

THE 2020 NFL DRAFT: DUAL-CAREER (DC) MESSAGING ON EDUCATION, FAMILIES, GENDER, AND RACE UNDER AMERICAN CAPITALISM¹

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Abstract

This paper is an examination of the 2020 National Football League (NFL) Draft and how the virtual prism created due to the COVID-19 pandemic provides insight on the dual career identities of collegiate football players that are drafted into the NFL. The virtual prism created by the COVID-19 pandemic is a moment for cultural studies to take up seriously, namely because of the clear tensions and synergies between academic and athletic prowess, racial inequality in higher education, racial socialization, the continued racialization of the vocational realm, and media biases. Our method involved an analysis of secondary compiled data from the NFL. In our data analyses, we focused on the idea of credited season, player eligibility, team graduation rate. We also used athlete triangulation information to advance our understanding of the dual career, family, masculinity, and race. Ultimately, we conclude that NFL players possess a comparable set of academic/professional skills that effectively help them transition from sports activities to the world of labor. Following our theoretical

¹ Dedicated to Marcellus Wiley, a great dual career transition example.

advancement(s), we discuss the practical application of our work and provide recommendations for scholars and practitioners on dual-career identities and player development dynamics.

Keywords: dual career, transition, National Football League, racial inequity, higher education

O *draft* 2020 da NFL: mensagens da dupla carreira na educação, família, gênero e raça na cultura americana

Resumo

Este ensaio é uma análise do *draft* da Liga Nacional de Futebol Americano de 2020 (NFL) a partir do contexto virtual criado devido à pandemia COVID-19, que nos fornece uma visão sobre a identidade de dupla carreira dos jogadores de futebol americano universitário que estão sendo convocados para a NFL. O prisma virtual criado pela pandemia COVID-19 é um momento para os estudos culturais levarem a sério, nomeadamente por causa das claras tensões e sinergias entre as proezas acadêmicas e atléticas, a desigualdade racial no ensino superior, a socialização racial, a racialização contínua do profissional reino e preconceitos da mídia. Metodologicamente, este ensaio constitui-se como uma análise de dados secundários compilados da NFL. Em nossas análises de dados, nos concentramos na ideia de temporada creditada, elegibilidade do jogador, taxa de graduação da equipe. Também usamos informações de triangulação de atletas para avançar nossa compreensão sobre dupla carreira, família, masculinidade e raça.. Em última análise, concluímos que os jogadores da NFL possuem um conjunto comparável de habilidades acadêmicas/profissionais que os ajudam na transição das atividades esportivas para o mundo do trabalho. Seguindo nosso(s) avanço(s) teórico(s), discutimos a aplicação prática de nosso trabalho e fornecemos recomendações para acadêmicos e profissionais sobre identidades de carreira dupla e dinâmica de desenvolvimento de jogadores.

Palavras-chave: dupla carreira, transição, *National Football League*, desigualdade racial, ensino superior.

Resumen

El *draft* de la NFL 2020: mensajes de la carrea dual sobre educación, familias, género y raza en la cultura americana

Este documento es un examen del *Draft* de la *National Football League* (NFL) de 2020 y cómo el enfoque virtual creado debido a la pandemia COVID-19 proporciona información sobre la identidad de carrera dual de los jugadores de fútbol universitario que se reclutan para el fútbol americano profesional. Este momento de los estudios culturales incluye la tensión y la sinergia entre la destreza académica y atlética, la desigualdad racial en la educación superior, la socialización racial, la continua racialización del ámbito vocacional y los prejuicios de los medios. Nuestro método consiste en un análisis de datos secundarios compilados de la NFL que se enfoca en las ideas de una temporada acreditada, elegibilidad de jugadores, tasa de graduación del equipo e información más amplia de triangulación de atletas para avanzar en nuestra comprensión de carrera dual, familia, género / masculinidad y carrera. En última instancia, llegamos a la conclusión de que los jugadores de la NFL poseen un conjunto comparable de habilidades académicas / profesionales para hacer la transición de las actividades deportivas al mundo laboral. Siguiendo nuestros avances teóricos, discutimos la aplicación práctica de nuestro trabajo y brindamos recomendaciones para académicos y profesionales sobre identidades de carrera dual y dinámicas de desarrollo de jugadores.

Palabras clave: carrera dual; transición; National Football League; desigualdad racial, educación superior.

“The Dual Career consists of the challenges faced by athletes to manage simultaneously their sports career to the academic and/or labour requirements. To provide a balanced routine between studies/work and sports training is essential for athletes to develop both their athletics and academic/professional skills avoiding to disturb their participation in different contexts and social positions—athlete, student, father/mother, among others. Another aspect of dual careers’ issues refers to the preparation for transition from sports activities to the world of labour.” (Felipe Rodrigues da Costa, Renato Francisco Rodrigues Marque, Christiano Streb Ricci, Iuri Scremin de Miranda, *The Journal of The Latin American Socio-Cultural Studies of Sport, Call for Papers for Special Issue on Dual Career*)

“I am mathematician, a PhD candidate at MIT. I am also a former professional football player, a retired offensive lineman for the Baltimore Ravens. Many people see me as a walking contradiction. They think that the pursuit of excellence in football makes the pursuit of excellence in mathematics impossible. They think that a strong interest in one makes a strong interest in the other improbable. People tend to think in binaries. Right and wrong. Black and white. Mind and body. Math and football.” (John Urschel, Preface to his book *Mind and matter: A life in math and football*)

Introduction

Thirty-two teams. Seven rounds. Two hundred and fifty-five players. Each year, a young man has an opportunity to fulfill a childhood dream. However, the story of a young man waiting to hear commissioner Roger Goodell call their name and wear the hat of their new employer is only one part of the equation. The other important story is on the nature of dual career identities in American higher education. In collegiate football, a player can expect to have at least a four-year college athletic career. Some pursue a professional career after their third year. Depending on eligibility and redshirting, some decide to return for a fourth, fifth, or even sixth year. Previous researchers have indicated that the college athlete, particularly in a revenue-generating sport like football, must navigate the distinct realms of academics, athletics, social life, and career development over the course of their athletic career (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Within these constructs, the student-athlete is charged with having a *dual-career*, that is, the challenge of establishing an optimal balance between sport and studies, academic and athletic excellence, the maintenance of a satisfying personal life, and physical/psychological wellness (Gavala-González et al., 2019).

