

Addressing the Gender Disparity in NBA Coaching

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Proposal for the NBA Board of Governors:

Adam Silver - Commissioner

NBA Board of Governors

Mark Tatum - Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer

June 13, 2023

Commissioner Adam Silver, NBA Board of Governors, and Deputy Commissioner Mark Tatum

645 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10022

Dear Mr. Silver, Mrs. Slaton Brown, Mr. Tatum, and NBA Team Owners,

Throughout the last month, my team and I have taken a deeper dive into the lack of female coaches in the NBA and the associated causes. We have determined that the misrepresentation in coaching positions is a direct result of gender stereotypes and the absence of rules incentivizing gender diversity. To assess the viable implications of a potential solution, we have performed research on the Rooney Rule and Selig Rule, as well as the SHEconomy. With that being said, we have concluded that the NBA needs the Slaton Brown Rule. The Slaton Brown Rule asserts that each NBA team must interview at least two female candidates, provide educational programs to support the development of gender-diverse candidates, and continue to consider female candidates. We have added incentives to expedite this process, while also decreasing superficial interviews. The incentives include a second-round draft pick and cash considerations as compensation. We are confident that our research-backed solution will reduce gender stereotypes and employ more women as coaches in the NBA. Thank you for your time and consideration, and please feel free to contact us regarding the specifics of the proposal.

Thank you for your consideration,

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Executive Summary

The NBA and Commissioner Adam Silver know that the NBA needs to make a change to impact the number of women represented in the league. At the current moment, there is a complete lack of gender diversity in coaching positions, with five female assistant coaches and zero female head coaches. Without a change, the NBA is leaving money on the table, letting an existing negative stigma stay in place, and will continue to have insufficient female representation.

Our solution to these problems is to add a rule that incentivizes female head coaching and assistant coaching hires. We plan to do this by requiring each team to interview at least two female candidates from the Career Development Advisory Panel list, or a female candidate not currently employed by a team. For every coaching position, at least one external female candidate is required to be interviewed. Hiring a female candidate in a head or assistant coaching position will reward teams with a draft pick in the early second round along with 2 million dollars in cash considerations, depending on the position of the female hired.

Some may argue that incentivizing teams to hire minority groups leads to superficial interviews, but our research shows that the best way to decrease the stigma around women as leaders is to actually put them in these leadership positions.

This rule will put females in coaching positions, increasing female representation and thus, decreasing the existing mindset around females as leaders. Additionally, more female representation will increase the number of female fans, increase the price for sponsorship due to this larger and more diverse fan base, and allow the NBA to market itself as more gender diverse.

We believe that this proposed rule is the best way to increase the hiring of female coaches, and thus, the best way to ensure the continued growth of the NBA.

Background

The NBA has long struggled with a lack of gender diversity in coaching positions, both historically and in the present day. As it stands, the league only boasts five female assistant coaches, a number that highlights the significant underrepresentation of women in coaching roles. This issue becomes even more glaring when considering that over the span of 76 years since the NBA's inception, there have been only 15 female assistant coaches, and to date, no female head coach has ever been appointed.

One contributing factor to this gender disparity is the negative stigma attached to the notion of women assuming leadership positions in a male-dominated industry. This stigma perpetuates the belief that women are somehow less capable or qualified to lead and make decisions in the highly competitive world of professional basketball. As a result, women who aspire to become NBA coaches face numerous barriers and biases that impede their progress.

This lack of gender diversity in coaching represents a missed opportunity for the NBA. By not tapping into the wealth of talent and expertise possessed by women in the field of basketball, the league fails to leverage gender diversity to grow its product in the female audience.

While the Rooney Rule of the NFL and the Selig Rule of the MLB have touched on the aspects of hiring minority candidates, they have not gone specifically into gender and actually hiring gender minority candidates. Currently, the NBA does not have a rule similar to either of these, leaving room for an addition.

