

THE PLAY BEYOND THE FIELD: THE LACK OF MEDIA ATTENTION RELATED TO
BLACK COLLEGE BASEBALL PLAYERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Denetra Walker)

ABSTRACT

Through interviews with Black college baseball players and coaches, this research examines the idea that there may be a systemic lack of media attention of Black college baseball players within the broader context of American collegiate sports. Through semi-structured interviews, this thesis argues that the marginalization of Black college baseball players in media reflects a deeper issue of racial inequity in American sports culture. This study discusses topics such as racial dynamics, cultural stereotypes in sport, and media practices. It explains how each contributes to the disparity in media attention. In doing this, this thesis seeks to encourage a broader dialogue about race, equity, and representation in sports to contribute to the ongoing conversation surrounding race in athletics.

INDEX WORDS: Media coverage; Black college athletes; college baseball; racial disparities; racial stereotypes

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Victor and Jacqueline Whitening. Their constant support and guidance have both shaped my research and the person that I have become. Their encouragement and their belief in the power of representation inspired me to explore the experiences of Black college baseball players in sports media. Their constant push to ask hard questions and search for truth gave me the strength to take on this topic. Without their influence, this paper would not exist. Thank you for always reminding me that Black individual's stories matter.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	3
Historical Context and Decline of Black Participation.....	3
National Media Coverage of Baseball	5
The College Sport Experience	6
Race in Sport.....	7
Media Narratives and Representation.....	7
Media Framing and Narratives in Sports	9
Social Media in Sports.....	10
Socio-Cultural Implications.....	11
Community Dynamics	12
Systemic Inequalities	13
Research Questions.....	14
3 METHOD	16
Sample Description.....	16
Study Procedure	17

Reflexivity.....	19
Participants.....	20
4 RESULTS	22
Need More Black Sports Journalists (from HBCUs).....	22
View of Black Baseball in Society	27
Social Media Might Be the Way.....	30
Is Social Media Use a Big Factor	33
Visibility Can Create Interest... But is it Cool?	35
5 DISCUSSION (FRAMING).....	38
Additional Research.....	40
Conclusion	40
Limitations	41
REFERENCES	43
APPENDICES	
A INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION TABLE.....	48

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The number of Black athletes in baseball has significantly decreased at the professional and collegiate levels. In Division I National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) baseball, there are only 752 baseball players - about 6% - that are Black (Thomas, 2024). Also, in the year 2023, only 6.1% of the players in the Major League Baseball (MLB) opening-day rosters were Black (USA Today, 2023). This is the lowest since the year 1955 (Nightengale, B., 2023). The underrepresentation of Black athletes in college baseball raises real questions and concerns that pertain to equity, visibility, and the cultural implications of race in sports.

Historically, baseball played a pivotal role in breaking racial barriers with the integration of the sport including iconic figures such as Jackie Robinson, who paved the way for future generations of Black athletes. Jackie Robinson was central to the idea of integration in baseball and America. Various media centered on the theme of integration itself rather than highlighting Jackie Robinson's life. He also represented a broader visual culture of integration of mainstream society (Raengo, 2008).

Over the past few decades, Black players in MLB have decreased (U.S. News, 2017). This same decrease occurs at the collegiate baseball level as well. According to the NCAA's race and Ethnicity Data for 2019-2020, Black athletes made up about 6.2% of baseball players at the NCAA Division I level. This statistic has steadily decreased since the 1970s (NCAA, 2024). Reports show that Black athletes make up a very small percentage of college baseball rosters. This reflects the systemic barriers and socio-economic factors that limit access to baseball. The

challenges, stories, and contributions of Black college baseball players show a significant gap in sports media coverage.

Media narratives play a critical role in shaping public perception, influencing the aspirations of young athletes, and creating discourse surrounding sports. Framing points out the way that elements in certain stories are presented.

This thesis will examine these factors through an overview of existing literature regarding sports and race, as well as interviews with Black players and coaches. Through interviews with Black college baseball players, the research will aim to highlight the perceptions of Black collegiate athletes' experiences. By highlighting a multitude of topics, this thesis seeks to encourage a broader dialogue about race, equity, and representation in sports. Also, it will contribute to the ongoing conversation surrounding race and sports in media.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The underrepresentation of Black Americans in baseball is well-documented in both mainstream and academic literature. The underrepresentation of Black participation in baseball is not only limited to the professional ranks, and it has been revealed by scholars as present among high school and college levels (Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Hodge, Harrison, Burden, & Dixon, 2008). This lack of involvement raises concerns about the interest of baseball by Black spectators. This suggests that the decrease in participation could lead to a decrease in interest and support amongst Black people (Brown & Bennett, 2014). This research examines the idea that there may be a lack of media attention towards Black college baseball players as it pertains to representation, media narrative, and on a socio-cultural level.

Historical Context and Decline of Black Participation

Initially, Black Americans embraced baseball, even forming their own professional organizations, specifically in cities with growing Black populations. However, the majority of the profits went to White owners and booking agents. Influential figures like Frank Leland and Andrew "Rube" Foster tried to create Black-owned businesses within baseball. Foster's establishment of the Negro National League in the year 1920 was to give economic benefits to Black Americans. It was also to create new job opportunities in a multitude of roles associated with baseball (Ogden & Hilt, 2003).

Jackie Robinson is the iconic figure that broke MLB's color barrier in the year 1947. Before Jackie Robinson broke the MLB color barrier, baseball thrived within the Black

community, mainly through the Negro Leagues. However, Black participation in MLB sharply dropped from a peak of 27% in the 1970s to just 8.5% by 2011 (Cooper, Gawrysiak, & Hawkins, 2012). This also is reflected at the collegiate level as well. Black participation in college baseball at the Division I level has decreased to around 6% in recent years (AP News, 2024). This can be a result of various factors, including socio-economic barriers and limited access to baseball programs in communities of color.

The decline of Black participation in college baseball connects with historical, social, and economic factors. To fully understand this decline, you must examine things such as the historical significance of baseball in American culture, the progress of desegregation in MLB, the socio-economic barriers that emerged in the late 20th century, and the landscape shifts as it pertains to youth sports.

Baseball holds a significant place in African American history. It serves as a pivotal platform for entertainment and social change. Baseball was influential in challenging racial barriers. The most noticeable being the career of Jackie Robinson, who broke MLB's color barrier in the year 1947. Jackie Robinson's success inspired a generation of young Black athletes to pursue baseball. Black players such as Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, and Satchel Paige became icons by demonstrating the elite talent and potential within the Black community. The MLB's color barrier was sustained amongst team owners. Jackie Robinson's entry into MLB was part of a broader struggle for racial equality. However, Black participation has continued to decline. This raises questions about true racial progress since Robinson's time. Recent data shows African American players made up only 9.1% of MLB rosters compared to 59.8% for White players. This trend of underrepresentation extends beyond professional baseball to high school and collegiate levels (Cooper et al., 2012).

