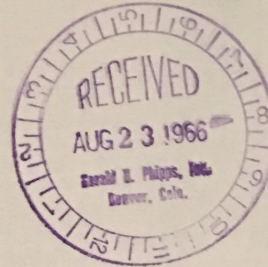


19 August 1966



CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM TO: Member Clubs

SUBJECT: Player Relations

Enclosed is a memorandum prepared by Claude (Buddy) Young of the Commissioner's office.

Please give it your careful consideration.

PR:te  
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PETE ROZELLE  
Commissioner

August 3, 1966

Subject: Some Observations on the NFL and Negro Players

To : Pete Rozelle

From : Buddy Young

Of the 560 professional athletes under contract to 14 National Football League teams at the end of the 1965 season, a total of 137 were Negroes. Approximately that same ratio prevailed among the members of the so-called Taxi Squads attached to these teams.

Quite plainly, this is a disproportionate number of Negroes in a nation whose total population breaks down to 11.9% non-white and 89.1% white. Theories as to why so many Negro athletes play professional football vary widely, depending on the views of the particular sociologist, psychiatrist, economist or social historian.

Whatever the particular explanation might be, however, the total number of Negroes in the National Football League has gone up and up. By way of comparison, only 58 out of a total of 406 NFL players were Negroes ten years ago -- and the figure twenty and thirty years ago was far lower.

The future can't be predicted with any accuracy, of course, but it is fair to say that the number is apt to go up rather than down, and at least it will probably remain static, exactly where it is, at around 25 per cent of the rosters.

Under the circumstances, it is important to carefully explore the role of the Negro in the NFL today. Quite apart from mere statistics, a number of the truly celebrated stars and box-office attractions -- Jimmy Brown, Gale Sayers, Bob Hayes, Dick Bass, etc. -- are Negroes. Since the performance of these men can specifically relate to box-office receipts, it is no exaggeration to suggest that their performances, and the performances of the other Negro players, has or may in the future may be related to how they are treated, by teams as well as the team cities and communities, as whole men.

It is not the point here to look into the political and civil rights sentiments of the Negro players, which vary considerably. On the basis of his autobiography two years ago, for example, Jimmy Brown takes a hard, militant view of American society, while a number of others are far more moderate.

But the all too familiar atmosphere of the nation already does and certainly will continue to relate to the disposition and attitude of Negro athletes, not to mention both Negro and non-Negro spectators and the television audience. The emergence of the more militant Negro civil rights groups, and the severe splinterization of the entire civil rights movement, individual NFL teams may expect not less but more involvement -- willy-nilly -- in the communities in which they operate; for these communities are, by and large, the major metropolitan areas with large Negro populations, oppressive slum areas, high unemployment, crime and truancy, as well as drop-out rolls.

It is conceivable, for example, that despite the record number of Negro players on NFL team payrolls, some incident, however slight (a Negro player whose militant stand on the rights issue being cut by one team, for example, strictly on the basis of his performance on the field) could spark a demonstration, large or small, or picketing by the more fiery extremist groups. In terms of the national picture, this might not be important, but it could cost a team at least some goodwill in its own area and increase tensions that already exist.

With such a heavy proportion of Negro players, the NFL happens to be in a position to make great contributions -- not only to the Negro cause, which admittedly not every owner might agree to, but to its own competitive and financial situation, which is important to every owner, as well as to the League itself. Little or nothing has ever been done in this realm by professional baseball, basketball or boxing; football has the opportunity for a real contribution.

To see what could be done, we must consider a typical NFL Negro player, not a prize-winning celebrity like Jimmy Brown, but not a marginal taxi-squad reserve, of marginal abilities, either. For purposes of this discussion we can consider Spider Lockart, a regular defensive back with the New York Giants, as representative.

Like any number of Negro players, and a large number of white players as well, Lockart grew up in a small rural town, attended a small Negro college little known beyond the area, except, of course, to NFL and AFL bird-dogs. The bright lights of a major city like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or Detroit lay beyond his vision, at least until his athletic prowess brought him to the attention of NFL scouts.