The paper is an examination of each of the aforementioned aspects during a monumental moment in our history — the coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis forced the National Football League (NFL) to adjust their scheduled Las Vegas, Nevada draft day plan. Instead, the NFL created a virtual prism, a space where the imagery and the imagination could prompt the making and remaking of a narrative (Morris et al., 2005). In short, imagery has become a major focus in sport psychology (Morris et al., 2005). From stories of educational successful and high-performance sport to perverse racial inequality, the 2020 NFL Draft articulated various social realities that can shape our understanding of American capitalism, namely the nature of financial investments and social agents. In our paper, we explore the student-athlete experience in higher education and the role of social agents, i.e., the family, gender/masculinity, and race — each play in large role in understanding the everyday life of the college athlete and the narration of the 2020 NFL Draft. In doing so, we uncover some of the tension(s) that surface when individuals combine academic and athletic prowess, the depth of racial inequality in American higher education, racial socialization, the continued racialization of the vocational realm, and media biases.

Review of Literature

The following review of literature is done with the hope of creating more innovative research approaches for the study of dual-career identities and student-athlete life.

Race and the Student-Athlete Experience

The relationship between college sport and the philosophy of education has been a major topic of discussion in recent years. The spectacle of college sport has prompted an assumption that the gap between intercollegiate athletics and the mission of higher education has widened significantly (Eitzen, 2003; Simiyu, 2012). Research on the faculty-student relationship showed that faculty at large National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions often believe that there is a grave disconnect between collegiate athletic culture and academic integrity (Engstrand, 1995). For some faculty, the perceived tension has resulted in a devaluation of the core academic mission of the academy, excessive commercialization, and the permission of unethical and scandalous behavior (Bok, 2003; Briody, 1997; Duderstadt, 2003; Shropshire, 1996). On the contrary, O'Neill et al. (2013) concluded that student-athletes are determined to combine their education and sport, explaining that the two mutually reinforce and strengthen student-athlete's sense of identity, purpose, and well-being. Simon (2008) also insisted that athletics is an essential component of a student's education while in college. In short, studying student-athletes is a prime entry point into the complexity of the interconnected sociopolitical systems within American education (Harrison et al., 2009).

Some have suggested that the dual-career is a universal concept, one shaping the experience of each and every student-athlete regardless of their positionality (Erpič et al., 2004). However, the psychosocial experience of collegiate student-athletes is quite distinct across race and gender (Comeaux; Harrison, 2007; Simiyu, 2012). Critical Race Theory (CRT) has allowed researchers to understand that Whiteness has been positioned as the optimal status criterion across the globe (Bell, 1995; Comeaux; Harrison, 2007; Ogbu, 2003; Simiyi, 2012). Melendez (2008) reported that Black student-athletes often experiences isolation, rejection, and unfair judgement by their coaches and wider campus community. As a result, many must rely on their family and leverage social capital to provide the necessary social support to succeed in college (Carter-Francique, 2015). More specifically, Black women in collegiate athletics have often expressed grave need for additional institutional support of their non-athletic identities (Bernhard, 2014). While participation in a collegiate athletic program has shown evidence of maximizing academic and athletic success, for Black women, academic and athletic prowess is often at the expense of their autonomy and freedom from surveillance (Foster, 2003). Foster's (2003) ethnographic piece on Black women in collegiate athletics examined the persistent racialization and hyper-sexualization of the student-athlete and described the attention devoted to the identities of Black women in collegiate sport as no less than "smothering" and "frustrating."

Until the passage of the Public Education Act of 1972 and the creation of Title IX, less than 40 percent of women participated in high school athletics and less than one percent of the money spent on collegiate athletics went to women (Person et al., 2001). Although Title IX increased women's collective participation in sport, women continue to experience grave injustice (Pickett et al., 2012). Shared athletic facilities with men has often created hostile environment for women in collegiate sport (Person et al., 2001). Media coverage of women's sport led to an increased interest in women sport but also created a breeding ground for unsolicited attention and sexual harassment (Horcajo; JuncàPujol, 2014; Person et al., 2001). Women in sport have constantly been tasked with legitimizing their athletic participation in the face of sexism. Such injustice is unacceptable and in desperate need of more scholarly attention and practical intervention.

The vast majority of the literature available on the student-athlete experience focuses on Black student-athletes because they hold the highest proportion of athletic scholarship support. Consequently, less attention has been devoted to Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and other social groups in collegiate sport. However, multicultural sport psychology researchers find that most racial and ethnic minorities in collegiate sport often experience racism and stigmatization while they are in college (Kontos; Breland-Noble, 2002). Most collegiate coaches and staff have little to no formal training in dealing with race, gender, and/or culture (Martens et al., 2000). Hence, the need for more

culturally competent research on education and sport. It is incumbent upon scholars and practitioners alike to understand how we serve each student to the best of our abilities, provide them with academic/athletic support, and relevant service/programming.