National Media Coverage of Baseball

The media plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of athletes and sports. Media coverage often pushes existing stereotypes. Athletes of different races are portrayed in ways that strengthen stereotypes. Racial and nationality-based stereotypes of professional baseball players have been reinforced in the United States media since the 1800s (Voight, 1976). In the 1920s, there was a partnership between the baseball press and Black baseball. Early coverage focused on promoting the interests of the Black community other than standing by the modern journalistic standards of objectivity and accuracy. Some newspapers expressed their significant support for the Negro National League and claimed to provide a "correct version" of its events (Carroll, 2006).

While racism in sports commentary has dwindled, the media continues to portray Black and White athletes differently (Eagleman, 2008). Black athletes are often associated with physical strength, while White athletes are often associated with intelligence. This pattern influences the public (Ferrucci, Tandoc, Painter, & Leshner, 2013). In the case of college baseball, the narrative focuses primarily on White athletes. This in a way sidelines the contributions and experiences of Black players. The lack of visibility for Black college baseball players can create the narrative of baseball as a "White sport." In being a Black athlete who played baseball for majority of my life, I always heard some of my teammates and coaches describe baseball being seen around the world as a "White sport." Even Jazz Chisolm, infielder and center fielder of the New York Yankees, during his interview with *The Atlantic* made the remark, "baseball is a White sport" (Fox News, 2025). Things like this limit the opportunities for visibility and sponsorship of Black baseball players. Even though Black Americans are potential consumers, there has been a struggle to engage this market effectively. Black

Americans view baseball as a sport that lacks cultural and motivational factors, such as excitement, skill, and social connection. Although MLB has implemented initiatives to promote diversity and increase youth participation, these efforts have not significantly improved Black American engagement with baseball (Brown & Bennett, 2014).

The College Sport Experience

The college sport experience is intertwined with institutional pride and cultural identity. These things help assist in shaping the overall college experience for students, alumni, and fans. This experience creates shared beliefs and norms that increase the sense of community within the institution. Major college sports can lead to demographic changes in college towns and generate economic growth, because of the alignment of local businesses and the associated institutions. The Historically Black College University (HBCU) athlete experience is special due to the unique history and culture of these colleges. While integration opened doors for Black college athletes, it simultaneously hurt the quality and appeal of HBCU athletics programs (Shropshire, 2013). Critical Race Theory attributes to the strategic decisions of Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) to dominate athletic competition (Cooper, Cavi, & Cheeks, 2014). This has resulted in social and financial disadvantages for HBCUs. These social and financial disadvantages include underpayment in guaranteed games and limited media exposure. This results in a devaluation of HBCU athletics.

HBCUs sporting culture reflects Black identity and community support (White, 2019). White emphasizes that the Black Sporting Congregation is the interconnectedness of the community that results in cultural pride and resistance. The rise of social media has increased these connections by allowing the expression of cultural narratives, counter public discourse, and resistance against mainstream narratives that belittle the HBCU experience (Foster, 2022).

Race in Sport

American sports serve as both a platform for racial integration and a site of racial conflict and stereotyping. Biases regarding college athletes' intellect and athleticism are deeply embedded in society. There is an emphasis on the differing stereotypes applied to Black and White players. In an eight-year study, Eagleman concluded that regarding stereotypes of individuals of race, White athletes were most likely to be depicted as hard workers, while Black athletes were most likely to be depicted as naturally talented. (Eagleman, 2008). This "black brawn vs. white brains" dichotomy is created by media narratives that connect Black athletic success to genetics rather than effort (Haslerig, Vue, & Grummert, 2018).

Research has shown that racial biases impact scouting reports. White players are often described positively in terms of intelligence and mental attributes, while Black players are often framed in terms of their physical abilities. This bias has consequences for career opportunities and health, as Black players' injuries may be taken less seriously. As racial integration in sports increased, White athletes began to be seen as less athletic but more knowledgeable. Black athletes continued to face stereotypes of physical prowess. This created a dehumanization of Black athletes where there is a desensitization to their injuries. This can impact medical treatment and support for Black athletes (Haslerig et al., 2018). Future research should continue from this research to closely examine the intersection of race, media, and sports to assist in advocating for systemic changes that promote diversity and equality within the landscape of collegiate sports.

Media Narratives and Representation

Historically, media coverage of college baseball has been minimal compared to more popular sports such as basketball and football. This lack of coverage extends to the achievements

and stories of Black college baseball players. This leads to a significant gap in representation. The narratives presented in sports media often prioritize stories of White athletes or focus on the professional leagues. This is partially because the sports media world is still overwhelmingly White and male (ESPN, 2021). A study from Hull, Walker, Romney, and Pellizzaro (2024) elaborates through social identity theory that the hiring of more Black television sports journalists to combat stereotyping of athletes.

“Black television sports journalists believe more Black hires can be a solution to combating stereotypes of athletes. They state that their backgrounds allow them to relate to athletes in a communal way, which echoes the missing voice of Black journalists covering local sports. The idea is reflected in social identity theory. Black athletes may feel more comfortable interacting with and sharing stories with Black television sports journalists because they are in the same in-group.” (Hull, Walker, Romney, & Pellizzaro, 2024, p.14)

Exposure to racial cues in the media can trigger stereotypical thinking. This happens through a process that happens unconsciously. The media is significant in reinforcing stereotypes. Athletes are regularly partially rated based on race and stereotypes (Ferrucci et al., 2013). This perception is rooted in historical biases and has been kept alive by the media's storytelling. The lack of visibility for Black players creates the notion that baseball is not a suitable or accessible sport for Black youth. This results in a lack of participation from this demographic. Also, when Black athletes are featured in media narratives, they are often portrayed through the lens of racial stereotypes. This tends to overshadow their individual achievements and experiences. This limited portrayal fails to capture the diversity of backgrounds and stories among Black college baseball players. This creates a narrative that doesn't truly reflect their true identities.

Media Framing and Narratives in Sports

The media's framing of sports influences the dreams of young athletes. It shapes their choices about which sports to pursue. The promotion of basketball and football as the primary avenues for success leads many Black youth to overlook baseball. Media narratives that promote the immediate rewards and visibility offered by sports such as basketball and football are a part of the cultural perception that reduces the significance of baseball.

Black youth see fewer role models and success stories in baseball compared to other sports. Because of this, they are less likely to consider baseball as a legitimate pursuit. "Black youth may try to emulate visible Black athletes and thus concentrate upon positions in which blacks are more prominent" (Castine & Roberts, 1974, p.61). This results in a significant underrepresentation of Black athletes in college baseball programs, which creates the cycle of marginalization and limiting opportunities for future generations.

Addressing the idea of the lack of media attention and the limited representation of Black college baseball players are crucial steps for creating a sense of inclusivity within baseball. There must be a better effort by media outlets to diversify their coverage by highlighting the achievements of Black players. By showcasing their stories, struggles, and successes, the media can play an important role in changing narratives around Black participation in baseball. Arguably, it could inspire young Black athletes to pursue baseball.

There is an importance of collaboration between media organizations, colleges, and baseball programs to create platforms that elevate the voices of Black players. This includes feature stories that explore the personal journeys of these athletes, their challenges, and their

contributions to baseball. Increasing visibility can lead to greater funding and community support for baseball programs.