The Three Problems

The Existing Negative Stigma

Throughout businesses all over the world, there is an existing mindset that is “think leader, think male” (Catalyst, 2018). Pairing with this are stereotypes and social norms that lead people to believe leadership is a masculine trait. Because of these views, many men do not want to have women above them in leadership positions. This is a huge problem and extends even to the NBA, a league with a major focus on diversity and inclusion.

Commissioner Silver even said that there is “clearly a bias in the system against women” (Gonzalez, 2022). This leads right into the next point on the insufficient female representation in the NBA.

Insufficient Female Representation

There have been zero female head coaches in the NBA’s 76 year history and only 15 female assistant coaches. This is largely due to the stigma mentioned in the last problem, causing very few women to even be interviewed for coaching positions due to the belief that only men can be leaders. Because of this, the NBA is limiting its pool of coaches, and thus, limiting the potential talent level in coaching, opening the gates to allow a whole other demographic to coach could lead to a higher level of coaching in today’s NBA.

Our research showed that one of the main ways to get rid of the existing negative stigma that exists around women as leaders is to put them in these leadership positions. By “actively advocat[ing] for their development and advancement” and putting females into these leadership

positions, the current stereotypes and beliefs will fade away (Martin, 2022). This will help change the perception of women around the league and around the world, and yet, this has not happened.

Another aspect of insufficient female representation is shown through the fans. “Females only make up 33% of the NBA audience” (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2022). Representation matters. Watching a game and picturing yourself on the sideline either coaching or playing is one of the best parts about being a fan. Fans have dreamed of being in the league they support and feeling a part of the team one supports is an integral part of the sports fan experience. As a woman supporting the NBA, it is hard to have that same excitement when one sees very few females coaching around the league.

As “women control or influence 85% of consumer spending” (SHEconomy, 2019), there needs to be a larger focus on female representation in the league, leading right into the third problem.

Money Left on The Table

With women having such a large influence on consumer spending, the lack of female representation has hurt the NBA. In a study conducted by Statista, it was found that 63% of

women are not fans of the NBA. This is a major market the NBA is missing out on. The inclusion of females in the league in high-level positions could fix this problem.

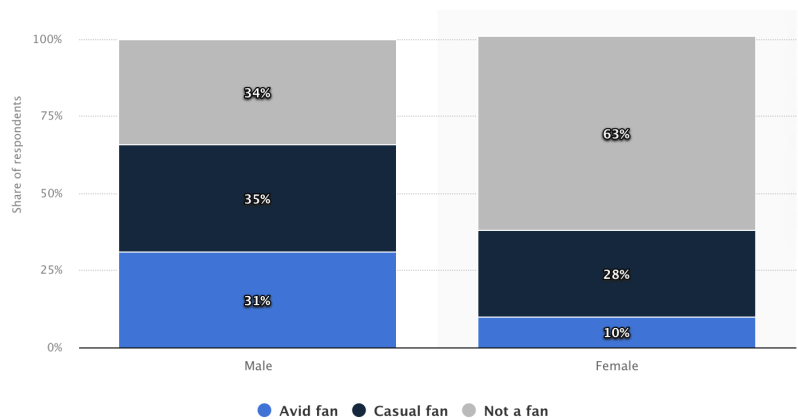


Figure 1

Adding women to more prominent spots in the NBA will create a new generation of NBA fans and will largely grow the support of the NBA in a market that the league has largely ignored. This market is necessary as females are major contributors to the consumer market, with females, as mentioned before, contributing or influencing 85% of consumer spending (SHEconomy, 2019).

Diversity also increases business revenue due to increased innovation, helps with recruitment efforts, increases productivity and performance, and improves decision-making (Helfrich, 2022).

