

Former Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores accuses the NFL, multiple teams of racial discrimination in blockbuster lawsuit

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Brent D. Griffiths and Jake Epstein 15 hours ago

- Flores alleges that Bill Belichick told him the New York Giants were set to hire him and then told him the Giants had made up their mind before even interviewing Flores.
- The suit also alleges that top Broncos officials, including John Elway, showed up drunk to Flores' 2019 interview with the team.
- Flores' allegations come after years of criticism that the NFL's so-called "Rooney rule" has done little to boost the number of coaches of color.

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Former Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores has accused the NFL and multiple teams of racial discrimination in a blockbuster lawsuit filed on Tuesday.

The class-action suit alleges the NFL "remains rife with racism" and that the league's efforts to promote the hiring of minority coaches through the so-called "Rooney rule" have amounted to an abysmal failure.

Flores said he knows challenging the league and its teams in such a public manner could lead to his exile from the notoriously close fraternity of coaches.

"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," Flores said in a statement accompanying the suit.

Of particular note, the suit begins with an alleged text message from Patriots head coach Bill Belichick. The images appear to show Belichick texting Flores that the New York Giants were set to hire Buffalo Bills Offensive Coordinator Brian Daboll even before they interviewed Flores for the opening.

Former Dolphins head coach Brain Flores included these reported texts from Patriots head coach Bill Belichick in his lawsuit

"Sorry – I fucked this up. I double checked and misread the text. I think they are naming Brian Daboll. I'm sorry about that. BB," Belichick texted Flores.

Belichick, the longest-tenured head coach in the league, is alleged to have previously texted Flores that he heard "Buffalo & NYG that you are their guy" before later adding that he was mistaken about the Giants' hiring.

The Giants said that Flores was under consideration "until the 11th hour," but the team hired who they felt was "most qualified to be our next head coach."

"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 Giants organization said in a statement.

The NFL said that Flores' claims are "without merit" and vowed that the league would defend itself against an unprecedented challenge.

"Diversity is core to everything we do, and there are few issues on which our clubs and our internal leadership spend more time," the league said in a statement, per the NFL Network's Ian Rapoport.

Flores is currently the only plaintiff, but his claims are allowed to move forward he is seeking to involve other Black head coaching candidates who have experienced similar circumstances. This is why his suit names both specific teams like the Dolphins, his former employer, as well as the entirety of the league.

The "Rooney rule" refers to a 2003 hiring practice that requires teams to interview a minimum of two people of color from outside their organization for any head coach or general manager openings. Named after Steelers owner Dan Rooney, whose family has owned the legendary team for years, the rule was last amended in 2009.

The NFL prides itself on the "Rooney rule," but studies have shown that its effectiveness has waned over time. FiveThirtyEight reported in 2020 on a study that found 59 percent of NFL players are black and 70 percent are nonwhite. As of now, Steelers coach Mike Tomlin is the league's only Black head coach. While The Washington Football Team's Ron Rivera is currently the only Latino head coach.

"I don't have an answer for you as to how to make it better," Tomlin told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette last year of the league's struggles. "The optimist in me says things will get better, but there's been no evidence in the recent cycles to back that up. Without evidence, all we have is hope. We just haven't been able to move the needle."

The suit also alleges that the Broncos were unprofessional when they considered Flores to be their head coach in 2019, claiming that John Elway, who was then the team's general manager, and Joe Ellis, the team's longtime president, and other officials showed up

"completely disheveled" and an hour late.

"They looked completely disheveled, and it was obvious that they had [been] drinking heavily the night before. It was clear from the substance of the interview that Mr. Flores was interviewed only because of the Rooney Rule, and that the Broncos never had any intention to consider him as a legitimate candidate for the job," the suit claims.

The Broncos called the allegations "blatantly false" and claim that Flores' interview started on time and lasted three and a half hours.

"Pages of detailed notes, analysis, and evaluations from our interview demonstrate the depth of our conversation and sincere interest in Mr. Flores as a head coaching candidate," the team said in a statement, per ESPN's Adam Schefter. "Our process was thorough and fair to determine the most qualified candidate for our head coaching position."

Denver went on hire Vic Fangio, who is white, and who was fired last month after three seasons with Denver.

In another damning claim, Flores' suit alleges that Dolphins owner Stephen Ross ordered the team to "tank" during its 2019 season and even offered to pay Flores \$100,000 per loss.

"The team's General Manager, Chris Grier, told Mr. Flores that 'Steve' was 'mad' that Mr. Flores' success in winning games that year was "compromising [the team's] draft position," the suit alleges.

Miami fired Flores after his team posted a combined 24-25 record over three seasons. The Dolphins are also alleged to have encouraged Flores to break the NFL's anti-tampering rules in pursuit of an unnamed "prominent quarterback."

"Shortly after he arrived, Mr. Ross told Mr. Flores that the prominent quarterback was "conveniently" arriving at the marina. Obviously, Mr. Ross had attempted to "set up" a purportedly impromptu meeting between Mr. Flores and the prominent quarterback," the suit alleges of efforts Ross made after the end of the 2019 season.

The Dolphins organization said it "vehemently" denies "any allegations of racial discrimination," but declined to elaborate on some of Flores' specific claims. The team also said it is "proud of the diversity and inclusion throughout our organization."

"The implication that we acted in a manner inconsistent with the integrity of the game is incorrect," the Dolphins organization said in a statement.

The Palm Beach Post reports that 7-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady, who was on his way out of New England at the time in question, is the "prominent quarterback" mentioned in the suit. Brady, who in an unrelated development, announced his retirement on Tuesday, would go on to sign with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Flores' suit, which it points out was filed on the first day of Black History Month, reiterates a litany of past incidents and charges against the league, including the treatment of former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, leaked emails from former Raiders head coach Jon Gruden, and the league's treatment of former players' concussion claims.

"Rules have been implemented, promises made—but nothing has changed," the suit alleges. "In fact, the racial discrimination has only been made worse by the NFL's disingenuous commitment to social equity."

The NFL reached a settlement with Kaepernick in 2019 after he filed a grievance when none of the league's 32 teams would sign him since the 49ers made clear they were moving on from him. Kaepernick, who led the team to the 2012 Super Bowl, alleged that the league conspired against him following his decision to kneel during the national anthem as a way to draw attention to the Black Lives Matter Movement and racial inequity in America.

Representatives for Belichick and Brady all did not immediately respond to Insider's request for comment.