The media narratives surrounding Black participation in college baseball are due to limited coverage, reinforcement of stereotypes, and cultural perceptions that undervalue baseball. These factors contribute to the ongoing decline of Black representation in baseball. By increasing the voices and stories of Black college baseball players, the media can help create a more inclusive narrative that encourages participation, as well as inspire future generations. Addressing these issues is essential for promoting equality and representation in all areas of sports.

Social Media in Sports

One part of modern human communication that social media has impacted the most is sports communication. Social media has opened alternative spaces for the production, distribution, and consumption of sports (Ncube, Mare, & Muzondo, 2023). Unlike traditional media, social media platforms offer the opportunity for content that focuses on underrepresented voices to be amplified. The popularity of social media consumption compared to other mass media content looks as if it will continue to be a trend with recent statistics related to Generation Z and their content consumption. Gen Zs spend 54% more time than the average consumer per day on social media platforms and watching user-generated content, and 26% less time watching TV and movies (The Wall Street Journal, 2025).

Social media allows athletes to create their own narratives, challenge stereotypes, and build personal brands without conventional media framing. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc., offer opportunities to connect directly with fans and gain visibility that they might not receive on mainstream platforms. This is significant as it pertains to

Black college baseball players, because it creates a space that allows them to promote their experiences.

Socio-Cultural Implications

The underrepresentation of Black college baseball players in the media has significant socio-cultural implications. Media coverage plays a critical role in racial and ethnic identity development. The lack of representation can lead to a sense of isolation amongst Black youth who dream is to play baseball at a high level. This comes from not seeing role models who look like them being successful in baseball. This disconnect is particularly current in communities of color where baseball programs are less accessible and often overshadowed by other sports such as basketball and football. This is discussed in, *“Racial Perceptions of Baseball at Historically Black Colleges and Universities”*.

“Things such as the ethnicity/subcultural hypothesis and the collective identity theory argues that the lack of Black participation in baseball is based on hegemonic social norms and values correlated with late 20th to early 21st century African American culture.

Additional cultural influences such as media’s reinforcement of dominant racist ideologies that baseball is not a sport associated with Blacks have also been attributed to the lack of Black participation in baseball. In conjunction with the media, the lack of role models in certain sports is another cultural explanation for the lack of Black participation in baseball. Black athletes account for nearly 77% of the players in the National Basketball Association (NBA), whereas they account for only 9% in MLB.” (Cooper et al., 2012)

Media narratives regarding sports often reflect broader societal issues. These issues include race and socio-economic class. Socio-economic status, social constraints, and racial identification are

factors that influence the consumption behavior of Black American sports fans. Low socio-economic status is one thing that often limits access to the resources required to play baseball. The "welcome theory" suggests that groups of people (ex. Black Americans) may not feel welcomed within particular sport settings due to comfort and familiarity levels (Harrison, 2001). The lack of connection between African American identity and baseball can decrease interest in a sport. Understanding the attitudes and barriers faced by Black Americans regarding baseball is essential for addressing these conflicts (Brown & Bennett, 2014). The prioritization of certain sports over others can emphasize stereotypes about Black athletes. This could result in lasting effects on things such as funding and the overall growth of baseball programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Community Dynamics

The decline of Black participation in college baseball also affects community dynamics. This is specifically true in urban areas where baseball programs have historically been less accessible. Communities with strong traditions related to sports often have a sense of unity and identity amongst them. Many sports programs are aimed at showing youth an alternative path and build cross-community solidarity (Sugden, 2010). When Black children turn away from baseball, it can lead to the breaking down of community structures built around baseball. This includes local leagues, youth programs, and mentorship opportunities. Fewer Black children choose to participate in baseball, the networks of support and engagement that have historically disintegrated.

The decline of urban communities being involved in baseball negatively impacts local economies that rely on baseball programs for jobs, sponsorships, and community events. This results in funding for youth baseball decreasing and creating a cycle that furthers the gap

between Black communities and their counterparts as it pertains to baseball. This can be seen as an example of the marginality hypothesis. This proposes that the underrepresentation of African Americans in certain leisure activities is primarily a result of limited economic resources, which is a byproduct of historical racial inequalities (Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, and Noe, 1994). This also creates an increasing focus on other sports that are more highlighted in the community. This results in a shrinking of opportunities for Black children related to participation in baseball.

The underrepresentation of Black athletes in college baseball also connects to the broader societal perceptions of race and success. As it pertains to Black athletes, the media emphasizes the success of athletes in sports that have athletes that are primarily black such as basketball and football. The media's perception of Black athletes does sometimes have a detrimental impact on their lives, careers, and public perception. When baseball is portrayed as a "White sport", it creates the stereotypes that weaken the capabilities of Black athletes in baseball.

The idea of societal perceptions of race and success being related occurs, but it is not only exclusively true in sports. It is also true in education. This was seen in a study to investigate Sport Management undergraduate students' perceptions of race/ethnicity and gender relations in the field of Sport Management done by Rennae Williams Stowe and Elizabeth Lange (2018). In their focus group, there were African American women that mentioned race and gender being factors of barriers for their success more than anyone else often than anyone else.

Systemic Inequalities

These conflicts can create a long-lasting effect on systemic inequalities that occur within college athletics. The lack of Black representation in college baseball can further impact things such as funding and overall visibility for programs at HBCUs. Due to their historic underfunding as it relates to PWIs, there are already problems regarding HBCUs not having the resources to

attract top level athletic talent on a consistent basis (Jones, 2016). Other problems include 75% of HBCU athletic departments not having a marketing department. This was found after research examined sports marketing practices using data obtained from 32 HBCU athletic directors via survey (Jackson, Lyons, & Gooden, 2021). With problems in funding and marketing, HBCU athletic programs will continue to miss out on the substantial revenue generated by intercollegiate athletics that other institutions already take advantage of.

There is an increased amount of literature pushing for more equal media representation of Black athletes in all sports, including baseball. Media outlets must take an active role in diversifying their coverage by highlighting the achievements and stories of Black college baseball players. This includes not only game coverage but also features stories that take a deep dive into the lives and challenges faced by these athletes. Increased visibility could assist in increased interest from Black children to engage with baseball. This would help in contributing a more diverse athletic pipeline in baseball.

Research Questions

With the sport of baseball already lacking in the number of Black players from a collegiate and professional standpoint, this further distances the gap in interest and popularity of the sport in the community of color. Based on an extensive review of previous literature and an analysis of current gaps, the following three research questions have been proposed to guide this study:

RQ1: How do Black college baseball players perceive media coverage of them as a whole?

RQ2: How do Black baseball players articulate the impact of media coverage on their youth collegiate career?

RQ3: In what ways can Black Baseball players use social media to combat the lack of media attention by sports journalists if it is present?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the idea that there may be a lack of media attention given to Black college baseball players compared to their counterparts. At the most basic level, an interview has a referential purpose (Briggs, 1986). By utilizing in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research aimed to uncover the experiences and perceptions as it pertains to media representation for these athletes. The study was framed within discussions of race, sports, and media representation. It focused specifically on the narratives surrounding Black college baseball players.

