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# Race Militancy and Affirmative Action in the Big Ten Conference

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Until 1972 there was no collective, coordinated effort by a major athletic conference in the United States to identify common grievances of their minority athletes and move to resolve them. Each university was expected to handle its own problems. Then, on March 8, 1972 the Big Ten Conference took steps to form an Advisory Commission, made up of black, former Big Ten athletes. The Commission's assignment was to identify the grievances of black athletes in the Conference, and to make appropriate recommendations.

The appointment of this Advisory Commission came not as intuitive "brainstorm" of any athletic director or faculty athletic representative. It was a direct result of a comprehensive report delivered to the Big Ten policy-makers on March 7, 1972 by Dr. Robert L. Green (formerly a professor of Educational Psychology at Michigan State University and now serving that University as Dean of the College of Urban Development). Green's report, "The Status of Blacks in the Big Ten Athletic Conference: Issues and Concerns," was highly critical and concluded that racism was prevalent in athletic departments throughout the Conference. The focus was on two issues: shortcomings in the education of black athletes, and discrimination in employment practices in the athletic departments of the Big Ten schools.

On the first issue, it was charged that securing an education is far too often sacrificed to the overriding concern for success in athletics by member schools, and that black athletes were suffering the most, a high percentage leaving school without degrees. In a majority of the Big Ten schools the counseling of athletes was done by the athletic department, the stress being placed upon maintaining the athlete's eligibility.

It was recommended that athletic departments hire black counselors to advise athletes.

The Conference policy regarding financial support of athletes was identified as another principal reason why many black athletes do not graduate.

It was recommended that a fifth year plan of financial aid be instituted, to support athletes in finishing their degrees after they have spent four years serving their university as athletes.

The second issue focused upon in the Green report was discrimination by coaches and athletic directors in employment practices in the athletic department of the Big Ten schools. Few blacks were to be found in the employ of the Athletic departments when a survey was made of clerical employees, publicity directors, team physicians, and other personnel essential to an athletic department.

There was a near total absence of black officials at Big Ten athletic events. Of the 76 game officials employed at the time of the report (40 in football and 36 in basketball) only two were black — one in each sport.

Green's report recommended that blacks be hired at every officiating level, particularly in basketball and football. It recommended that a Big Ten Equal Opportunity Committee be established, each university having two representatives on the committee, one from each school being black. The committee would work to insure that each athletic department is desegregated at all levels of employment.

In a final, bold gesture, Green recommended that the Big Ten hire a black associate commissioner with a major responsibility for implementing the above recommendations.

The Big Ten Joint Committee (athletic directors and faculty athletic representatives) took steps on March 8, 1972 to create an Advisor Commission. Judge Dickson, a University of Minnesota alumnus, became chairman of the group, and reported to the Big Ten Joint Committee at its December 4, 1972 meeting. Without knowing of Green's report, (the Joint Committee wanted a study conducted by former athletes which could later be compared to Green's study), Dickson's Commission reported essentially the same findings and recommendations.

The response of the Big Ten was a strong affirmation of the Advisory Commission's work. In response to academic concerns, conference rules of eligibility were altered to include assurance that an athlete, to remain eligible, must be making progress toward a degree that could be completed comfortably in four to five years. A formula for its implementation was developed. An academic/career counseling program, to be financed by the athletic department but to operate under the faculty representative, was approved. Athletes needing a fifth year to complete a bachelors degree were to receive financial aid. To enable coaches to become more sensitive to the special needs of minority athletes, the idea of conducting sensitivity sessions at member schools was approved.

In response to charges of discrimination in employment practices in the athletic departments, the Big Ten Joint Committee gave its approval for the Advisory Commission and the Big Ten Commissioner to begin developing a list of blacks who could be employed as coaches, athletic administrators, game officials, trainers, and other athletic department personnel.

Then came the announcement that clearly cast the die. A black Assistant Commissioner of the Big Ten Conference was to be appointed. One of his major functions was to be the implementation of the above policies.

To date it can be reported that the Big Ten is making good on its promises. All its universities have filled the position of academic/career counselor. Four of these men are black. The grant of a fifth year of financial aid became effective with freshmen entering in the Fall of 1973. In the area of sensitivity seminars, a pilot study called a "Leadership Skills Workshop" was conducted at the University of Wisconsin April 23-25, 1974, but its findings were incomplete at the time this paper was being presented. Considerable progress has been reported on the hiring of black officials for the 1974-75 school year. Five will be working in football and eight in basketball. Approximately 15 others have been identified and are being developed through the customary Big Ten workshops. Each Conference school is now expected to report regularly on its figures for the employment of blacks and other minority persons within the athletic department.

The newly-created position of Assistant Commissioner of the Big Ten Conference was filled on June 1, 1974 with the appointment of Dr. C.C. Henry, Chairman of the Depart-

ment of Health and Physical Education at Grambling University (Louisiana). Dr. Henry has accumulated enviable credentials in both the academic and athletic areas.

In essence, the Big Ten Conference has asserted a leadership role among the nation's athletic conferences in its firm resolve to eliminate racism in intercollegiate athletics.