Because Lockart played out his college career in a relatively small college and a small league, his reputation, although probably not his ability, amounted to something less than another player who competed in the Big Ten, Southwest, Southeast or West Coast Conference. Playing for a small school in a small league, his prospects for national publicity, All-American honors, Heisman and other trophy prizes was obviously less -- and so, as a consequence, was the salary he signed for, with either an NFL or an AFL team. Lockart, for example, was every bit as good as other players from more prestigious schools, but he was signed for considerably less.

I might add that exactly the same situation also applies to a white player from a smaller college. NFL player sheets glow with the heroic exploits of discoveries down in the collegiate bush-leagues -- Harlan Hill, John Unitas, Mac Speedie and many, many more. In each of these cases, and a number of others, anonymous small-college stars who made it signed for far less than the headline star from, say, Illinois -- my own alma mater, I might add -- whose size and prestige admittedly helped me squeeze \$20,000 out of Dan Topping and the old New York Yanks when I first came into pro football.

After Lockart signed his Giant contract, he arrived in a big metropolitan city, the biggest we have in America, to join the team and commence training. If the Giants operate like other teams, no organized orientation program awaited him. He was treated like all other rookies, and how well I remember that.

More to the point, however, Lockart is a Negro in a great urban center not yet highly integrated. In his spare time, away from other teammates, Negro or white, it is only natural for him to drift into the community composed of large numbers of fellow-citizens of the same color -- Harlem, in this case. It is well to keep in mind, in this connection, that the rural, small-college player, Negro or white, on whom the NFL is building its squads is not an especially sophisticated or worldly individual. He finds company where it seems easiest and most comfortable for him.

One aspect of this is obvious. The hazards of surrounding oneself with friends in Harlem, or Watts, or Chicago's South Side, or in a dozen other such ghettos, may be slight, or minimal, or even nil -- if one is lucky. But this man is a stranger to the town, "up for the first time", and like all strangers he may be inclined to find his friendships in the normal places -- bars, cafes, hotel lobbies, bowling alleys, and worse.

I had a friend once, a very good friend, memories of whom still linger in my mind -- Big Daddy Lipscomb, a player of exceptional abilities, one of the very best, who came into football from what the social workers call a disadvantaged background, without a layer of any real education to help. Daddy would be the first to admit that before his reformation with Baltimore he ran with a bad pack in Los Angeles, numbers people and pimps, short-cut artists and tough hard drinkers. People like that are only too willing to be friendly to a kid from the sticks -- because by their standards, the fact that he's a professional athlete makes him a celebrity, a conversation piece -- and he gives them status.

At the time Spider Lockart is receiving no real guidance, no committee of ranking Negroes in the community, no personal helping-hand to guide him, he reads about other players in the newspapers. What he reads may depress him -- and may make him angry. A new quarterback the club has traded for is set up with the club's help with a radio-interview program, extra money, perhaps the start of a post-football career. Another player, a prominent lineman, is eased with the team's help into an interesting off-season sales job with a large local organization.

Lockhart recognizes certain facts. He knows that the quarterback, being a quarterback, is a celebrity, and thus the radio show makes sense. He knows that his own reputation isn't big enough for that other sales job -- not yet, anyway. But he wonders about the club helping with some sort of a job, between seasons -- teaching, insurance, something he might qualify for and build into a career in the community when both his abilities and athletic reputation enlarge.

In view of all this, for the sake of the players, the teams, the league cities and the continued success of <sup>professional football</sup> the National Football League, I strongly urge that member teams of the league embark on a program with regard to Negro players in order that maximum benefits may accrue to all concerned. Components of that program are suggested below.

(1) Every team should have at least one full-time front-office man, perhaps the assistant player personnel director, who is a Negro. In addition to duties typical of personnel management, this Negro assistant should be continuously in

touch with representative Negroes of the community -- ministers; newspapermen; radio, television and other communications persons; businessmen; ministers; schoolmen, including secondary and college and university people; professional leaders; and other community-minded persons who are sensitive to, and communicative of, the sense of the Negro community.

