

## **Prologue**

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### **Published version**

CARTER, Leeja and OLUSOGA, Peter (2023). Prologue. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 35 (1), 1-4.

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To cite this article: Leeja Carter & Peter Olusoga (2023) Prologue, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 35:1, 1-4, DOI: [10.1080/10413200.2022.2149635](https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2022.2149635)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2022.2149635>



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Published online: 30 Nov 2022.



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## Prologue

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The sporting arena is often considered to be a prime example of a post-racial environment, a true meritocracy, where success is determined by a combination of natural talent, hard work, and mental fortitude (Carrington, 2010). Although we might well wish this to be the case, it is crystal clear, upon closer examination, that racism and racist practices are deeply embedded in sport at all levels. For example, across all American sports leagues there is a clear disparity between athletes of color and the proportionality of head coaches. According to Brassil and Lutz (2020) the percentage of athletes of color versus current coaches of color per sport league was: 74% vs. 13% (NFL), WNBA (83% vs. 25%), NBA (83% vs. 30%), MLB (40% vs. 20%), and MLS (60% vs. 41%). Furthermore, the 2022 Racial and Gender Report Card of the National Football League (Lapchick, 2022) illustrates the ongoing racial disparities among coaching staff and ownership. The 2022 report by Lapchick highlights that 18.8% of NFL head coaches are persons of color, 42.9% of NFL assistant coaches are persons of color, and only 3.1% of NFL team owners are people of color (Lapchick, 2022) in contrast to 71% of NFL players (Chinni, 2022).

In addition to underrepresentation of minoritized groups in coaching, support-staff, ownership, and board-level roles (Bradbury et al., 2018; UK Sport, 2019; Yeowell, 2013), the daily racial microaggressions experienced in sporting and academic settings (Carter & Davila, 2017, 2019), as well as the biased and racialized language used by those who commentate and report on athletic endeavors (Merullo et al., 2019), collectively indicate that racism has a discernible impact on sport psychology professionals and the athletes and coaches we serve. Furthermore, access to youth sports, recreational spaces, and barriers to youth of color remaining in and advancing through sport, are other indicators of the pervasive impact of racism. Racial sport equity opens, forms, and moves conversation on how racism is formed and instituted (Park & Pellow, 2004) in sport spaces, creating barriers to sport access and equity across the lifespan. According to the Aspen Institute, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the sport participation gap among the youth of color, with 47% of Hispanic youth and 42% Black youth resuming sport at a lower level (Aspen Institute, 2022). Moreover, play space, transportation, and geography

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disproportionately negatively impact racial minority youth participation (Aspen Institute, 2022).

The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, amongst others, and the subsequent world-wide protests against racism were thought by many to be something of a watershed moment. Organizations across the globe were swift in issuing statements of their own positions against racism and their dedication to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Sport was often at the forefront, with athletes and coaches leading many of these conversations and using their platforms to highlight social justice issues. Premier League soccer players took the knee as a powerful anti-racism statement before each game, Athletes from the NBA and WNBA, Major League Baseball, and Major League Soccer exercised their collective power and went on strike in response to the shooting of Jacob Blake.

Yet over two years later, we must ask ourselves what has substantively changed in our day-to-day practices. In studies exploring university administrators' responses to racist incidents, researchers found that statements by administrators were not disruptive and, in many cases, downplayed, diminished, and failed to name the institutional and historical systems that created the racist events (Ofoegbu & Epke, 2022). As a result, these statements might be merely considered as manipulative tactics that reinforced systems of power through performative solidarity to placate campus concerns and fears, rather than a commitment to meaningful changes to the safety, transformation, and change for racial equity among campus communities. Sport is a microcosm of society, with statements of solidarity published, posted, and reshared, yet meaningful institutionalizing allyship, equity, and anti-racist practices are sparse.

Yes, the Washington Redskins changed their name and logo to the Commanders, but there is still considerable work to be done to achieve racial equality across all sport sectors and for all members of sport. For example, substantial system-wide reform is needed that addresses recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of racially and ethnically diverse candidates of color in senior sport leadership roles, coach training and development models that emphasize racial and culturally aware approaches, models for building and maintaining welcoming spaces for sport professionals in athletic and academic environments, reform within academic sport settings and programs, and systems that amplify Black, indigenous, and people of color's (BIPOC) voices in academic publishing.

It is essential that sport psychology practitioners develop their awareness and understanding of both the racism that exists *within* sport, and the disproportionate impact that highly racialized events *outside* of sport have on the wellbeing of athletes, coaches, and indeed practitioners of color.

The purpose of this special issue on "The Current Status of Racism in Sport and Liberatory Practices for Dismantling Systemic Racism" was to elicit applied and basic research, policy, and practice guidelines that specifically serve to improve outcomes in the field. A racial liberation lens unfolds and reveals the embedded systems of racialized power and practice that drive racial inequality in sport from the playground to the boardroom. This Special Issue names racism, racist incidents, and racial oppression within sport to move beyond discourse to creating disruptive policies, regulations, and practices that creates balanced power and repairs the harm of racist systems in sport.

We believe that we have brought together an excellent collection of articles which clearly address that purpose.

First, Economou et al. explore the lived experiences of Black student-athletes navigating their way through a world in which Black people and those from other minoritized groups are routinely victimized, brutalized, and murdered by those supposedly in authority, and in which the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted minoritized groups across the globe. The authors offer practical applications for developing and implementing anti-racist practices within sporting organizations and in the wider world.

Second, Lee et al. discuss the normalization of whiteness in sport, the ways in which women student-athletes of color experience, negotiate, and navigate whiteness in their everyday lives, and offer insights into how Sport and Exercise Psychology professionals might work to disrupt white normativity and disrupt systemic racism.

Third, Tibbetts and Smith explore the obstacles to effective mentorship for BIPOC practitioners in the traditionally white field of sport and exercise psychology. Through lenses of critical race theory, feminist and womanist mentorship practices, and intersectionality, a model of mentorship that aims to foster well-being and retention for BIPOC professionals is presented.

Fourth, Couch et al. provide an in-depth exploration of African American female Olympians' lived-experiences of navigating intersectional identity transitions through various career stages. Moreover, practical implications for offering culturally competent service delivery and therefore supporting athletes' well-being and performance goals through identity transitions are offered.

Finally, Muriwai et al. provide a fascinating insight into how diversifying and therefore legitimizing forms of knowledge might expand our understanding and application of Sport and Exercise Psychology practices, with an investigation into the perspectives of Māori sport and exercise academics, health professionals, athletes, and coaches.

Our hope is that this collection of papers moves the field forward in our understanding of and commitment to dismantling systemic racism within and beyond the spheres in which we work. Moreover, we hope that this special issue offers practical and tangible suggestions for sport psychology professionals to become truly anti-racist in their work.

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