

Political Protesting, Race, and College Athletics: Why Diversity Among Coaches Matters*

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Objective. Athletes have long used their platform to stage political protests on issues ranging from racial oppression to athlete compensation. For college student athletes, protesting is complicated by their amateur status and dependence on their schools. As a result, college coaches hold particular power over student athletes' decisions in this realm. We seek to better understand the determinants of coaches' attitudes toward student athlete protests. *Methods.* We use a novel survey to study what college coaches think when student athletes participate in various forms of political protests. *Results.* We find that African-American coaches exhibit greater support for protests and are more likely to believe protests reflect concern about the issues, rather than attention-seeking behavior. *Conclusion.* Our results isolate a major driver of opinions about athletic protests and reveal why the relatively low number of minority college coaches matters: greater diversity in the coaching ranks would lead to more varied opinions about the politicization of student athletes.

Political decisions fundamentally affect sports—this is clear on such issues as gender equality in college athletics (e.g., Title IX), the use of public funds to build stadiums, labor negotiations, drug testing, and more. Sports also affect politics, such as when athletes use their public platform to make political statements. While there is a long history of political protests by athletes (e.g., Bass, 2002; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Epstein and Kisska-Schulze, 2016), they have become particularly salient in recent years: “the era of the ‘apolitical’ athlete appears to be drawing to a close as a ‘new era of athlete awareness and advocacy’ has emerged” (Cooky, 2017:4).

At the college level, protests have included refusing to stand during the national anthem to draw attention to racial oppression, threatening to boycott practice and games in response to racially charged campus incidents, and writing the acronym “APU” (standing for “All Players United”) on wrist tape to demand increased benefits for student athletes. These protests, not surprisingly given the large college sports fan base, garner attention and generate debate. They also accentuate the unique position of college student athletes, whose success as athletes and often as students depends on their coaches (e.g., Staurowsky, 2014:23–24). As Kassing and Anderson (2014:173) explain, “coaches hold a degree of authority over their

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respective players and by implication operate to some degree as supervisors . . . Athletes in turn end up in subordinate roles.” What coaches think undoubtedly affects what players are willing to do. Yet, we know little about what college coaches think when it comes to various types of student athlete protests, and perhaps more importantly, what explains variation in coaches’ opinions.

We aim to fill this gap with a large survey of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) coaches. The survey probes their opinions on various types of student athlete protests and the reasons behind those opinions. As we explain in the next section, we expect race to play a large role in explaining variation in attitudes, with African Americans being more supportive of protests. This is, in fact, what we find. Regardless of what one believes when it comes to student athletes’ protesting, our findings make clear that diversity among coaches generates a diversity in beliefs.

Race and Opinions About Athlete Protests

Race and sports are deeply intertwined. The history of racial exclusion from sports (Widener, 2017), contemporary bias in media coverage and perceptions of athletes (Buffington and Fraley, 2008), and a disproportionately low number of minority coaches all make this clear. The latter led the National Football League to implement the Rooney Rule, in 2003, which requires teams to interview at least one minority candidate in head coaching searches. Diversity in the coaching ranks is an acute concern at the college level. Lapchick (2017:2) states: “Opportunities for coaches of color continued to be a significant area of concern in all divisions [of college sports].” Relative to the demographics of student athletes, white coaches are notably overrepresented, particularly among head coaches.¹ The low proportions of minority coaches likely reflect an entrenched history of institutional racism (Martin, 2014) and limit the number of minority role models for athletes (Hoch, 2011).

