaches as being less desirable (Tomkiewicz, Brenner and Adey-Bello, 1998); challenge exclusionary 'white-to-white' networks (Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001); challenge ability related stereotypes manifest in the white racial frame (Feagin, 2006; 2013); and, create role models for current and aspiring coaches (Kilvington, 2016).

'Tokenism'?

Some participants criticised the Rooney Rule suggesting that it represents 'tokenism'.

My concern is, I'm a BME coach applying for a job, and yes they need to bring along a BME person for the interview list, but they might not

even want me. They're ticking a box. I don't want to be a tick box.
(Participant 9, 24 August 2016)

When the rule came out a friend rand me and said 'you'll be alright now, you'll get an interview'. For me, personally, being completely honest, it's more for the sake of it rather than anything else.
(Participant 11, 15 January 2018)

The former participant echoed the views of others stating that he did not want to be 'just a Rooney Rule candidate'. He added that this policy is a 'tick box exercise' and one which can be easily manipulated. Several participants argued that gatekeepers can shortlist the least qualified and experienced 'Rooney Rule candidate', who may have little chance of securing the position, and yet the club have followed the correct procedures. This manipulation of the rule was also noted by Solow, Solow and Walker (2011) who suggest that a team that wished to discriminate on a racial basis could do so without violating the rule by interviewing a minority candidate whom it had no intention of hiring, before hiring a candidate of the preferred race.

Football managers and coaches are often appointed through personal networks and recommendations (Farennet, 2014) and thus, 'outsider' coaches may not be wanted. Observe how many former captains, players and fan favourites have secured tenures at their beloved clubs. Bradbury (2017: 12-13) argues that elite level coach recruitment demonstrates 'patterns of institutional closure' for many minority candidates as coaches are commonly recruited as a result of 'personal recommendations, patronage and sponsored mobility of key power brokers

from within the dominant (white) social and cultural networks of the professional industry’.

If a full recruitment process is not carried out, then the Rooney Rule is being by-passed. Of the ten clubs who trailed the rule at first-team level during the 2016-17 season, eight managerial changes were made, although only two occasions saw the policy being enforced (BBC Online, 2017). For example, Wolverhampton Wanderers overlooked the code when they hired Walter Zenga in July 2016 but faced no ramifications. During the policy’s first season, 123 academy jobs were listed on the EFL website but the EFL received data relating to just 76 of these jobs. Lord Herman Ouseley, chair of Kick It Out, said: ‘For maximum effectiveness, [The Rooney Rule] would have to be backed up by penalties and sanctions for non-compliance ... clubs have got away with doing little or nothing to achieve fair outcomes’ (cited in BBC Online, 2017). If there are no sanctions for clubs who bypass this policy, it is unlikely to have a significant impact in the game and therefore this must be urgently addressed.

‘Special treatment’

Mirza (1999: 112 in Hylton, 2009: 22-23) suggests that racial inequality in sport, as in the law, is commonly seen as ‘exceptional and irregular’. Lusted (2017) and Hylton (2015) add that popular discourses of inclusion, belonging, equality, meritocracy and ‘fairness’ are so deeply embedded within sport that few would challenge them. Because sport is hailed as an egalitarian sphere in which talent, ability and determination negate the existence of inequalities and

discrimination, it has led some to argue that positive action policies such as the Rooney Rule are redundant.

There shouldn't be any need to have a rule saying that black and Asians should be interviewed; BME groups should just be given the opportunities regardless of 'race', ethnicity or colour. BME candidates should just get the interviews anyway. (Participant 2, 13 April 2016)

Everything I've achieved in football has been achieved without any special treatment. Every role I've had has been down to merit and what my work is like and what I'm like as a person ... Every single one of my roles has been achieved without any special BAME initiative. (Participant 9, 24 August 2016)

It's down to the individual. I'm a big believer of that. If you want to be a success in football or in life, you've got to get out of bed and work your socks off. (Participant 11, 15 January 2018)

Those who subscribe to a utopian, race-neutral or 'post-racist' world arguably oppose positive action solutions. Some participants suggested that if a policy appeals for 'special' or differential treatment, that policy could itself be considered discriminatory against the power holders. This view was put forward by the following interviewees:

If you're given an interview on the basis of, you know, this rule when there's a better candidate then that's not fair no matter what. You could say that there's been discrimination against black and Asian coaches in the past and now it's being reversed. (Participant 8, 22 August 2016)

I can only speak on behalf of my experiences, but for me, it could cause conflict because the wider community might say 'hang on, why are they getting special treatment'? (Participant 9, 24 August 2016)

For some participants, affirmative action policies reflect, or may appear to reflect, 'reverse racism'. Such policies in the US have faced a similar backlash as some regard them as 'unconstitutional' (Rich, 2013: 48). Lusted (2017) critically examined online forum responses concerning the Rooney Rule and highlighted that many responses showed anger towards the policy citing that it is advocating inequality. Several interviewees felt uncomfortable and hesitant at the prospect of gaining job interviews because of their ethnicity. This feeling was expressed by participant 5: 'It's good and bad. I don't want to get a job based on meeting statistics ... But if we don't have Rooney Rule in place then doors will be shut' (18 April 2016). For some, there appeared to be an internal conflict or an uncertainty with regards to whether supporting the rule was in fact discriminatory, i.e. using the 'race-card' to gain an advantage.

However, rejecting the Rooney Rule 'gives little recognition to the existence of underlying disadvantages' that some groups may face in competing for coaching and management jobs (Lusted, 2017: 53). In other words, 'by downplaying or denying the indecencies of racism, it exonerates those accused of engaging in such acts' (Kilvington, 2016: 120). The Rooney Rule attempts to weaken institutional favouritism, a process which has always benefited whites. Depending on how one perceives sport, this policy either advocates unequal

treatment or promotes necessary positive action. For critics, successful BAME coaches and managers may not deserve their positions as their selection could have been due to their membership of a social group. For supporters, the Rooney Rule is meritocratic because the eventual candidate is chosen on merit - nothing more, nothing less.

Concluding comments

This article has critically explored the Rooney Rule with the aid of British Asian coach insight. A somewhat contentious policy, it continues to provoke heated debate. The empirical work presented illustrates that British Asian coaches remain split regarding its implementation. Some participants were apprehensive and critical as the policy appears to use 'race' to claim an 'unfair' advantage while others stated that it could damage the confidence of aspiring coaches. Conversely, several participants welcomed its implementation arguing that it opens doors.

Although the Rooney Rule has been accused of being discriminatory itself, we must understand that racial inequality still exists – it is not on the periphery of social life, it 'permeates every aspect of social life from minute, intimate relationships ... to the neighbourhoods we live in, and the schools we go to ... all the way to the macro-economic system' (Zamudio et al, 2011: 3). 'Race' is endemic and systematically embedded within popular culture and contemporary discourses. If we ignore 'race' and disregard that it influences social actions and structures, we are effectively refraining from acknowledging that it has worked to exclude BAME coaches within English football (Bradbury,

2017). The neoliberal, or mythical, position of meritocracy and colour-blindness must be challenged because 'race' and racism operate on both micro and systemic levels. Racism is not a 'thing of the past' as racial subordination is still a major problem of the present. Systemic Racism Theory allows us to critically understand the extent of which racism is embedded within football. Throughout this article, tenets of systemic racism such as white's unjust enrichment versus black's unjust impoverishment, social reproduction and alienation, the embedded nature of stereotypes manifest within the white racial frame, and attempts to resist social reproduction, were common themes to help us counter meritocratic discourses and highlight the existence and perseverance of racial discrimination within football.

The Rooney Rule alone is not the solution to the problem. This policy must be complimented by other means. Alongside existing and developing programmes, such as the COACH programme, it is likely that the numbers of British Asian coaches will increase over time. In addition, I argue that equality and diversity (or unconscious bias) training for academy personnel, coach educators and selection committees is advisable in order to challenge narrow and unfair perceptions of minority groups that permeate the white racial frame. Moreover, diversifying selection panels, evident within basketball, is another positive way to challenge white social hierarchies (Regan and Feagin, 2017). And, finally, sanctions must be enforced for those who overlook the rule as too many clubs ignored the policy in its debut season. Football clubs must embrace, adhere to, and fully support this policy if we are going to observe any positive change within the 'beautiful game'.

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