Sample Description

There were 11 Black men who were interviewed who played baseball at the collegiate level. They were selected through snowball and purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of experiences based on the college/university that they played or coached at, age, position played, and the number of years played and coached at the collegiate level. Each participant was informed about the study's purpose and provided with forms of consent detailing their rights, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. The interviews were conducted over 3 weeks in the spring of 2025. During the interview, all participants confirmed that they identified as Black/African American. All the participants were male. As it pertains to age, three individuals are in their 20s, one is in their 30s, three are in their 40s, two are in their 50s, and two are in their 60s. As it pertains to age, three individuals are in their 20s, one was in their 30s, three were in their 40s, two were in their 50s, and two were in their 60s. As it pertains to the type of

colleges attended, three individuals only attended PWIs, five individuals only attended HBCUs, two individuals originally began their collegiate playing careers at HBCUs and then transferred to PWIs, and one individual attended a predominately Black college that is a White institution. As it pertains to positions, six individuals played infield, two individuals played outfield, one was a pitcher, one was a pitcher and an outfielder, and one was a utility (a player who can play more than one position in the field and is primarily used as a substitute). Lastly, out of the eleven individuals interviewed, all of them played baseball collegiately and only three of them coached collegiately. All the individuals who coached collegiately coached at HBCUs.

Study Procedure

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews serve as a social technique for the public construction of the self (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This allowed flexibility in exploring participant's thoughts and experiences regarding media attention and representation. On average the interviews lasted around 30-45 minutes. There was only one interview that was over an hour. Each interview was conducted either over a phone call or in person. An interview guide was developed. It focused on personal experiences, perceptions of representation, impact of media attention, and suggestions for change. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Otterai for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts. This allowed being able to identify patterns and themes within the data. There was saturation found in the study. It (saturation) is considered a fundamental: (1) "frequently touted guarantee of qualitative rigor" (Morse, 2015, p. 587) (2) guideline or "gold standard" to inform sample size determination in qualitative research designs (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, p. 60), (3) point of "information redundancy" (Sandelowski, 2008, p. 875) or "diminishing returns" (Rowlands, Waddell, & McKenna., 2016, p. 40) (4) juncture at which

“information power” is attained (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016, p. 2) (5) phase where no additional codes (code saturation) and themes and or further insights (meaning saturation) are emerging from the data (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017, p. 14).

Ethical approval for the study was given from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia (UGA). Each participant being interviewed was given consent forms that outlined the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their rights as it pertains to confidentiality and data usage. All data was anonymous to protect participant's identities. Also, any identifiable information was removed from the transcripts before analysis.

By utilizing a qualitative approach to examine the idea that there is a lack of media attention given to Black college baseball players, this study aimed to contribute to the existing literature on race and sports media representation. The insights gained from participants' experiences provided a deeper understanding of the implications of media narratives on the lives and careers of these athletes, ultimately informing strategies for enhancing representation in sports media.

The purpose of this study was to view how and why collegiate Black baseball players receive less media attention compared to their counterparts of different races. There were interviews conducted with current and former Black collegiate baseball players and coaches to gather personal narratives and insights. This is known as qualitative interviews. The individuals were interviewed, because they all encompass a large amount of knowledge as it pertains to baseball at the collegiate level. These individuals gave a clear understanding of the disparity between the amount of media attention that occurs when it comes to White and Black baseball athletes at the collegiate level.

Reflexivity

I played baseball my entire life before attending college. During my time playing baseball in high school, I was able to experience some great baseball opportunities. One great opportunity that I had was being able to play for my high school team. I attended Redan High School. The school's baseball program is very well known in the southeast baseball community. Redan baseball is mostly known for being the first all-Black baseball team from metro Atlanta to win a Georgia High School Association (GHSA) state championship. It is also known for producing a great number of college and MLB players.

In playing baseball for this highly touted high school baseball program where all the coaches and players were all of color, I always found it interesting how scouts, analysts, and reporters would compare us to other teams that we would play. When describing my teammates and my team as a whole, I would always hear the adjectives “fast”, “strong”, and “gritty”. This is very different from how they were describing the all-White teams that we were playing. Those players and teams were described as “smart”, “methodical”, and “disciplined”. This made me feel very disgruntled. Even though there were situations where this might have been a correct observation, to continually hear this knowing that it wasn't true at all in some instances made me believe that some journalists were using stereotypes in writing stories instead of actually telling the true story.

The disparity in description of majority White teams versus majority Black teams shows the marginalization of Black players versus White players. From my point of view, it appeared that Black athletes were celebrated more for their physical prowess instead of their mental fortitude. My hope with doing this work as a Black scholar and former baseball player is to help

understand the experiences of Black college baseball players and to explore meaningful ways for sports media platforms to promote Black college baseball.

Even though my personal experience was at the amateur level, it is simply a smaller level event that resembles how Black baseball is seen at the collegiate level. Experiences like mine continuously push the narratives that Black people don't play baseball and the ones that do are only successful because of their physical prowess. This pushes a marginalized way of thinking for athletes of color. This is especially true in a sport such as baseball where there is a large disparity in athletes that participate in the sport at the collegiate and professional levels as it pertains to race occurs. It is important to me that Black baseball gains more media attention, so that it is not seen as a surprise or an anomaly in the future.

Participants

- Player 1 - 29 years old, played at Grambling State and Morehouse College, was a second baseman, shortstop, and third baseman, and has never coached at the collegiate level.
- Player 2 - 47 years old, played at Southern A&M University, was a third baseman and first baseman, and coached at a HBCU.
- Player 3 - 51 years old, played at Tennessee State University and Thomas University, was an infielder, and has never coached at the collegiate level.
- Player 4 - 22 years old, played at Vanderbilt University and Charlotte University, was a pitcher, and has never coached at the collegiate level.
- Player 5 - 67 years old, played at Tennessee State University, was a first baseman, and has never coached at the collegiate level.

- Player 6 - 62 years old, played at Georgia State University, was a center fielder and pitcher, and coached at a HBCU.
- Player 7 - 49 years old, played at Southern A&M University, was an outfielder, and has never coached at the collegiate level.
- Player 8 - 47 years old, played at Southern A&M University, was a catcher, and has never coached at the collegiate level.
- Player 9 - 59 years old, played at Western Carolina University, was a shortstop, and coached at a HBCU.
- Player 10 - 24 years old, played at Eastern Kentucky University, Chattanooga State University, and Shorter University, was a utility player, and never coached at the collegiate level.
- Player 11 - 36 years old, played at Albany State University, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, and Armstrong State University, was an outfielder, and never coached at the collegiate level.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In analyzing the experiences of Black collegiate baseball players, there were multiple themes found about their connections to media representations. These themes include that there needs to be more Black sports journalists, especially from HBCUs, in sports media, there needs to be more media exposure of Black baseball to improve the interest of Black amateurly, collegiately, and professionally, and social media might be the way to promote of Black baseball in the future.