Blackness, Whiteness, and Masculinity

Recently, the field of sport sociology has focused on Whiteness in sport. Researchers have illustrated the prevalence of racialized sport media content and negative stereotyping as well as how Black student-athletes have been both positioned and subjugated against White student-athletes (Harrison, 2006; Harrison et al., 2011). Ideologies that perpetuate White cultural power and social privilege echo throughout the American sporting establishment (Harrison, 2006; Harrison et al., 2011; Hartmann, 2007; Hill, 1997). In their analysis of the White collegiate football player, Lawrence et al. (2016) problematized the feeling of pride that White student-athletes held in regard to their athletic identity and academic success. Regardless of intention or goodwill, the language used during the interview process demonstrated both a reproduction of anti-Blackness, White privilege, and a demeaning racial attitude. Simultaneously, although each participant was directed to discuss the image of a White student-athlete, many responded to the image with a comment on the athletic abilities of Black men in collegiate sport and followed with how White men in collegiate sport often display “more balance” and “great managerial skill.”

During the period of segregation in sport and society, the notion of the “good ole boy” and “All-American boy” not only signified a theory of Whiteness but also operated as a popular discourse concerning White masculinity (Dyer, 1997; Hill, 1997; Lawrence, 2013). The narrative of White men and their inherent “goodness” circulated television and popular film (Brayton, 2007). Both the discourse and imagery of the “good ole boy” and “All-American boy” prompted a belief that criticism of heteronormative masculinity is a form of marginalization. For example, in the view of the White male student-athlete, their success in the athletic realm is a reflection of their great work ethic and diligence (Lawrence et al., 2016). Such reasoning has prompted a belief that Black male student-athletes have a “natural athletic superior” but remain inferior from a perspective of character, commitment, discipline, and intellect (Edwards, 2002).

Similar to our current project, Oates and Durham (2004) discuss the idealization of the athletic male body in Western culture through an examination of the NFL Draft. In their work, the media discursive construction of athletic bodies during the NFL Draft appeared to be focused on “enumerative strategies used to define and delimit racialized bodies” (Oates; Durham, 2004, p. 301). In media discourse, through an assessment of the body’s performance, the body’s productivity in relation to a perceived mastery of football, and the delineation of the body with respect to dimensionality, sport

commentaries re-inscribe power hierarchies of race and class (Oates; Durham, 2004). In doing so, we blur the line between the individual and the institution, that is, reinforce questionable and often counterfactual social pathologies into the psyche of the public.

Socialization, Sport Participation, and the Family

Socialization and the family are an essential research topic when examining adolescence development and behavior (Kremer-Sadlik; Kim, 2007). For example, when it comes to sport participation, the family can play a major role in a young child's potential involvement in sport. From naturalistic family interaction during formal participation in organized sport (e.g., Little League) to passive participation through a televised athletic event, a parent can exercise a great deal of influence on their children's ability and interest in physical activities (Coakley, 1990). Children often learn about sport participation through observation, imitation, and modeling of parental involvement. Studies also show that these activities can increase social and cognitive performance (Kremer-Sadlik; Kim, 2007). Today, approximately 90 percent of American youth participate in some form of organized youth sport between the age of five and 18 (Dunn et al., 2016). Those with the highest level of adulthood participation also tended to have a physically active household with little to no financial restraint (Haycock; Smith, 2014). Dunn et al. (2016) illuminated an inverse association between family financial investment and child sport commitment, mediated by children's perceptions of parent pressure and sport enjoyment. Additional researchers in family socialization have uncovered how sport participation experience can also be mediated by race, class, and/or gender (Coakley, 1990).

Many men inevitably confront a sport discourse that promotes a certain order of existence concerning masculinity and manhood (Hopper, 2007). Being forced to maintain a certain masculine ethos can often have detrimental effects on one's psychosocial health (Hopper, 2007). Harris (1979) also examined sport discourse to highlight the perversive logic of patriarchal and sexist ideologies in sport. In doing so, Harris ultimately argued that hegemonic masculinity in sport discourse creates a subsequent tension between athleticism and femininity. Many young women decide not to participate in sport because of a societal expectation of who the athlete can and should be (Costa; Costa; Guthrie, 1994). Those that decide to participate must constantly wrestle with the following controversies: "Why are women excluded from sport?" and "What specific social practice(s) are responsible for the physical and ideological exclusion of women from sport?" (Birrell, 1987). Sport has become an integral site for the construction of our current gender relation. Nevertheless, extensive parental encouragement can still positively shape a young woman's involvement in sport.

In analyses of Black families, socialization has assumed a negative connotation. The commonly held belief in society is that Black families de-emphasize academic achievement and independence (Edwards, 2002; Harrison, 2006). However, this reasoning is negligent of the nature of systemic racism. The disposition that Black athletes hold in regard to sport is a manifestation of a complex social and political condition, i.e., history, slavery, and racism (Gaston, 1986). The family has played a large role in Black culture, tradition, and community. During United States (U.S.) slavery, the family provided Black people with quietness and intimacy, a network in which Black people could support one another to withstand the horrific nature and cruelties of slavery (McAdoo, 2007). By the end of the Civil War and immediately after emancipation, Black people searched for all family separated by slavery (McAdoo, 2007). Some did not succeed but many did have an opportunity to reconnect (McAdoo, 2007). The institution of slavery could not destroy the Black family. Much of the adult generation born from 1880 through 1925 would move from being born into slavery to having to experience the economic devastation of the budding Great Depression. As a result, the economic opportunities of Black people were both scarce and limited (Shihadeh; Steffensmeier, 1994). Slavery, an institution that provide no space for Black humanity and a right to life, coupled with arguably the darkest economic period in American history, became one source of the racial wealth gap and contemporary economic inequality (Darity, 1975; Shapiro; Kenty-Drane, 2005; Shihadeh; Steffensmeier, 1994).

Nevertheless, through the Great Depression, a time where many remained in the lower socioeconomic class, the Black family household widely maintained a two-parent household (Gutman, 1976). Despite popular belief, the narrative of familial dysfunction is largely untrue but unfortunately, Black women regularly encounter some t charge of being either a Mammy, Sapphire, or Jezebel (Berry, 1998). Black men regularly encounter some violence charge of being either a thug or deadbeat (Berry, 1998). The history of marginalization and the continuous negative representation of Black family life and culture in print and electronic media has created a media organization of racial differentiation, or what Seth et al. (2020) called a "unseeing of Blackness and being."

