

NFL

Rooney Rule success: 8 minority head coaches for 2017

By BARRY WILNER
Associated Press

The NFL will have eight minority head coaches in 2017, tying the most for the beginning of one season.

With the hirings of Anthony Lynn by the Chargers and Vance Joseph by the Broncos, the eight minority coaches will equal the number in 2011.

Five of those men — Marvin Lewis, Mike Tomlin, Jim Caldwell, Hue Jackson and Ron Rivera — remain as head coaches, though Caldwell has switched from the Colts to the Lions, and Jackson went from the Raiders to the Browns. The Jets' Todd Bowles is the other.

The 49ers are the only team without a head coach.

Robert Gulliver, the NFL's chief human resources officer, cites the effectiveness of the Rooney Rule, which mandates that teams interview minority candidates for coaching and general manager positions. That rule also has been extrapolated to include other NFL jobs.

"The rule is firmly embedded," Gulliver said

Friday. "It makes us better."

Hall of Fame coach Tony Dungy agrees.

"To me, the Rooney Rule is doing what it is supposed to do," Dungy said. "It's not just to interview minority coaches, but to investigate every candidate and make a thorough list and highlight the person who fits you."

"If you explore it and take your time, you usually come out with a good candidate."

Perhaps most notable in the process this winter has been the rise to prominence of assistant coaches who might not have been among the prime candidates mentioned when the season ended. Lynn, Joseph and the Rams' Sean McVay — the youngest head coach in modern NFL history at age 30 — fall into that category.

"When we created the Rooney Rule in 2002-03, what we were trying to do was give guys who otherwise got overlooked to get a fighting chance," explained Cyrus Mehri, who co-wrote the Rooney Rule and has been a strong advocate of minority hiring in pro football, working closely with the Fritz Pollard Alliance.



AP Photo/Bill Wippert, File

The San Diego Chargers hired Buffalo Bills assistant coach Anthony Lynn as its newest head coach on Friday, giving the NFL eight minority head coaches in 2017, tying the most for the beginning of one season.

"This hiring cycle has been particularly special because of the guys who have worked hard to get themselves in position to compete, two guys got selected, and now we are at the highest number of clubs that have" a minority head coach.

"We are very happy about that."

If 2011 was a groundbreaking year — three other minorities finished that

season in charge of teams, Mel Tucker in Jacksonville, Romeo Crennel in Kansas City, and Bowles in Miami — Gulliver, Dungy and Mehri are excited with how 2017 has begun.

Already in place are minority general managers Rick Smith in Houston, Jerry Reese with the Giants, Ozzie Newsome in Baltimore, Sashi Brown in Cleveland, Reggie McKenzie in Oakland and Doug Whaley in Buffalo.

Most encouraging to Gulliver is how the Rooney Rule is being adopted in other sports, businesses and, as of last week, apparently by the U.S. government.

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) is planning to urge his fellow Democrats to adopt the "Rooney Rule." In the Senate, Schumer wants to ensure that at least one minority applicant is considered for any open position.

"The more diverse the Senate is, the better it can serve the American people," Schumer said. "Expanding the diversity initiative, following the Rooney Rule, and dedicating ourselves to increasing diversity will be good for the Senate and for the country."

Within the NFL, Gulliver notes there are plenty more opportunities for diversity.

"We continue to look for opportunities to build on the success of the Rooney Rule," he said.

"We've had a good dialogue with the Fritz Pollard Alliance and the commissioner, talked about the opportunity not only to have a diverse candidate

slate for coaches and GMs, but about the best practice to have multiple diverse candidates. We've talked about the best practices being applied to coordinator positions."

A year ago, Commissioner Roger Goodell announced the extension of the rule for gender applying for senior level positions at the league office. The NFL has encouraged the 32 teams to consider that as a best practice, too.

"Forty-five percent of our fans are women," Gulliver said, "so it only makes sense for women to be involved in all levels of our sport. It just makes us better as an organization."

Dungy, whose coaching tree includes such successes as Tomlin, Caldwell, Lovie Smith and Herm Edwards, was particularly uplifted by this year's coaching hires.

"The spirit behind the Rooney Rule is very good when the interview process is executed properly," he said. "To foster diversity helps in a lot of ways, and in the NFL it allows you to get a better and deeper pool of people and then you can pick from it. It only adds to the quality of people hired."

Steelers-Chiefs game moved to primetime because of ice storm

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The AFC divisional playoff game between the Steelers and Chiefs on Sunday has been moved from an early afternoon kickoff to primetime because of an ice storm due to hit the Kansas City area this weekend.

The game was originally scheduled to kick off at 12:05 p.m. Central time. It will now start at 7:20 p.m. to give road crews and public safety officials more time to treat roads and parking lots.

The forecast calls for ice to move into the area Friday, and persistent cold temperatures throughout

Saturday and Sunday. More precipitation is expected Sunday, though mostly in the form of cold rain.

"We talked about all the options. We talked about the factors that went into making the decision," Chiefs president Mark Donovan said, but "it's the Commissioner's decision."

Donovan said he began having conversations with the league office on Wednesday, when the forecast began to look dire. Those discussions continued Thursday, and he spoke with commissioner Roger Goodell on Friday morning, at which point the league decided to move the kickoff time.

"This storm has the potential to be pretty damaging," Donovan said. "We talked a lot about the weather, what the experts are telling us. It's changed so much the last few days, we wanted to make sure we had the most up-to-date information. But we also talked about the importance of making a decision quickly so we can prepare."

The time change means the Packers-Cowboys game scheduled to kick off at 3:40 p.m. Central time on Fox on Sunday will serve



• Sunday, 5:20 p.m.
• at Arrowhead Stadium
• TV: NBC

as the lead-in for the Steelers-Chiefs game, which will remain on NBC.

The Chiefs have already played a couple of home games in inclement weather this season, including a frigid matchup with Tennessee in early December. The official temperature at kickoff that day was 1 degree, which tied the 1983 season finale against Denver for coldest game in Arrowhead Stadium history.

As if the cold, wet weather expected Sunday

night wasn't bad enough, the Chiefs decided to re-sod the field between the hash marks earlier this week, which could leave a quagmire for the game.

The Steelers are planning to leave for Kansas City earlier than normal on Saturday to account for the weather, though team officials did not specify when they planned to arrive.

"The Steelers have been monitoring the potential storm near Kansas City and fully support the NFL's decision to move the game to Sunday night," team spokesman Burt Lauten said.

This isn't the first time they've dealt with time changes, either.

In 2004, Ben Roethlisberger's first NFL start against the Miami Dolphins was delayed from an early afternoon kickoff to a night game because of Hurricane Jeanne. The hurricane moved out by game time, but a tropical depression brought rain, wind and muddy conditions for the game.

Not surprisingly, the hazardous weather has sent ticket prices plummeting. The game is expected to be sold out, but tickets on the secondary market were available for about \$50 in the upper levels of Arrowhead Stadium on Friday afternoon, and lower-level seats were about \$100.

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