Need More Black Sports Journalists (from HBCUs)

RQ1 asked how Black college baseball players perceive media coverage of Black baseball. Most of the interviewees expressed that there was a lack of coverage. They talked about being discussed or covered minimally locally and nationally during their amateur and collegiate career. There were only 2 participants who expressed that there was no lack of media coverage as it pertained to their college baseball team or them individually during college while being a player. The common denominator of both individuals is that they both played collegiately at Division I PWIs. Player 4 is 1 of the 2 individuals that felt that there was no lack of media coverage as it pertained to his college baseball team or him individually during his collegiate career. He said, “For both teams I played for, they both were covered at the national level. When I was at Charlotte, we made it to the regionals. We were able to be seen. And then, you know, Vanderbilt is a powerhouse, so we were always getting played on TV.” Player 9 was the other individual that had a similar experience as a college player. He said, “When I was at Western

Carolina, we were covered in both (local and national level), because we were a PWI. We had money... I didn't feel like we had a budget on expenses, because I was able to get everything we needed." Also, during Player 9's interview, he also expressed that during his collegiate coaching career he felt that there was a lack of media attention as it pertained to his team. He coached at Morehouse College, a Division II HBCU. When he was asked what was the difference, he stated, "We didn't really receive media attention locally and definitely didn't at the national level." In other words, there is a clear difference as it pertains to the media attention and viewing interest at HBCUs compared to PWIs.

In the interviews, most of the athletes agreed that it is easier to connect with Black journalists due to sharing similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Player 5 expressed this when saying, "I personally feel comfortable with speaking with other people in my race." Player 7 said something similar. He said, "I would think that the one of color may have written what you said better or listened more than somebody that was not of color would." Player 11 expressed this as well when he said, "I think you always are going to be more comfortable with people that look and talk like you." Player 2 talked in depth about during his time as a collegiate baseball player how he felt more comfortable being interviewed by a Black journalist instead of journalists from other racial backgrounds. He said:

"I think being a Black baseball player during that time when it wasn't a lot of Blacks, I probably felt more comfortable and open to talk to Black journalists, opposed to White journalists. It was just a comfortability level for me. I'm not necessarily saying that for everyone, but for me it was just more of a comfortability thing. I can be who I am. I didn't have to hide who I was, opposed to talking to a journalist that's not Black."

This statement shows that shared identity can create a sense of trust and comfort. The journalists and the players are more likely to be aware of unique challenges faced by Black individuals within and outside of the sports world. This can be seen as social identity theory. “People who are members of an identified social category perhaps feel more comfortable associating with and promoting others within that group” (Hull et al., 2024 p. 5). Black athletes may feel more comfortable interacting with and sharing stories with Black television sports journalists because they are in the same in-group. The relationships are reciprocal. This means that Black athletes feel like they can engage with someone who grasps the complexities of race, representation, and societal pressures that Black individuals face in society. This connection can lead to more authentic and open conversations where athletes can feel that their voices are being heard with greater empathy and respect. In the interview with Player 1, he expressed something very similar, but it was more in line with journalists from HBCUs.

“It’s different when I’m talking to somebody that went to Tuskegee or Clark Atlanta (2 HBCUs). I know that you feel what I’m saying. I know you feel it on a different level. I don’t have to explain to you what’s going on. If I say something about the resources here, I know you won’t go and say, “Man, these schools need to shut down, because they don’t have any resources.” You felt the same struggle, because you were in school playing ball a couple of years ago. I know you understand it. And I’m speaking about HBCUs... Of course, I prefer for somebody to interview me that went through the same struggle that I’ve been through.”

This expresses how being a part of a HBCU community could assist in the comfortability aspect of interviews. It makes it easier to understand personal and cultural experiences. Both the athletes and journalists have navigated similar environments where things such as Black

excellence, tradition, identity are emphasized and promoted. This common bond creates a deeper sense of trust and relatability. They likely have faced similar challenges within the broader societal and sports landscapes. This dynamic of being more relatable to converse with allows for conversations that are often more authentic, because both the athletes and the journalists can engage in shared history and values. This creates a special perspective that participants feel could be overlooked if a White journalist is interviewing a Black athlete.

The overall theme throughout the interviews was the personal experiences of everyone during their playing and coaching career. All the individuals who played or coached at HBCUs said that they felt that there was a lack of media coverage regarding their team. Player 6 said, “I think it’s important to hire journalists from Black colleges and encourage them to cover everything. I think you’ll find more coverage of Black colleges.” This statement points out the problem of not having enough Black reporters or journalists that come from HBCUs in the field of sports journalism. In analyzing the interviews, most individuals felt that their team and themselves individually should have been covered more during their playing and coaching careers.

Majority of the participants in the study agreed with the idea that it matters which journalists cover stories about athletes. Some felt that journalists write about what’s similar, what’s popular, and what’s liked. This is a problem when the decision-making continues to reside with White editors who reinforce certain journalistic norms and values (Heider, 2000). Many participants noted that their teams, whether as players or coaches, were portrayed by scouts or the media in a way that differed from their opponents because of their race. A couple of individuals expressed themselves or their teams being described as “raw” or “physical” which are physical adjectives instead of adjectives that represent mental fortitude. This is important to

point out, because baseball is viewed by many as what Players 9 and 11 described as “a thinking man’s game.” When asked, “During your time in baseball, have you noticed the media using physical ability-related adjectives more often when describing you or your team, especially compared to how they describe other teams with different demographics to focus more on mental attributes for them?” Player 6’s answer was “For you to ask that question, I think you already know that answer.” His answer implied that it is normal for Black players or teams to be seen to be more physically imposing instead of mentally cerebral in a quote unquote thinking game. Player 1’s answer to the question also implied that it was normal.

“Yea, but that’s baseball... When you are at Grambling or Morehouse (2 HBCUs), you’re going to be described as tough, strong, quick, fast, and all of that. But I would assume that that’s what they expect from Black athletes anyway. And then when you hear about other guys they are described as intelligent and witty. But I know for us we’ve been described using physical attributes.”

This individual is explaining the differences between White and Black athletes. His overall point is that White baseball players are usually described as “intelligent” and “witty” compared to Black baseball players which are usually described using athletic adjectives. This is something that is supported by most of the athletes that were interviewed. It is also found within research about Black athletes. A study by Ferrucci et al. (2013, p.3) states, “Intelligence is typically mentioned when describing a White athlete, whereas physical strength is a characteristic that tends to be used when describing Black athletes” Black athletes, no matter the sport, have historically been more often described in terms of physical ability rather than mental fortitude or intellect in regard to their respectable sport.

Thematic analysis shows that Black baseball players who attend HBCUs feel that there are not enough journalists who attended Black colleges. They believe this hinders the coverage of Black baseball players in the media. All the individuals who played college baseball at the HBCU level expressed a lack of attention at both the local and national levels. The hiring of sports journalists who attended Black colleges would push and encourage the coverage of HBCU sports. This would also allow negative stereotypes about Black baseball players and teams to diminish over time.

View of Black Baseball in Society

RQ2 asked how the media coverage of Black college baseball players compares to that of their White counterparts. The participants were asked how would you explain the coverage of Black baseball players at the collegiate and professional levels? Most of the participants felt like the sports coverage of Black baseball players at the college and professional levels is getting better, but there are still problems that need to be acknowledged. In analyzing the problems that were expressed, the most notable points from the baseball players were how much Black baseball players are outnumbered by their counterparts, the heavy increase of Latino players in baseball in America, the media choosing to push the narrative of negativity of the lack of instead of pushing the positivity of the ability of as it pertains to Black baseball, and the lack of effort in trying the market baseball towards Black culture. This connects with the cultural explanations of ethnicity/subcultural hypothesis and the collective identity theory in suggesting that the lack of Black participation in baseball is based on social norms and values associated with contemporary African American culture (Cooper et al., 2012). Player 9 expressed his concerns.