(2) Negroes should also be employed in every department of a member-club. They should be represented as much on the sidelines, in the front-office, and in the background as on the field. They should be found among ticket sellers, ticket takers, ushers, concession attendants, grounds and equipment keepers and attendants, trainers -- in short, everywhere. And deliberate pains should be taken to assure their presence.

(3) As soon as the names of top prospects in the Negro colleges are known, the League and the teams should get their field representatives "on the boy", the better to prepare him psychologically for the possibilities which lie ahead. It is to be remembered, in this connection, that the coaches of these men are usually over-worked, busy men who simply do not have the time systematically to advise their players with respect to this detail. Moreover, advice concerning maintenance of physical conditioning may be uneven; and facilities for this purpose at a given college may not be systematically or imaginatively used. It becomes too easy a possibility that a draftee of tremendous potential may thus be "dumped" into a training camp with physical and psychological readiness at dangerously low levels. The League cannot risk this possibility.

(4) Immediately upon his being drafted, a player should have information concerning physical conditioning, income tax, and expectations of the clubs, owners and coaches with respect to personal and professional behavior. The orientation here suggested would include instruction by way of direct, face-to-face conversations with owners, coaches and other players in the club-town or in the city or region of the draftee's college. Telephone liaison should be maintained also. In short, these draftees would benefit greatly from as much as may be possible of the kind of treatment accorded the high-ranking draftees from the larger colleges. Not to do so, it is feared, may jeopardize the investment already entered upon, or may render unnecessarily more difficult the assimilation of the draftee into the club's program.

(5) As new Negro players become adjusted to their new professional football environments, their respective clubs should book them for appropriate speeches, public appearances, coaching clinics, school talks -- the works. They should appear before all kinds of civic groups -- Negro and white. This type of exposure will serve three ends simultaneously: it would be a morale-builder for the player, would be good for the community-at-large; and would produce tremendous goodwill for the clubs.

(6) The League should try to do everything in its power to influence the placing of Negro players -- and particularly Negro-college players -- in each of these special games: East West, North South, Coach's All-American and the Senior Bowl Game.

(7) The clubs would determine whether the player wants to settle permanently in the league town on a year-round basis. If so, efforts would be made to see that employment opportunities are explored and employment doors opened. Moreover, special care should be taken to persuade the non-college-graduate among the new players to undertake full-time college studies during off-seasons toward the end of completing requirements for a college degree. Such players may be urged to return to their former colleges; or, it may be more convenient, and perhaps more advantageous, to work out a program whereby the player might matriculate in a college within the metropolitan area served by the team. It is to be remembered that a player with a degree is more easily placed in an off-season job; and the adjustment of a player when his playing days are over is easier if he has a college degree. And a well-adjusted football player -- active or retired -- reflects the very greatest credit upon the clubs and the League.

The impact of all this is obviously cumulative. Over a period of years such a program ought to contribute much toward additional goodwill for the teams and the League. Such a program will mean much in terms of money and of human relations. I consider it most essential and urge its most careful consideration.

Finally, a true anecdote from my experience during the heat of the war, when NFL and AFL were bidding for the same players: On one occasion I encountered some trouble with two Negro prospects from the same small but athletically distinguished school in the south. Why the trouble? Not because the NFL teams on whose behalf I was negotiating didn't offer enough money; they did. It was rather different. As the two players told me, another graduate of their school had signed with a particular NFL team two years earlier and had told them why they ought to "shop around some". "Team I signed with doesn't care about me except as a uniform and a number," he had told them. He continued: "They don't help me with living space, or job advice, or anything else. To them I'm 260 pounds of meat-playing tackle -- nothing more."

In this day and age, with the civil rights involvement more acrimonious than ever -- but with the goals never more desirable, and with the dignity of the individual not all it should be for anyone, Negro or white, the NFL has a tremendous opportunity. Let's hope this project isn't fumbled.