However, some research on the relationship between Black family life and student-athletes has been insightful. Oliver's (1980) early work found evidence of a difference between African American and White American children in terms of how these youth "come to perceive sports as a vehicle of mobility" (p. 71). Consistent with the previous studies aforementioned in this section, Shakib and Veliz (2012) in their study of third through twelfth-grades (n=2,185) found that "relative to White, Hispanic, and Asian youth, African American youth are more likely to receive encouragement for sports participation from all sources (total encouragement scores)" (p. 295). Unfortunately, this encouragement is often still met with limited opportunities in athletics (Kjerulf-Dubrow; Adams, 2010; Singer; Buford-May, 2010).

The inertia of these societal messages and American socialization patterns have a large impact on the two sports where Black men are overrepresented: football and men's basketball. The systematic recruiting in America of five-star (i.e., top rated) players in these two sports has been documented in recent scholarship on American high school sports. One study examined body discourses of interscholastic athletes ($n = 1,650$) and another connected the recruiting narratives with American high school athletes ($n=7, 670$) to institutions of dual career identity formation at the pre-college levels (Macaulay et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2017).

This recruiting phenomenon's impact on social support and the family often continues to the collegiate level. Coaches impact the recruiting experiences of many athletes at universities (Paule, 2011) and have the potential to alter the degree aspirations of football and basketball players (Briggs, 1996). Furthermore, there is a psychosocial component. For male Division I American collegiate athletes, these themes emerge when considering transition from college to post-college careers: motivation, overall college experience, career direction, and identification with one's sport (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). The good news — researchers have found that among successful Black male scholar-athletes, parents, faculty, and coaches can also have a positive impact on a student-athlete's dual career trajectory (Donnor, 2006; Martin et al., 2010). As we continue to synthesize and analyze relevant literature about the career development of student-athletes and professional athletes, this will be an important finding.

Career Development: USA

The tension between higher education and athletics has created the view that athletic identity is the most salient feature of the student-athlete model (Harrison et al., 2009; Stone et al., 2012). Even though many in collegiate sport possess a desire to continue competing professionally, data published by the NCAA has shown that the likelihood of playing professional sport is remote (Tyrance et al., 2013). Although they have to juggle being a full-time student and a full-time athlete, as they complete their playing eligibility, many upperclass student-athletes gradually decide to invest in non-sport career options (Wiechman; William, 1997). Stambulova and Wylleman (2015) suggests that student-athletes should look to win in the short term and develop an early understanding of their dual-career identities to maximize career optimism. Student-athletes that focus exclusively on their athletic identity have been observed to have some difficulties transitioning into a more conventional working life (Aquilina, 2013; Torregrosa et al., 2015; Tshube; Feltz, 2015). Athletic identity is defined as a commitment to team advancement and a love for the game rather than the glory and attention attached to sport participation (Clopton, 2012; Miller et al., 2006). This definition can provide evidence of how athletic involvement and experience shape one's career outlook.

Murphy, Petipas, and Brewer (1996) reported that women in college athletics scored significantly higher on a career development/optimism scale than men. Hansen and Sackett (1993) also reported that women in collegiate sport also chose an academic major that coincided with their occupational interest. Revisiting Foster's (2003) ethnography, Black women in collegiate sport have displayed a tremendous amount of confidence in their academic, athletic, and professional development. For Foster, Black women's "work ethic, achievement, and dedication was indisputable [...] so was the knowledge that the overwhelming majority would graduate, regardless of their pre-collegiate academic training" (p. 319). The statement made by one sprinter, that is, "I know I will have to work hard but I know I will make it" seemed to be a widely held belief among women in collegiate sport (Foster, 2003, p. 318).

Contrary to previous research, Tyrance (2013) found that a NCAA Division I student-athlete with a high athletic identity in a large revenue-producing sport (i.e., men's basketball, football) had a lower level of career optimism. In their study, women in collegiate sport maintained a higher athletic identity than men and thus held a much lower level of career optimism (Tyrance et al., 2013). This contradictory research could be a reflection of a constantly evolving sport world, the creation of a sport environment in which women are expected to compete at an extraordinarily higher level today than before the creation of Title IX, the lack of institutional support for women in collegiate athletics, and/or sport specific culture, training, and preparation (Tyrance et al., 2013). An alternative reason could also be the fact that participation in a revenue-producing sport has generally become synonymous with increased exposure. In short, men's collegiate football and basketball generate the most revenue. Although competing at the professional level is a commonly held desire among many collegiate football and basketball players, football and basketball are two sports that showcase a wider array of opportunities post-sport such as sport broadcasting, team management, coaching, and player development. Each of these post-sport avenues are also much larger in men's sport than the current market of women's sport.

Global Perspectives on Dual Career

The concept of dual career has also received a great deal of scholarly attention outside the U.S. Countries with this research sweep involve scholars and scholarship across Italy (Corrado et al., 2012; 2015; Guidiotti et al., 2015; Lupo et al., 2015), France (Debois et al., 2015), Sweden (Stambulova et al., 2015), Brazil (Martins; Rocha; Costa, 2020), Slovenia (Tekavc et al., 2015; Tekavc; Erpic, 2018), Finland (Ryba et al., 2017), Germany (Baron-Thiene; Alfermann, 2015) and Spain (Lopez de Subijana et al.,

2015). Thus, the topic of the current study transcends geographic borders and carries significance across human civilization.

Many in collegiate sport could benefit from specialized career and personal development programming aimed toward the transition out of college and collegiate sport. Researchers have discussed the value of psychoeducational and cognitive behavioral intervention as methods of transforming the emotion(s) associated with transitioning from sport into a transferable skill (Bernes et al., 2009). However, Tinley (2015) wrote that “once you commit to a life of sport, you can never fully escape that part of your life” (pg. 28). For an athlete, the transition to the post-athletic world can be incredibly challenging. Even those who do have the opportunity to make sport a career rarely have the physical capacity to compete for more than one decade. Nurturing the personal side of the self is a relatively inescapable journey.