“I think that they get pushed aside a lot. They have to be very special in order to get their coverage pushed up, because the fact that it’s one on the field. If you see a dugout at the

collegiate level and the professional level, you may see 3 Blacks out of 50 guys. So therefore, if that Black player doesn't have an exceptional game, he might not be the one that they talk to. And if he does have an exceptional game, and if the White guy has a good game, then he will get overlooked by the White guy. It's because we're so outnumbered. So, we have to do 3 to 4 times as much as the White guy to get the benefits that they do."

This supports a common point that was brought up in the interviews that Black players feel that they must consistently outperform their White teammates and counterparts to receive any type of media attention. The perspective from Player 9 is cognizant of how important it is for there to have more Black players in collegiate and professional baseball. As the number of Black players increases at the collegiate and professional levels, it will be more difficult for media platforms to cover baseball and not cover or market Black players.

After the participants answered the original question, they were then asked if the coverage that Black players receive impacts the perception of Black baseball players in society. Player 2 in the research said, "Yes, I do. I think because they're not seen a lot, it makes it seem like a lot of Blacks are not playing baseball." Player 1 said, "Yes, of course... If you cover Black baseball players, whether it's collegiate or professional, Black kids growing up no matter where they are from will know that it's possible. Player 5 also agreed. He said, "It's hard to say, because when we talk about society you have to break it down into demographics. Some people don't even know what a HBCU is. It's a lot deeper than this question and it would take me a lot longer to answer."

The research also shows that some individuals believe that Black society is shocked when they hear a Black athlete playing baseball. Player 1 said, "I would assume that there's a bit of a

shock to know that there's a Black baseball player playing." Player 4 said, "Me being 6 feet tall and a Black male, most people won't think I play baseball. They would think I play football or basketball or something like that." When asking him to elaborate on why said that, he said, "There are not too many Black tall pitchers or players in the game, so seeing somebody 6'6" makes people think that I play a different sport."

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed multiple reasons why Black society is shocked to see Black baseball players. Player 2's explanation was based on the lack of time that they see Black baseball players while watching television. Player 2 said, "You don't see a lot of them when you turn on Major League Baseball. It's about 2% that's Black playing, and when you look at football and basketball, they have over 50% that's Black. It just seems like Blacks aren't playing, but in actuality, it's a lot of Black kids playing (baseball)."

Player's 5's explanation was based on marketing. He said, "I think it's marketed differently. Historically, you've seen the numbers twiddling professional baseball from an all-time high of 26 to 27% to now we're down to 6% to African Americans playing baseball. But again, that is systemic as well." Player 3's explanation was based on the investment of time.

"If I'm watching a kid tonight playing for Kansas, he may be in the NBA next year. If I watch an African American play in college baseball, it may be 7 years before he makes it to the Major Leagues. I'm not going to invest that time, and he never makes it to the Major Leagues. He may get stuck in the Minor Leagues, where again, that kid at Kansas is going to be in the NBA next year. It's easy for me to follow and become a fan of him, because he's going to be on TV 82 times next year. He may be in the NFL next year, and he's going to be on TV 17 Sundays in the fall. In baseball, he may never make it to the Major Leagues. If he does, it's 7 years from now. I'm 60 years old in 7 years. I may not

care about baseball, so I may not invest that time in somebody that I've got to watch for 7 years."

Player 3's statement expresses that the investment of time that must be used to keep up with a very talented collegiate baseball player that might end up playing professionally might turn off viewers and push their interest more towards other collegiate sports such as basketball or football. This supports the argument that there is a lack of media attention regarding Black college baseball players and that this problem is a multifaceted issue. When the narrative that is pushed by the media is that Black baseball players don't exist, it could create a lack of interest. The decrease in participation could lead to a decrease in interest and support amongst Black people (Brown & Bennett, 2014).

Social Media Might Be the Way

RQ3 asked in what ways can Black baseball players use social media to combat the lack of media attention by sports journalists if it is present. Participants were asked if they have ever seen any differences in media coverage of baseball at the collegiate level compared to other sports, especially when it comes to Black athletes. Majority of the individuals said that they had. Player 2 said, "I definitely think PWIs get a lot more coverage, because they're probably looked at as being more elite than HBCUs... I just think the perception is that Blacks are not as good as Whites. I think that's the big thing." Player 3 said, "Absolutely. I went to Tennessee State in Nashville, Tennessee. Every night the news reporter profiled something about the University of Tennessee, which was on the other side of the state. The Nashville news worried more about the University of Tennessee than they ever did Tennessee State University. We were in the same zip code." Player 11 had the same response. He said, "If you look at the coverage in general, there is a big difference between Power 4 schools... compared to a Clark or Morehouse. I'm not sure if

it's resources or if it's the emphasis on spotlighting players... For some reason, we don't, as African Americans at the HBCU level, put that much harness on coverage as much as we should." Obviously, Power 4 schools are going to receive the most media attention, because of the amount of money they have, the number of resources they have, and the type of talent they recruit. But the bigger issue is the wide disparity in media attention and the fact that individuals feel as if HBCU baseball programs are not talked about at all unless they are playing Power 4 schools. Again, this creates the narrative that either Black baseball can't compete against "high level" competition, that Black baseball isn't important, that Black baseball doesn't exist at all, or a mix of all 3.

While continuing Player 11's interview, he expressed that he had a similar experience during his high school coaching experience. He said, "During my first coaching opportunity when I was the youngest head coach in Georgia at Griffin High School, I got a lot of press. It was way more compared to when I was at Redan, which is an all-Black school. I feel like they (journalists) took the baseball program a little bit more seriously." This quote introduces an argument that the inequity of Black versus White as it pertains to media coverage in the sport of baseball doesn't begin at the collegiate level. It begins and regularly occurs at an amateur level.

Another point that was brought up a lot in this part of the interviews was the money and resources of Power 4 schools compared to HBCUs. Multiple participants expressed the clear disparity in money and resources as the largest aspect of the disparity in baseball media attention. Player 5 said, "When you spend the type of money that the Power 4 schools spend and you have the type of budgets that they have, naturally, they're going to receive bigger coverage. You have to follow the money... The more money the more coverage. The bigger the program, the bigger the exposure" Player 7 basically expressed the same thing when saying, "They (PWIs) have

resources. I think if we (HBCUs) had more resources, there would be more coverage.” Player 9 simply said, “The bigger schools have more money.” According to the baseball players in this study, money and resources play a major role in media attention. As it pertains to collegiate baseball, the schools with the most money and resources are able to offer things that HBCUs might not be able to offer, such as tools to higher level recruits, more advanced content creation, better social media posts, more television visibility, and connections with high level influential donors which all play a part in media attention in collegiate athletics.

