

**Commissioner Tagliabue with William C. Rhoden of the New York Times**  
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**Rhoden: It looks like this year no black coaches will be hired. Last year it was two. What is your gut reaction to that?**

**PT:** If I look at the whole season and coming into the end of the year, I was encouraged by some things and then disappointed by the results of the hiring up until this point. I thought that the encouraging thing was the way that the black coaches were performing and being treated as great coaches in and of their own right. The fact that they were black was completely irrelevant. With Lovie Smith turning the Bears around and with Marvin [Lewis] completing the turnaround in Cincinnati, Tony [Dungy] being 13-0, the great thing about that was you didn't know whether Tony Dungy was black, white, green or red. He was being compared to Don Shula and Bill Walsh and coaches who had teams at 11-0, 12-0, 13-0.

In terms of performance, I thought that was a really encouraging thing because it's the power of the performance that gets rid of the stereotypes and gets rid of the old fashioned thinking. The same thing has happened at the quarterback position. Randall Cunningham goes to the Pro Bowl and it's worth its weight in gold in terms of getting rid of stereotypes. The same with other quarterbacks like McNabb and Vick and Culpepper, and a lot of guys along the way, Warren Moon and so forth. So the performance, I was really encouraged by.

As for the number of black assistants and coordinators, you could see staffs where the entire leadership group on the staff was African-American coaches. Now you come to the hiring season, it's one of those years where everybody's template seems to go out the window. In prior years, we had the feeling that everyone was going to the tried, true, tested and rested, which was the Joe Gibbs and Dick Vermeil hirings. You know they were not only tried, true and tested, they were well-rested. And now it just seems to be going in the opposite direction. All of a sudden you have a bunch of guys who are head coaches for the first time, which in some way is opening the door wider, which is what we are trying to do.

All that being said, if we don't have any increase in the number of black coaches this year, it will be a disappointment.

**Rhoden: Is there a core of NFL owners and general managers that just aren't sold on black head coaches, that see Tony Dungy as an anomaly?**

**PT:** I don't think there is any of that. I think people are looking for the coach that they think they can win with. I think the big issue this year is who can put a staff together. Some of the guys who hired white coaches this year hired black coaches before. Green Bay had Ray Rhodes, Minnesota's prior ownership had Denny Green. So you go around the league and to say that an owner and his organization got it four years ago and now all of a sudden he's lost it in terms of his sensitivities and his priorities on this issue, I don't see any of that. Right across the board, a heck of a lot of people are being interviewed. As far as Jeff Pash here in our office can tell, we've had the largest number of minority coaches interviewed. It's hard to find a team out there looking for a coach that hasn't taken this very seriously.

About half of these clubs spoke to me, and in every case it was the owner calling me up and saying, "What about this guy? What about that guy? I heard he's great. I heard he gave a great interview. I'm talking to him tomorrow. Do you have any suggestions as to issues I want to bring up with him? How can I persuade him to be interested in my club?" That type of thing. So all I've heard is salesmanship. Clubs in the cases that I'm talking about ended up not hiring the guy, but when they spoke to me they said, "This guy is an offensive guy, and I want to make it clear that we are looking for an offensive guy because we want to go after Reggie Bush." Or "I think our strength is on defense, and I want to make it clear to the whole world that we've got a strong defensive coach, which this guy is, because we're going to be in the market to pick up a linebacker." A lot of it was strategic thinking around the candidate and people being very interested and recognizing that these people had strengths. It was not, "Can you help me find a guy that I can bring in here for an interview." It was well-informed people, knowing all the positives, looking at offensive guys versus defensive guys, looking at what other teams they had coaches, looking ahead to will this guy be a positive in terms of attracting other coaches, attracting players, building my team.

**Rhoden: At the end of the hiring season, if no African-Americans are hired, what should be the feeling? What would be your advice on how to look at this?**

**PT:** My advice would be to stay on with the full-court press. Don't go into a prevent defense. Stay in a full-court press in terms of unearthing candidates and doing all the things we've been doing. The first thing I need to do is what we have been doing in past years, meet with head coaches, coordinators, front office executives, African-Americans and others that we've been meeting with every year at the Combine in Indianapolis. We've been having meetings every year, a dinner meeting and some other meetings, where we've had 20-25 people together, predominantly African-American, but not entirely, talking about these issues and getting feedback. What was the feedback? Why were the patterns the way they were? A lot of young guys, a lot of new guys. Why did Fassel get passed over? Why did Haslett and Sherman get passed over? Maurice Carthon got passed over. What about these guys, black and white? What is going on? We had a cycle of Vermeil, Gibbs and Schottenheimer. Now we have a cycle of guys who are in their mid-to-late-30s. That is if two people makes for a cycle.

**Rhoden: One of the owners said about the Jets coach (Mangini), "Six years ago, he was getting me coffee. Now he's the head coach."**

**PT:** A lot of people, and this has always been true because going way back you have the Paul Brown tree, the Vince Lombardi tree, the Bill Walsh tree, it's interesting that when you look at where these coaches come from this year, in many cases it's the same places they came from last year. Last year, Romeo Crennel was coming off of Bill Belichick's staff. This year, Eric Mangini is coming off of Bill Belichick's staff. They are both coming off of the success of the Patriots' defense. It just so happens that one guy is black and one guy is white. So I don't know what conclusion you draw from that. It's interesting to look at some of these other guys. Obviously, Carthon is getting a look because Parcels is talking a lot about Carthon. Sean Payton gets a look because he's working for Parcels. The guys are coming off the same trees. It just so happens that one year they are black, one year they are white, in one case they are black, in one case they are white.

**Rhoden: There is a thin line between overreacting and drawing general conclusions, and just being diligent.**

**PT:** It doesn't ever help to overreact. It is certainly positive to react clearly and unequivocally and keep the full-court press on. But you've got to be analytical, because if you're not it's all about being the guy at the end of the diving board and all of a sudden the board breaks off. Like I said, I haven't done that analysis, but it just occurs to me now looking at some of the names here we're talking about. Parcells' comment to Sean Payton and Maurice Carthon. Belichick's comment to Romeo Crennel and Eric Mangini. If you play that game to the end, the interesting thing might be that a lot of those guys are coming from the same heritage. Marvin Lewis and Mike Nolan come out of the Ravens staff. I don't know what conclusion to draw from that, except for the fact that success will change the produced coaching candidates.

**Rhoden:** Normally it's a copy-cat league. Are you surprised that given the recent success, you didn't get one new African-American coach?

**PT:** There again, I don't think that has to do with color. It has to do with things that work. A commonality between Marvin Lewis, Lovie Smith and Tony Dungy seems to be defense. A commonality between Eric Mangini and Romeo Crennel seems to be defense. Jack del Rio is defense. So people are copy cats, but they are always copying on two sides of the ledger. Some guys copy the defenses successes and come up with the idea that you win with defense. Other guys copy the Drew Brees and LaDainian Tomlinson model of winning with offense. So there is a lot of copy-catting, but they are copying about five different models.

I just think we've got to stay at it as hard as we've been at it and make sure it's better next year.