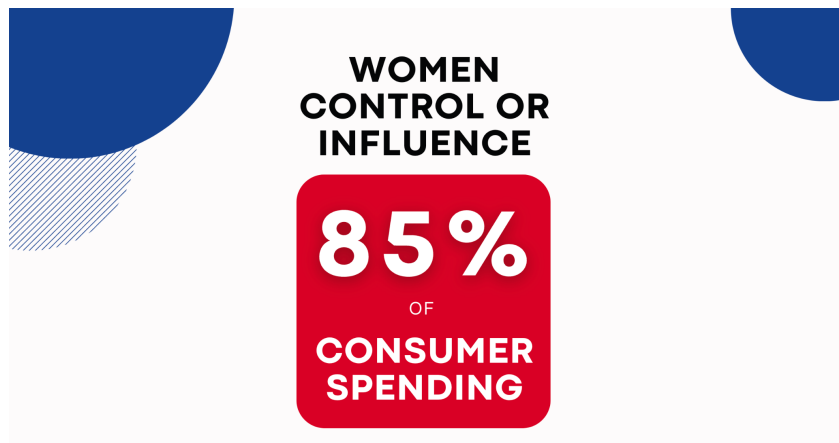


Figure 2

With more women in these roles, the NBA would become more marketable to different diverse audiences. DEI has become very important for companies and organizations that capitalize on that will be at the forefront of a new business world.

Women make up a growing part of the NBA audience, but currently are only at 33 percent of the total fans, as mentioned previously. The increase in female fans is leading to larger companies showing interest in becoming a sponsor of the league due to this more diverse audience (McCarthy, 2022). With more female fans, the NBA would be able to make more money as bidding for sponsorships would increase in price. When looking at the NBA and its sponsorships many of them are male-focused companies running male-focused campaigns. This

leads to the NBA missing out on major sponsorship opportunities. Female-focused brands have no reason to partner or invest in the NBA because their target customer is just not watching it.

Gaining more female viewership will incentivize companies and lead to more money for the league. Increasing representation of females within the league, especially in leadership roles will allow the NBA to market as more gender diverse, and gain new fans as representation does make a difference (Helfrich, 2022). The more gender diversity in NBA fanship leads directly to more fans. Without the female market, the NBA is not maximizing its sponsorship and TV deals as there is a good chunk of the female market not viewing the NBA.

The Solution

The Slaton Brown Rule

We propose to create a rule similar to the NFL's Rooney Rule and the MLB's Selig Rule, establishing the NBA's as the Slaton Brown Rule, named after the NBA's Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Lesley Slaton Brown. Slaton Brown has "yielded the internal movement and advancement of more than 78% of underrepresented employees" ("NBA Names," 2023)

In the new rule, NBA teams must:

1. Interview at least two female candidates from the Career Development Advisory Panel list, or a female candidate not currently employed by a team.
2. Conduct an in-person interview with at least one external female candidate for any coaching position.
3. Hold records of female candidate hirings and their roles on the team. Should the Commissioner be suspicious of possible wrongdoing, teams must provide these records upon request.

Other guidelines in the new rule are:

4. If the final decision maker is involved from the beginning of the hiring process, they must be involved through the conclusion of the process ("The Rooney Rule," n.d.).
5. Following the hiring of female coaches, teams must continue to consider multiple female candidates for positions.
6. Should a team hire a female coach, they "will receive a one-year contract and 'work closely with the head coach and offensive staff to gain experience'" (Scott, 2022) is a crucial addition to the Rooney Rule.
 - This rule will only be put into effect should teams hire a female.

- As Roger Goodell, the NFL Commissioner said, he “admitted the NFL has fallen short “by a lot” on hiring Black and minority candidates” (Scott, 2022).

Shortcomings of the Rooney and Selig Rule

We have noticed that there have been shortcomings in the Rooney and Selig Rule of the NFL and MLB which the NBA can learn from to address the possible shortcomings that could occur from the new policy.