Rationale for the Current Study

Through an examination of athlete triangulation data from the NFL Draft, we accentuate the multi-dimensional ethos of student-athletes headed to the league, i.e., the pros. Paired with player data and analytics from a recent NFL labor and diversity seminar, we discuss how the racialization of dual-career identities can spill over and de-contextualize the evermore complicated condition of education, families, masculinity, and race. Our combination of descriptive statistics coupled with a cultural studies lens of the 2020 NFL Draft fills an important gap in the academic literature. While a few studies in particular relate to our study (which we will contextualize shortly), most of the NFL Draft research has focused on the Wonderlic aptitude test (Gill; Brajer, 2012), athletic performance and scouting (Berri; Simmons, 2011; Hendricks et al., 2003; Robbins, 2010) and power dynamics and race discourse about the Black male body being hired by mostly White American male owners (Oates; Durham, 2004). The latter paper is closer to the current study but does not connect their critical analysis to implications related to dual career.

The current paper uses three studies in particular as a launchpad into the dual career. These notable studies are as follows: “The erotic gaze in the NFL Draft” (Oates, 2007), “So you can see how the other half lives: MTV ‘Cribs’ use of ‘the other’ in framing successful athletic masculinities” (Smith; Beal, 2007), and “Race and the NFL Draft: Views from the auction block” (Dufur; Feinberg, 2009). These researchers argue that Black male NFL players are exploited for their physical talents and furthermore, that issues of race, social class, and racism are perpetuated through the process of draft day each year. In the next section, we flesh out our methodological and epistemological strategies related to humanizing through education (dual career identities):

The NFL Draft is the culmination of a long process of corporeal objectification. In one sense, this objectification begins the moment a player begins organized football and is sized up (literally) by the coaching staff. The culture of elite football itself is a continuous process of objectification, of attempts to measure players in numbers. But the process becomes a media spectacle during the Draft process. (Oates; Durham, 2004, p. 304)

The following scholarly inquiry and data analysis are our attempt to extend this seminal work in a country that is deeply entrenched in a tradition of sport.

Method

First, our secondary compiled data from the NFL focuses on the ideas of a credited season, player eligibility, team graduation rate, and broader athlete triangulation information. A credited season is used to measure the following: minimum salaries, severance pay, long-term care insurance planning, second-career saving, player disability, former player life improvement planning, neurocognitive disability benefit, tuition assistance, workers' compensation, player annuity planning, and health reimbursement (NFL Front Office, 2020). The player eligibility and team graduation rate offers insight on league and team commitments to career transition, i.e., life after sport development. We utilize athlete triangulation information to shine direct light on the dual career identities of each athlete.

Second, we briefly build on visual methodologies encouraged by recent scholarship. According to Kortegast et al. (2019): "Incorporating visual methods and representations into research opens possibilities for deeper understandings of how individuals experience higher education. Written and spoken words and numerical data are necessary in research but may be insufficient in developing new understandings of the social world. Participant generated visual methods (PGVMs) can increase our repertoire of methods, thus, expanding what is and can be known" (p. 485). The first author of this paper is a former U.S. college football player and current researcher for the NFL's "Diversity and Inclusion Good Business Series." This author observed and coded the entire NFL Draft, from which four major themes were found from this field work: *education, families, gender and race*.

Findings/Results

Secondary Data: Overview and Background

Educational data of NFL players are rather limited in the dual career research and academic literature. Issues of access and accuracy are often challenging for scholars of career transition with high-

profile athletes. In Figure 1 (see below), nearly 65 percent of the players from the 2020 NFL Draft earned their undergraduate degree. This descriptive data point is important when considering that other U.S. professional male sports leagues graduation rates range between 25 percent to 50 percent (e.g., National Basketball Association [NBA], Major League Baseball [MLB], National Hockey League [NHL], and Major League Soccer [MLS]).

Table 1A captures baseline data in terms of roster analytics that impact how many seasons that NFL players earn benefits. In other words, in order to earn a pension, there are minimal games and seasons that have to be accrued. For example, in order for a credited season to be counted, the “credited seasons clock” begins after the rookie season which means that for the 2019-20 season all those in column zero on the graph table are rookies (n=307) and that the clock does not start for credited seasons until their second year which is considered Year 1 even though it is the second year after the rookie year.

