

RACE AND GENDER IN AMERICAN FOOTBALL

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B(l)ack to the Future: **Slash-ing through the Black Atlantic**

Recently, Pittsburgh Steelers' quarterback Kordell Stewart has received substantial media attention because of his impressive athletic ability and his polyvalent style of play. In many of these interpretations, Kordell is seen as a new sensation, a 'new' kind of quarterback.

This essay reads the phenomenon of Kordell Stewart differently. Borrowing on Paul Gilroy's insight that the Black Atlantic represents the counterculture of modernity, I read Kordell's contribution as not new, or post-modern. Instead, I historically re-read Kordell in line with a number of other 'Slash-ers', namely the tradition of scrambling Black quarterbacks who have been playing in the Canadian Football League (CFL) for decades, including people like Chuck Ealey, Condredge Holloway, Don MacPherson, J.C. Watts, and Damon Allen.

Such a reading is important for a number of reasons. First, it stresses, once again, the dangers of Eurocentric applications of the term post-modern without regard to historical context. It allows us to read the emergence of Kordell not as a new phenomenon, but as an example of the reluctance of the racist National Football League (NFL) to having not only Black quarterbacks, but also Black quarterbacks who scramble.

Second, it highlights the limits of Black American bourgeois readings of the Black quarterback question, which are constrained by what Patrick Taylor calls a "mythical narrative" in that they seek to only understand NFL contributions and ignore the CFL. Seeing the NFL as the only "real" game in town is what drives the celebration of Stewart and others (Steve McNair and Jeff Blake, for example) by Black bourgeois Americans such as Spike Lee and Doug Williams. Reading Stewart through a Canadian lens avoids these pitfalls, reveals the limits of the discourse of "racial authenticity," and, I argue, makes for a much more open discussion.

Third, the essay provides a reading of blackness, sports, and quarterbacks which will hopefully put an end to the repetitive and tiresome issues raised in the "stacking" debate.