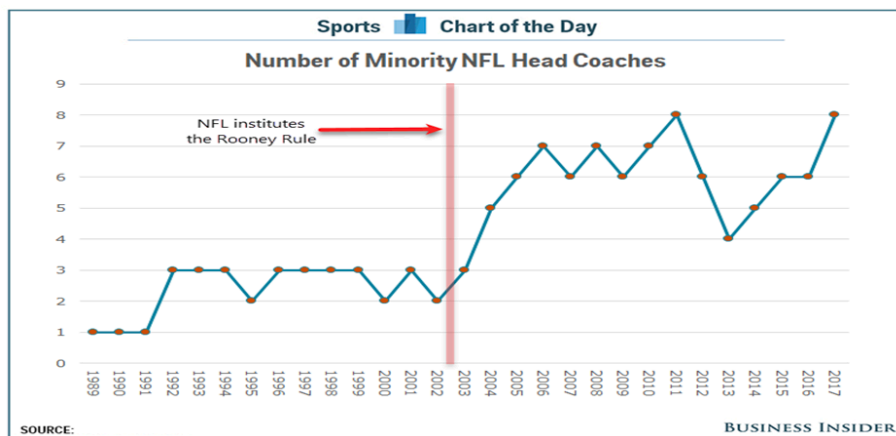


Figure 3

Teams have been accused of fulfilling the Rooney Rule requirements through conducting superficial interviews, without genuinely considering minority candidates for the positions. The Rooney Rule primarily focuses on head coaching roles: however, the NFL has expanded the rule to include general manager and other executive positions, emphasizing the need for diversity at all levels of decision-making. We understand that all positions in the NBA require attention in terms of diversity. While we are starting at the coaching level, we hope to expand this to executive positions in the future.

The NFL has implemented draft-related and financial incentives for teams that hire or develop minority coaches and executives, highlighting that teams aren’t necessarily hiring

minority candidates and that incentives will help them to do so (Bell, 2020). The NFL has emphasized stricter enforcement and monitoring of compliance with the Rooney Rule to ensure meaningful opportunities are provided to minority candidates. We have decided to take inspiration from this but add more incentives to emphasize the need for diversity in coaching around the league.

From the Selig rule, we have identified that the MLB is formalizing the hiring process, as they encourage teams to develop and follow formal hiring protocols that include diverse candidate slates and comprehensive assessments. The league emphasizes the need for teams to actively seek and consider diverse candidates, including those from outside the traditional baseball networks. Along with this, the MLB has implemented educational programs to support and develop diverse candidates, providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge for executive positions (Ghiroli, 2021).

While the NBA has its own diversity initiatives, such as the NBA Inclusion Committee, continuously evaluating and refining these initiatives based on the lessons learned from other leagues can lead to further progress.

Provided Compensation

If teams hire a female candidate, following the interview process, for a head or assistant coaching position, they will be rewarded a draft pick in the early second round along with 2 million dollars in cash considerations depending on the level of the female hired.

If the selected candidate reports any issues, including being ignored, housekeeping duties, having a superficial interview, or assault, an investigation will be conducted, and teams will be at

risk of losing their rewards. We believe that with this strict enforcement, teams will welcome more females onto the team to establish diversity in the coaching staff.

The Implementation

Timeline

We will propose our new rule change to the NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and the NBA Board of Governors during the season on November 23rd, 2023. Any alterations or proposals can be discussed and implemented from this point forward.

Once we have agreed on each of the details regarding the new rule, there will be a vote held on March 23rd, 2024 to officially approve and ratify the rule change. A three-quarter majority is needed in the vote in order to approve the rule.

The players and the rest of the organizations will be notified on March 24th, 2024, and the media will be notified on March 25th, 2024.

The rule will be implemented in the NBA rulebook soon thereafter and will be enforced starting with the hiring process leading up to the 2024-25 NBA season.

Broad Goals

Our goal is to get to a point where the league does not need to have this rule in place anymore. We would like there to be a much higher percentage of female representation in coaching positions, which will lead to a variety of positive outcomes.