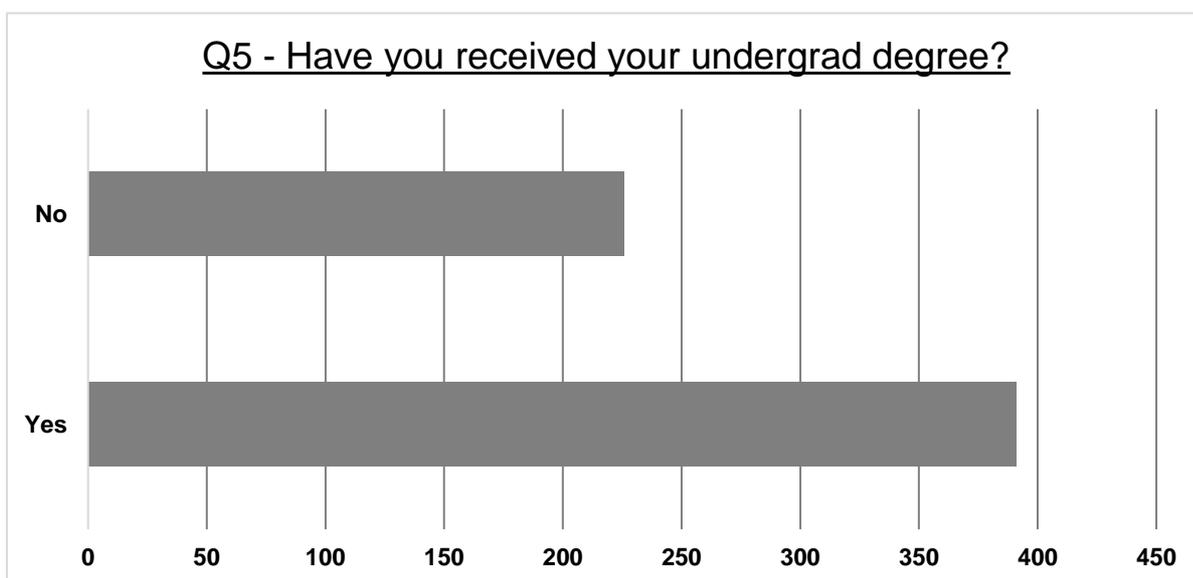
In terms of definitions (see Table 1), “special” indicates those football players in the NFL that came out early as underclassmen and made it on a NFL roster. From 2014 to 2018 indicates all the players that came out of American higher education early and made it on a roster (n=263). Total number of active (n=324) means that 61 of those players are rookies. It should be noted that depending on the number of academic credit hours left for a pro football player to complete their baccalaureate or graduate degree, the NFL will provide between \$15,000 and \$60,000 to achieve a positive dual career completion.

Figure 1
Graduation Rate of 2020 NFL Draft (Players)

High: 63.7%

Low: 36.63

Figure 1 – Indicates the number of players enrolled in school to finish their degrees



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Have you received your undergrad degree?	4	5	4.37	0.48	0.23	617

#	Field	Choice	Count
4	Yes	63.37%	391
5	No	36.63%	226
			617

Table 1A indicates the number of players enrolled in degree completion programs

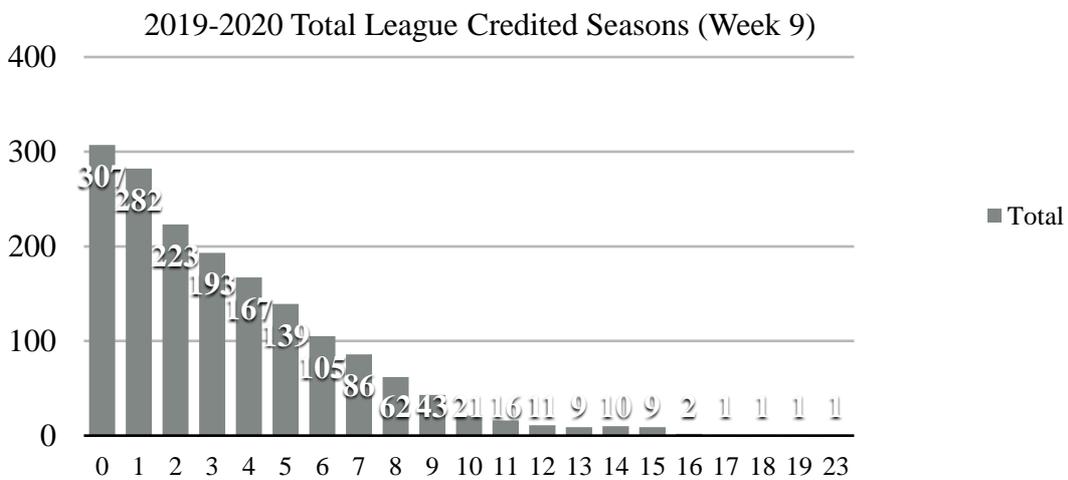


Table 1B - Special Eligibility 2014-2019 Degree Completion

Special Eligibility Player Status	
Total Number Active	324
Total Number Active (2014-2018)	263

The Campbell Trophy

The Campbell Trophy is awarded to players who successfully manage a dual career in an effective way. Out of all of the nominees (see Table 2), the finalists are narrowed down to 16 contestants who demonstrate exceptional positive achievement. It is notable that the selection pool is so large to begin with before being culled for the scholar-athlete who demonstrates remarkable excellence in service to others. As the most prestigious and desirable award, its receivers are the best combination of academics, community service, on-field performance. Thus, this trophy is nicknamed the “Academic Heisman.”

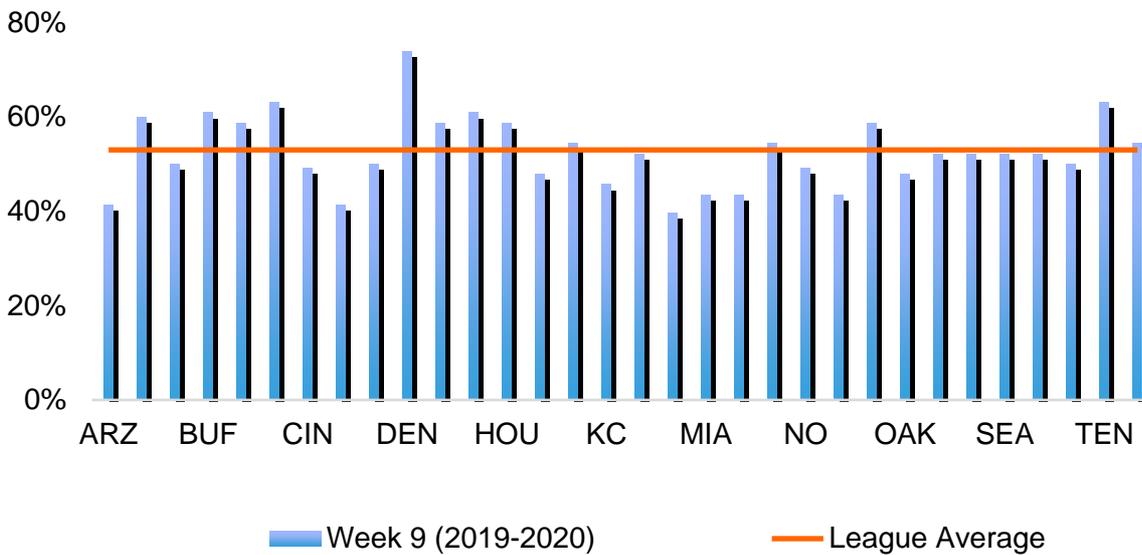
Table 2 - Player Achievement and Characteristics of the 2020 William V. Campbell Trophy ® Presented by Mazda Semifinalists.

