

Former Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores sues NFL for alleged racial discrimination

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Flores is suing the NFL, alleging that the league has a painful history of racism that continues through the present day -- particularly when it comes to the hiring and retention of Black head coaches.

The complaint includes text messages from New England Patriots' head coach Bill Belichick, who congratulated Flores on getting hired by the New York Giants when he hadn't yet interviewed. The job actually ended up going to former Buffalo Bills offensive coordinator Brian Daboll.

Belichick informed Flores, three days before his interview with the Giants, that Daboll had already been selected for the job.

"Sorry -- I f----- this up. I double checked and misread the text. I think they are naming Brian Daboll. I'm sorry about that. BB," the complaint quoted Belichick.

In the lawsuit, Flores alleges that the interview with the Giants was held simply to keep the team in line with the Rooney Rule, which was instituted in 2003 and mandates NFL teams must interview minority candidates. It is named after former Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney.

"Mr. Flores had to give an extensive interview for a job that he already knew he would not get -- an interview that was held for no reason other than for the Giants to demonstrate falsely to the League Commissioner Roger Goodell and the public at large that it was in compliance with the Rooney Rule," the lawsuit said.

The Giants addressed the lawsuit in a statement, saying, "We are pleased and confident with the process that resulted in the hiring of Brian Daboll. We interviewed an impressive and diverse group of candidates. The fact of the matter is, Brian Flores was in the conversation to be our head coach until the eleventh hour. Ultimately, we hired the individual we felt was most qualified to be our next head coach."

The lawsuit seeks class-action status, unspecified damages and changes to ensure the hiring of more Black coaches, coordinators and front office personnel.

"As described throughout this Class Action Complaint, the NFL remains rife with racism, particularly when it comes to the hiring and retention of Black Head Coaches, Coordinators and General Managers," the lawsuit states. "Over the years, the NFL and its 32-member organizations (the "Teams") have been given every chance to do the right thing. Rules have been implemented, promises made—but nothing has changed. In fact, the racial discrimination has only been made worse by the NFL's disingenuous commitment to social equity."

In the lawsuit, Flores also alleges then-Denver Broncos general manager John Elway and CEO Joe Ellis showed up an hour late for an interview in 2019 and they "looked completely disheveled, and it was obvious that they had drinking heavily the night before." The Broncos strongly disputed the claims in a statement Tuesday, saying they were "blatantly false."

"Our process was thorough and fair to determine the most qualified candidate for our head coaching position," the Broncos said. "The Broncos will vigorously defend the integrity and values of our organization—and its employees—from such baseless and disparaging claims."

Flores, 40, coached the Dolphins from 2019 to 2021. In a move that surprised outside observers, he was fired on Jan. 10 despite two years remaining on his contract. He finished his tenure with the Dolphins with a record of 24-25. He had back-to-back winning seasons in 2020 and 2021 after a 5-11 record in his first season.

Flores worked as an assistant under Belichick for 11 seasons before getting the Dolphins job.

"God has gifted me with a special talent to coach the game of football, but the need for change is bigger than my personal goals," Flores said in a statement about the lawsuit. "In making the decision to file the class action complaint today, I understand that I may be risking coaching the game that I love and that has done so much for my family and me. My sincere hope is that by standing up against systemic racism in the NFL, others will join me to ensure that positive change is made for generations to come."

There is currently just one Black head coach in the NFL -- Steelers veteran Mike Tomlin.

Nine head coaching jobs were vacant this offseason, including the Dolphins. Of the four teams that have already hired a coach, none of them have been Black. Five of them remain open, including Miami. Flores interviewed for several of the jobs, including the Houston Texans job, which remains open.

"The NFL and our clubs are deeply committed to ensuring equitable employment practices and continue to make progress in providing equitable opportunities throughout our organizations," the league said in a statement. "Diversity is core to everything we do, and there are few issues on which our clubs and our internal leadership team spend more time. We will defend against these claims, which are without merit."