A few participants in their interviews expressed that they hadn’t witnessed any racial disparities as it pertains to media coverage. When asking them to elaborate on their answers, they all said things related to social media. Player 4 said, “Everyone looks at a phone. Everybody looks at social media. So, at the end of the day if your name gets put into one of these big social media accounts people are going to see it.” Player 11 said, “I think social media is the key to it all. It’s the easiest way to get your word or opinion out to the masses... The more we (Black Americans) can be versed on social media, the growth of our kids will be seen.” The topic of social media being an outlet to promote players and teams is something that was brought up in almost every interview. Player 10 even talked about how he has had teammates of color at the professional level that paid for a camera crew to follow them around to record content for them to post on social media to assist in promoting themselves. Technological advancements have created a different dynamic as it pertains to visibility and gaining information than it did in the past. Player 3 during his interview said, “Now you can do a right click, pick up a phone call, or shoot an email to somebody and they can get back to you about information. Thirty-five years ago, it wasn’t that simple.” Player 8 expressed something similar as it pertain to technological advancements.

“You’ve seen a lot more guys that are on social media and that really helps. They can post a lot of their stuff on the internet and different websites. It’s easier now, because everybody’s a jump drive away or a stream away or a photo away to be seen. When I grew up, we didn’t have smartphones. We didn’t even have the flip phone... So, it’s way different now. If somebody likes something you post, they can show it to somebody else. Before you know it, it can get in the right hands of the right coach and they will say, “Let me go see that guy”.”

The clear importance of having social media and using it as a tool to promote yourself is there. The continuous growth of social media is something that, if used correctly, could be used to properly give media attention to Black baseball players at all levels. Technological advancements and social media can further allow organizations such as Minority Baseball Prospects (MBP), Mentoring Viable Prospects (MVP), Black Baseball Mixtape, and Black Baseball Media allow Black amateur, collegiate, and professional baseball players to be seen and be noticed for better opportunities.

Is Social Media Use a Big Factor?

Something that was brought up in some of the interviews was the impact of social media. Even though every individual interviewed doesn’t use social media on a regular basis, it was brought up as a topic of discussion in terms of the evolution of media attention in sports. This was especially discussed in relation to media attention of Black baseball.

During the interviews, there were individuals that acknowledged that social media is a tool that has been used to improve media presence as it pertains to Black college baseball players. However, they still acknowledged that there is still a gap in the media attention of Black college baseball players in relation to their counterparts. But, also during the interviews, there

were some individuals who acknowledged that the media attention of Black college baseball players is relatively even compared to their counterparts due to the use of social media. From analyzing the research, it is believed that the difference in opinions was the use of social media. Player 6 is an older gentleman (62 years old) that doesn't use social media daily. He expressed that he feels that the sports coverage of Black college athletes is not balanced and inclusive. Regarding social media he said, "I think it's a great driving factor that has increased the population of Black players in Power 4s." By saying this, he is expressing that social media is a valuable tool in helping very talented Black high school baseball players get recruited by high level Division I baseball programs but didn't exclusively say that it helps promote Black baseball players at the collegiate and professional levels. In contrast, Player 4 (22 years old) and Player 7 (49 years old) both use social media daily. They both expressed that they feel that the sports coverage of Black college athletes is balanced and inclusive. Regarding social media, Player 4 said, "Everyone looks at a phone. Everyone looks at the media. So, at the end of the day, if your name is put on one of these big accounts people are going to see it. It's going to be shared and it's going to go to the next person. Social media does play a big part in everything now" and Player 7 said, "We're getting a lot more showing. You've seen a lot more guys that are on social media and that really helps... It's easier now, because everybody's a jump drive away or a stream away or a photo away to be seen."

After analyzing the data, it seems as if individuals who use social media on a day to day basis are more likely to say that the sports coverage of Black college athletes is balanced and inclusive, while individuals who do not use social media on a day to day basis are less likely to say that the sports coverage of Black college athletes is balanced and inclusive. This brings up a multitude of questions that need to be researched in the future. These questions include, how

much effect does social media have on marketing Black college baseball players and Black athletes as a whole, currently does social media have more of an impact of content consumption than television, and how should content related to Black college baseball players be promoted in the future?

Visibility Can Create Interest... But is it Cool?

Player 11 expressed a lot while discussing the factors of the lack of media attention and its impact on Black college baseball players. The underrepresentation of Black athletes in college baseball is not exclusively a recruitment problem. It is also deeply tied to the lack of media visibility and marketing of the sport of baseball within the Black community. The critical role of media shaping the interest and participation in baseball amongst young Black athletes is a central theme. Player 11 explained, “I think the more visibility and more coverage we can obtain to Black and Brown players the more we can create interest. More visibility could make more kids want to do it. This creates a pool of players.” This statement shines a light on how the cycle of visibility and inspiration works in communities. Representation on screen fuels aspirations on the field. This is visibly true in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico in regard to baseball. This was brought up when Player 11 said, “Why are the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico high concentration areas for baseball? It’s because they see one player do it and that turns into the goal.” Without exposure and icons that look like you, Black children in the United States will continue to lack visible pathways in the sport of baseball.

The lack of media attention also contributes to the larger cultural disconnect between Black identity and baseball. Player 11 said,

“We (Black people) don’t have anybody to promote or say that it (baseball) is cool. When you think of a Black baseball player, you think of a Black, White guy. We are not putting

guys like Mookie Betts into those conversations, even though he should be named when talking about being 1 of the best in his respected sport.”

This perception underscores a significant branding issue. Baseball, unlike basketball and football, has not embraced and promoted their Black stars into the mainstream of sports culture. The absence of Mookie Betts from broader cultural conversations with individuals such as LeBron James and Lamar Jackson, is a missed opportunity to inspire the next generation of Black baseball players.

In his interview, Player 11 most exclusively spoke about the visibility issue in college baseball. He expressed that mainstream coverage hardly ever showcases Black college baseball. In referencing the visibility gap of the highest levels of collegiate competition he said, “If I turn on the College World Series, I’m not going to see too many Blacks.” Again, there is a consequential lack of Black role models in college baseball for Black amateur athletes that would like to aspire to be college baseball players. Limited exposure of Black baseball players can create the false perception that there is no appeal for baseball in the Black community. This was also expressed by Player 11 when he said, “If we don’t see it (Black baseball), we can’t really feel like it’s being done... Coverage affects what people believe and the narrative.” This problem extends beyond college baseball. It reflects a larger systematic trend in how the sport is marketed. Player 11 said, “I think the coverage of baseball is just down in general, because there aren’t any Black players in the forefront like Barry Bonds or Ken Griffey Jr. We don’t have a Mookie Betts’ shoe or Nike commercial.” What Player 11 expressed reinforces the perception that Black athletes cannot obtain celebrity stature even while playing at the professional level. In extreme thinking, it can also create the perception that Black athletes do not belong in the sport of baseball.