Characteristic	Sub-category Characteristic	Number of Players
GPA	Average GPA: 3.67	
	Nominees with a perfect 4.0	9
	Nominees with a 3.8 or better	59
	Nominees with a 3.7 or better	72
Player Accolades	Academic All-America Selections	18
	Captains	94

	All-Conference Picks	110
	All-Americans	18
Playoffs	Nominees from the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)	85
	Nominees from the NCAA Football Championships Subdivisions (FCS)	45
Association	Nominees from NCAA Division II	20
	Nominees from NCAA Division III	40
	Nominees from the NAIA	9
Player Position	Offensive players	107
	Defensive players	72
	Special teams players	20

The average graduation rate for league members is 53% (see Table 3). Compared with the general population's graduation rate for bachelor-seeking individuals at 62% (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), the NFL players who complete their education have a comparable set of academic/professional skills to transition from sports activities to the world of labor. The data in Table 3 supports Figure 1 in that the graduated NFL player creates an educational profile of dual career individuals that is higher than the NBA, MLB, NHL, and MLS.

Table 3 - 2019 Club Graduation Rate by NFL Team with League Average 53%.



The NFL Diversity Report in Table 4 presents a graphic representation of the number of racialized Black bodies that White owners have to choose from when drafting their selections.

Table 4 - Diversity Report

Race	Number of Players	%
African American	1557	68.6
White	645	28.4
Pacific Islander	49	2.2
Hispanic	19	0.8
Total	2270	100

2020 NFL Draft Observations

From April 23 to April 25, 2020, the first author of the current paper watched the entire NFL Draft while taking field notes. The following four major themes emerged in terms of how the NFL

Draft was presented, framed, and perceived: education, families, gender, and race. The next few paragraphs summarize and interpret these four themes.

During the NFL Draft, educational messages were presented in non-systemic ways, which left a perception and reality gap of the success of college football players. Within the American system of collegiate football, student-athletes are often given an athletic scholarship for five years to play after high school. If they are a transfer from the community college level, they may have three years to play two years of athletic eligibility. With the possibility of attending summer school or winter break intense courses, numerous football players out of college earn their undergraduate degrees. Some players even graduate in three years (e.g., one player from the University of California Los Angeles graduated in two and a half years).

In the past, one NFL team official suggested that flashing the image of the front office leader during the draft was a “bad look for the league” because it showed a lack of diversity in club management (Reid, 2020, para. 1). The 2020 NFL Draft seemed to follow suit. Shot after shot, a White man selected a player. The on-field workforce of the NFL is approximately 70 percent Black. Of the 32 young men selected in the first round, 30 were People of Color and 29 were Black. Former senior vice president of the New York Jets, Rod Graves, discussed such imagery during a recent interview with *The Undeclared* (Reid, 2020):

On the one hand, the league doesn't have a problem using Blacks on the field to help increase the revenue opportunities. You saw player after player, so many Black players or players of color, but we can't participate in the leadership roles. What does that say to all the young men who were welcomed into the league last night? They can have opportunities on the field, but there are few opportunities for them in the game after they've helped to grow the game and make it more popular? That's wrong. And that, to me, is a bad commentary...What we saw in the draft not only magnifies the imbalance in the lack of diversity [in leadership positions in football operations] but it underscores the type of racism that's taking place in the National Football League.

The media is rarely a neutral rendering of our world (Costa; Costa; Guthrie, 1994). Researchers have shown that race is frequently discussed in sport broadcasting. Using data from video broadcasting of the NCAA's Annual Men's Division I Basketball Tournament, Foy and Ray (2019) revealed that a commentator seemed more likely to discuss the performance and mental abilities of a lighter-skinned player than a darker-skinned player. A darker-skinned player seemed to be discussed on the basis on their physical appearance. Although the “positive” stereotyping of Black people as naturally athletic would appear to be less reflective of the blatant racial epithet of “traditional” racism, such stereotyping can still undermine equality by tethering skin color to innate ability and inaccurately characterize race as a biological concept (Buffington; Fraley, 2008).

Although the societal consequence of such framing is still relatively ambiguous because of the lack of empirical studies assessing audience's understanding of race in a sporting context, Foy and Ray's (2019) research is evidence of an interesting media formulation of human communication, knowledge, and sense-making (Han, 2010), one that can actively reduce the dual career identities of the student-athlete and create unwarranted racialized visual economics. Hence, the need to be particularly mindful and critical of media narration during the 2020 NFL Draft.

The college education is often framed as the common way for an individual to assist their families and communities. Given the historical and structural realities created by racism and racist ideologies, professional sport became a rare scene for Black upward mobility. The merging of the two in the form of the student-athlete model thus illustrates a nexus for providing for the family and leveraging capital for their community (Hawkins, 1999). A common theme centered in the Black student-athlete worldview is a concern for both the family and the community (Hawkins, 1999).

Discussion and Conclusions

The current study has contributed to the literature in four major areas. Empirically, we present secondary data from the NFL related to player graduation rates and team (clubs) graduation rates that actively challenges racial stigmas about Black manhood. Second, qualitatively, our "real time" cultural studies analysis of the NFL Draft in 2020 is novel given the realities of COVID-19 in society. Third, the current paper has advanced theories of the dual career, life after sport, and career transitions. Fourth, we provided insight on Black families and professional sport draft day(s).