We are shooting for at least 30 percent of those filling these positions to be female.

Success Metrics

To gain the success of our proposed solution, we will look at the percentage of women candidates being interviewed and hired each year. We want the percentage of women who are hired to increase significantly to at least 30 percent of these positions.

We will also determine if the media rights and sponsorship deals bring in a larger pool of potential applicants due to the increase in diversity of fans, and thus, more money.

Additionally, we will determine if the percentage of our fan base that are females grows to a larger amount, ideally closer to 50 percent.

Barriers to Implementation

The barriers to implementation would be team owners or the NBA commissioner deciding that this is not the solution that they want to put in place. Another possible barrier would be if the players decided that they will not allow this to happen, but they are not part of the decision-making process as this does not involve the CBA.

Additionally, if we are unable to get the solution in place by the time of the next NBA season hiring process we will be forced to move the implementation to the next season.

Impact

The Reduction of Gender Stereotypes

The NBA stands to benefit from a proposed solution that encourages gender diversity in coaching positions. The implementation of this rule has several benefits. Foremost, increased gender diversity will lead to the reduction of gender stereotypes, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (Krivkovich, 2022). A study by Lawson (2022) found that organizations hiring a female CEO saw a significant shift in the association of females with leadership roles. Furthermore, female leaders have been observed to contribute to improved employee well-being and retention, influencing players' decisions to stay with teams (Krivkovich, 2022). In addition to this, businesses founded by women have been noted to have a higher percentage of female employees, fostering a path toward diversity (Weisul, 2021).

Diverse Perspectives and Attitudes

The addition of female coaches also offers diverse perspectives and attitudes. Women, due to their experiences of inequality, bring unique insights and character that can be beneficial for the teams (Haigh, 2018). These perspectives can inspire and aid in the development of athletes in various aspects such as skills, training, and techniques. On top of that, athletes can relate to their journeys.

Improved Rosters and Talent Pool

Another benefit of the solution is that NBA teams will have the opportunity to bolster their talent pool and improve their rosters. Drawing from the NFL's implementation of the Rooney Rule, 37 compensatory draft picks were awarded in the 2023 NFL Draft (Parr, 2023).

Notable NFL players, such as Tom Brady and Pat Tillman, were also compensatory draft picks ("Most impactful NFL compensatory picks of all time," 2015). This initiative opens the door for potential players to join the NBA and increases the market's size and competitiveness.

Increased Revenue

Increased gender diversity can contribute to higher engagement levels and increased revenue. Organizations with high gender diversity on their executive teams have been linked with above-average profitability that exceeds 25% more than companies without gender diversity (Dixon-Fyle, 2020). We believe that the NBA is missing out on a large portion of female demographics. Furthermore, companies with high gender diversity have demonstrated a higher return on equity up to 1.1% (3 Benefits of Investing in Diversity, 2023). The NBA can leverage this aspect to attract more investors, sponsors, and partners. In addition, the inclusion of women coaches can attract a new audience of young women inspired to follow in their footsteps, which can contribute positively to the sport fan cost index. Promoting gender diversity in NBA coaching positions presents numerous benefits, from reducing gender stereotypes and providing diverse perspectives to improving rosters and increasing revenue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed Slaton Brown Rule provides a comprehensive solution to address the lack of gender diversity in NBA coaching positions. By incentivizing teams to hire female coaches, the rule aims to reduce gender stereotypes, bring diverse perspectives, improve team rosters, and increase revenue by attracting a larger and more gender-diverse fan base. The success of the solution will be measured by increased female representation, media rights, sponsorship deals, and the percentage of female fans. Despite potential implementation barriers, the rule has the potential to make a significant impact on the NBA and its long-term growth.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Highlights female interest level in the NBA

Figure 2. Shows consumer spending of women

Figure 3. Reveals the impact of the Rooney Rule

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