

Racial position segregation in intercollegiate football

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General observation suggests that racial position segregation may not be as prevalent in North American sports as in past years. Not that long ago, one might be hard pressed to find professional or collegiate sports teams with African American quarterbacks in football or African American pitchers in baseball. According to Grusky (1963) and multiple other researchers, there is a tendency for white players to be allocated to positions requiring extensive leadership and decision making ability (central positions) and for African American players to be allocated to positions requiring relatively less leadership ability but greater physical attributes (peripheral positions). In this study, we revisit the issue of racial position segregation or racial "stacking" in intercollegiate football.

Employing data from *Rivals.com*, we observe a player's position in high school and college. We then estimate a probit model to predict the probability of a player changing positions as he transitions from high school to college. The probability of a player changing positions is modeled as a function of his weight, height, speed, and race. In addition, we include controls for high school performance indicators such as passing yards for quarterbacks, rushing yards for running backs, and receiving yards for wide receivers. Lastly, our model includes, as a control variable, the *Rivals.com* rating given to each player. Explaining the rating is beyond the scope of an abstract, but it is included to account for latent talent.

Our full dataset consists of the 1,006 players from the 2008 and 2009 recruiting classes that reported the necessary physical attributes and talent measures used as explanatory variables in our econometric analysis. For reasons explained in the paper, only players that signed with Bowl Championship Series (BCS) universities are included in our dataset. Descriptive statistics of our data reveal significant evidence that racial position segregation is widespread in high school football. In particular, the descriptive statistics suggest that African American high school football players are largely underrepresented at the

quarterback, tight end, and offensive linemen positions and largely overrepresented at the running back, wide receiver, and defensive back positions. The data also offers much information about which players are likely to change positions and the positions they are likely to switch to when transitioning from high school to college.

Most notably, our probit results do not reveal any evidence that African American players who played wide receiver, tight end, offensive lineman, defensive lineman, linebacker, or defensive back in high school are significantly more or less likely to change positions in college than white players at these positions, other things equal. However, our results do suggest that African American high school quarterbacks and white high school running backs are significantly more likely to change positions in college than their white and African American counterparts, respectively. Thus, while other positions do not appear to become more racially segregated as players transition from high school to college, the quarterback and running back positions do appear to become significantly more racially segregated. According to the estimated marginal effects, the probability of an African American high school quarterback being moved away from the quarterback position in college is 38.5 percent greater than that of a white quarterback. Similarly, the probability of a white high school running back changing positions in college is 31.7 percent greater than that of an African American high school running back, all else equal. We discount previous explanations for racial position segregation, such as employer discrimination, customer discrimination, and self-segregation, as not being able to fully explain our results. We put forward that the most likely explanation for our result is statistical discrimination, resulting from imperfect information.

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