Utilizing secondary data from the NFL, our paper situates professional football players who earn degrees as exclusive within a group of already elite athletes drafted each year (i.e., 255 players). Of all the major American sports (i.e., NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, MLS, etc.), NFL football players earn degrees at the highest rate at 63.7 percent (see Figure 1). This is an important data point when considering the numerous amounts of American student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics with dreams of making it to the professional level without always balancing education and sport (Edwards, 1973). This finding is also important because contrary to the mixed results with decades of research on education and sport (e.g., dual career), there is evidence in other studies that high athletic identity does not impede education and occupational development by athletes (Murdock et al., 2016; Rasmussen, 2009). The data presented in this study serve to illuminate and reinforce the efficacy of scholar-athletes who face challenges that result from simultaneously managing their sports career with academic and/or labor requirements.

In terms of our cultural studies approach to the 2020 NFL Draft, some explicit observations about education, families, gender, and race are apparent. Stereotypical narratives about Black families and their sons continue to dominate the discourse when announcers cover the NFL Draft as players are selected and announced by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell. Though the subjects of these stereotypes are men who have successfully balanced the multiplicity of academic studies with work and sports training, the dominant language undercuts their achievements and reduces them to a single scope of limited capacities of manhood.

In support of existing research, our current finding revealed that more than 60 percent of the NFL players drafted (many Black males) earned college degrees. Data analysis also illustrates that narratives about educational success and positive dual career identity formation are executed by the players themselves. Such dual career identity achievement is supported by other researchers who have found that college athletes can indeed balance academic and athletic priorities in addition to being aspirational about professional sport as a vocational reality (Fuller et al., 2020; Harrison, 2000; Harrison; Martin, 2012; Harrison et al., 2014; Hodge et al., 2008; Martin; Harrison, 2006; Wiggins, 1991). However, more in-depth narratives about those who attained degrees and even for those who did not is needed.

The challenges facing NFL players, especially Black male football participants in the current study's analysis, parallels and intersects with Blodgett and Schinke's (2015) qualitative research on Aboriginal athletes. Within sport and academic careers in mainstream cultural spaces, these researchers found that their athlete vignettes "centralize the dynamic and constitutive role of sociocultural and psychological processes in Aboriginal athletes' dual career experiences, enabling deeper insights to be gleaned into how their cultural transitions intersect with and shape their sport and education transitions" (p. 121). Debois et al. (2015) also echoes the current study and its approach to highlight the developmental factors that impact athletic individuals and populations. Furthermore, support services in the U.S. have an organization that builds a community of practitioners on campus in American higher education known as the National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals. These leaders and practitioners should be given partial credit for the matriculation of over 60 percent of the players holding bachelor's degrees in the 2020 NFL draftee cohort:

Using this perspective, this study also sheds light (for this sample of elite athletes) on the possible avenues for and extent to which support services, which take into account not only the athletic domain but also the interaction with some other components of elite athletes' life (e.g., psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational levels), may assist individual athletes to cope with the specific requirements inherent to their sport and post-sport careers. (Debois et al., 2015, p. 25).

While the difficulty of dual career transitions is well documented across the world from the U.S. to Europe etc., the reality is that more attention with theory and practice should focus on elite athletes that successfully balance academics and athletics on their journey toward professional sport.

In terms of previous work on Black male professional athletes, other researchers and scholars have focused on other themes beyond non-stereotypical tropes and constructs of Black male sportsmen that have a history of Blackness and manhood tied to strength and deviance (Leonard, 2009; 2010). Furthermore, narratives dominated by stereotypical and even racialized discourses are problematic and we need more empirical quantitative and qualitative studies that at least attempt to investigate the role of intellectualism on NFL performance, namely when and how these players are selected during the NFL Draft (Lyons et al., 2009). Researchers must also continue to condemn racialized stereotypes, American sport structural inequities, and the demonization of Black men in sport (Atencio; Wright, 2008; Beamon, 2012; Beamon; Bell, 2004; Cox, 2017; Czopp, 2010; Edwards, 2000; Ferber, 2007; Goodwill et al., 2019; Simiyu, 2012; Tucker, 2003).

At the same time, more research is needed on successful identities of dual career within the American system of sport, from youth levels all the way to the major professional sport leagues. Future researchers should use the framework of our current paper to examine other professional sport leagues in the U.S., i.e the NBA, MLB, MLS, NHL, WNBA, and other professional sports organizations around the world. Future researchers should also examine the experiences of players drafted into the NFL through qualitative investigations on the quality of their academic interactions with faculty, peers, and campus collegiate communities

We conclude with a set of the best practices that scholars and practitioners can use to foster a spirit of excellence to the field of sport sociology. The NFL has 32 teams, each with player development and player engagement directors. The NFL headquarters also has a department dedicated to player engagement, player programming, career transitions, and player mental/physical health. How might the narrative on the NFL Draft day evolve in terms of a paradigm that represents broader notions of education, race, Black masculinity, and identities beyond gladiators being selected to play for mostly White coaches, White owners, and a mainstream system that historically only sees Black males as stereotypical human beings? The answer to this question revealed itself at the start of the 2020 NFL season. Based on the racial justice protest movement in the U.S. in response to the murder of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the NFL has started a number of campaigns that focus on the humanization of Black bodies, beginning with “End Racism” and “Black Lives Matter” on uniforms and helmets, increased commercial advertising, as well as social media campaigns.

This humanization movement should encourage those in public policy to seriously engage with the educational and dual career pursuits of NFL players. An existing example of a dual career

intervention is the Man of the Year patch worn by select players, which recognizes their leadership off the field with community efforts, educational excellence, and other aspects beyond athleticism. This is positive but as Harrison et al. (2020) articulate, more could be done to foster belonging in a country steeped in sport tradition and celebration.

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