The entirety of Player 11's interview fully expressed in detail how and why the lack of media attention for Black college baseball players is not merely an oversight. What he said in the interview explained the structural barrier that creates underrepresentation. Without continued efforts to elevate Black baseball players through media, marketing, and visibility through the amateur, collegiate, and professional levels, the sport of baseball is risking the ability to reach future generations of Black athletes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION (FRAMING)

The findings of this study highlight the important role that media coverage plays in the underrepresentation and marginalization of Black athletes within college baseball. After analyzing the interviews, the absence of consistent and visible media attention takes away the achievements of current Black players and deters the growth of future talent. It does this by limiting exposure and aspiration within the sport. The lack of connection between visibility and interest development were the themes that were brought up the most in the interviews. The lack of Black representation in games shown on television, social media content, and sports media narratives creates the narrative for Black youth that the sport of baseball is not a culturally relevant option when picking sports to play currently and to aspire to play collegiately.

The cultural framing of Black athletes in sports media limits baseball's appeal within Black communities. Football and basketball have successfully positioned their stars as cultural icons through marketing, endorsements, and visibility in mainstream media. However, baseball on the other hand has not capitalized on its Black stars in the same way. This not only affects public perception of who dominates or belongs in the sport of baseball, but it also creates and shapes the narrative within the Black community that baseball is not "for us."

The structural factors of collegiate baseball also contribute to the lack of media of Black collegiate baseball players. The relatively small percentage of Black players and teams mean that even at one of the highest levels of the sport, representation is scarce. This helps in diminishing the chances that young athletes or their communities will identify with or invest in the sport. The

sports media's failure to highlight the top Black players at the collegiate and professional levels adds on to the issue and continues to push the narrative or illusion of absence.

It is also important to consider the economic and institutional dynamics that shape media narratives. Professional and collegiate sports organizations usually promote the athletes and teams that resonate with their core audiences. As a result of this phenomenon, Black consumers and athletes are systematically sidelined in baseball coverage because of lower engagement.

The idea that there may be a lack of media attention surrounding Black college baseball players is not exclusively a byproduct of underrepresentation like some individuals like to think. Visibility is a matter of acknowledgment, as well as a tool for empowerment, recruitment, and cultural connection. Addressing this gap requires a collective effort of collegiate programs, sports networks, and national organizations to elevate Black baseball players into the public eye. The change must come through media coverage, cultural campaigns, and amateur programs. This must happen for baseball to reflect the diversity of its potential athletes.

The media's portrayal of race in sports has not received enough scrutiny. The lack of media attention regarding Black college baseball players is a multifaceted issue that is related to historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. There is literature that points out the decline of Black in baseball. African Americans' baseball attendance and participation (at least at the highest levels of youth and adult competition) has dropped (Ogden et al., 2003). Addressing the problem of lack of representation is very important in creating inclusivity and making sure that the stories of all athletes are told and celebrated. Things such as investing in and expanding youth baseball programs in predominantly Black communities and encouraging media platforms to dedicate consistent coverage to Black collegiate players and HBCU baseball programs are

things that can happen moving forward to changing the landscape of Black college baseball in the media.

Additional Research

The socio-cultural implications of the decline of Black participation in college baseball are affecting cultural identity and community dynamics. It is also continuing societal perceptions of race and success. The loss of connection to a historically significant sport has and will continue to diminish opportunities for Black youth and will continue to be devastating. Addressing these conflicts is important for creating a more inclusive environment in college baseball. It is imperative that all athletes, regardless of race, can see themselves represented. Regenerating interest in baseball amongst Black youth and promoting equal representation in media and sports programming will help ensure that the legacy of Black athletes in baseball continues to inspire future generations.

Conclusion

After analyzing the interviews, the data suggests that there is a lack of media coverage as it pertains to Black college baseball players. This is a multifaceted issue. It is an issue that needs comprehensive investigation. This research is just the beginning in shining a light on the conflict and pushing towards a more inclusive narrative as it pertains to the media and baseball. The research's findings shine a light on the barriers faced by Black baseball players at the collegiate level. It also shines a light on the importance of equal representation in sports.

The lack of media attention as it relates to Black college baseball players is an issue that is connected to broader racial, cultural, and institutional dynamics in sports and media. Some recommendations to assist in combating this conflict are to create and support specialized media platforms to highlight HBCU baseball and Black college baseball players, train staff at HBCUs

on how to proactively pitch stories to media outlets, encourage players to build personal brands on social media, work with organizations like MLB and NCAA to incentivize media coverage of collegiate Black baseball players, educate Black college baseball players on media training, and partner with advocacy organizations such as The Player Alliance to fund and push for broader media coverage. These recommendations will elevate stories of Black college baseball players to not only local audiences, but also national audiences as well.

As it pertains to sports reporters and journalists, there are also some meaningful recommendations that can be taken to assist in reporting stories that promote Black collegiate baseball. One recommendation is to find and pitch stories that highlight Black collegiate baseball player's journeys, achievements, and challenges. Emphasize stories that go deeper than just informing statistics. Tell stories that promote Black athletes as both players and people. The second recommendation is to regularly interview Black players, coaches, and athletic staff. In doing this, you as a reporter will build a rapport with a group of people that have in the past been covered on a regular basis. Also, it will make it normal for viewers to see content on Black collegiate baseball. The last recommendation is to address racial stereotypes and biases in the newsroom. The more you call out racial stereotypes and biases that occur in the newsroom, the less they will occur.

Limitations

There are some limitations that occurred while acknowledging this study. Due to this study exclusively focusing on Black college baseball players, it may overlook the experiences of other minority groups as it pertains to the relationship between race and collegiate athletics. Also, with this research only having the experiences of 11 individuals through semi-structured interviews, further research could look at different methods including surveys, content analysis,

or even focus groups. Lastly, everyone who was interviewed in the study played collegiate baseball in the southeast region of the United States. There may be different information gathered if individuals who played in different regions of the United States during their collegiate baseball careers were interviewed.

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APPENDIX

The table below gives the details of everyone that was interviewed for this research. The table lists everyone's age, school attended and whether or not it's an HBCU or PWI, positions played during their playing career, whether they coached at the collegiate level or not, and if so, was it at an HBCU or PWI.

PSEUDONYMS	AGE	SCHOOL(S) ATTENDED (HBCU/PWI)	POSITION(S)	HAVE YOU COACHED AT THE COLLEGIATE LEVEL (HBCU/PWI)?
Player 1	29	Grambling State University (HBCU) and Morehouse College (HBCU)	Infield – 2B, SS, & 3B	No
Player 2	47	Southern A&M University (HBCU)	3B & 1B	Yes (HBCU)
Player 3	51	Tennessee State University (HBCU) and Thomas University (PWI)	Infield	No
Player 4	22	Vanderbilt University (PWI) and Charlotte University (PWI)	Pitcher	No
Player 5	67	Tennessee State University (HBCU)	1B	No
Player 6	62	Georgia State University (Predominately Black but a White Institution)	CF & Pitcher	Yes (HBCU)
Player 7	49	Southern A&M University (HBCU)	Outfield	No
Player 8	47	Southern A&M University (HBCU)	Catcher	No
Player 9	59	Western Carolina University (PWI)	Shortstop	Yes (HBCU)
Player 10	24	Eastern Kentucky University (PWI), Chattanooga State University (PWI), and Shorter University (PWI)	Utility	No
Player 11	36	Albany State University (HBCU), Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (PWI), and Armstrong State University (PWI)	Outfield	No