The lack of minority coaches also may affect what players do when it comes to political protests. To see why, consider that coaches have notable power and influence over their players (Turman, 2006; Jayakumar and Comeaux, 2016): “[t]he relevancy then of coaches’ communication to athletes’ experience is sizeable” (Kassing and Anderson, 2014:174). These communications, which range from formal rules to subtle gestures, are particularly salient for college student athletes. Staurowsky (2014:23–24) explains:

In the netherworld that has existed for college athletes between bona fide workers and students, their ability to access their rights becomes more difficult . . . The lives of college athletes are routinely regulated in ways that distinguish them from their colleagues in the general student population . . . coaches and athletic department personnel concerned with the brand and the product have developed over the years a detailed set of guidelines by which athletes must live . . . in an atmosphere where questioning the status quo is not welcome and with the expectation that players will not go public with their grievances for

¹In the 2016 season, the percentages of white head coaches, for men’s NCAA teams, were 86.1 percent in Division I, 88.1 percent in Division II, and 91.7 percent in Division III. For women’s teams, the respective numbers of white head coaches were 84.5, 87.5, and 91.6 percent (Lapchick, 2017:6). For assistant coaches, the respective percentages of white coaches were 72.7, 73.1, and 85.1 percent (for men), and 74.2, 75.5, and 87 percent (for women) (Lapchick, 2017:7–8). This contrasts with the percentages of white student athletes, which, respectively, for men’s and women’s teams, were 64.9 and 66 percent (across all divisions) (Lapchick, 2017:6).

fear of damaging the program and their own prospects, there is considerable risk associated with player activism”²

This latter point implies: (1) coaches (and/or other athletic administrators) oppose activism³ and (2) they work to prevent it. We are unaware of systematic data on either claim.⁴ Our goal here is to partially address the first claim by exploring college coaches’ opinions when it comes to student athlete behavior. Instead of bluntly focusing on whether to “allow” or “disallow” protests, we are particularly interested in *sources of variance* in coaches’ opinions. We suspect race plays a substantial role in affecting coaches’ opinions, and as a consequence, the aforementioned lack of diversity among college coaches leads to a scarcity of perspectives within both universities and the NCAA writ large.

Why would race explain variance in opposition to or support for student athletes’ protests? Protests have played a significant role in the history of black politics in the United States, constituting an important and effective political resource for relatively disadvantaged groups (Gillion, 2012; Lipsky, 1968). In addition to helping secure civil rights victories in the 1960s and 1970s, protest maintains its importance to 21st-century minority politics. African Americans who exhibit higher degrees of racial group consciousness are more likely to engage in protests and boycotts (Chong and Rogers, 2005). Furthermore, alienation in the form of cynicism toward traditional avenues of political influence has been shown to lead to favorable protest orientations among African Americans (Jackson, 1973). As a result, African Americans should be more inclined to prioritize the right to protest over other considerations such as team unity or image maintenance.

Moreover, protests in the arena of athletics are often race based. One of the early modern protests in sports involved University of Michigan football players threatening not to play when one of their African-American teammates was asked not to participate (Epstein and Kisska-Schulze, 2016:83–84). Sports history is rife with other examples of race protests (e.g., Epstein and Kisska-Schulze, 2016), with the best-known one being the 1968 Olympic Black Power salute by two African-American sprinters (Bass, 2002).⁵ More recently, attention was drawn to the state of race relations in the United States when, in 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick refused to stand during the national anthem prior to games, as a way to protest racial injustice and police brutality in the United States (Rogers, 2016; Wyche, 2016). A number of professional, college, and high school athletes adopted the practice (Breech, 2016; Associated Press, 2016; ESPN, 2016). Of particular note was U.S. soccer player Megan Rapinoe, who protested (i.e., kneeled) while wearing the official national team uniform (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/20/sports/soccer/megan-rapinoe-anthem-protest-dividing-us-fans.html>)).

Such protests have prompted divergent reactions among the public. Opinion data suggest that attitudes toward police are important predictors of support for the protests, but among the most significant factors is race; African Americans prove more supportive than whites,

²Journalist Shannon Ryan (2016) quotes Lane Demas, author of *Integrating the Gridiron*, as saying: “Today, coaches and administrators still have tremendous power over these players That’s probably the thing that’s changed the least in the long history of American college sport.” Ryan further states that “college basketball coaches, who are majority white, are delivering subtle and conflicting messages to their players, who are mostly black, on how to express their voices when it comes to racial injustices.”

³To be clear, Staurowsky (2014) duly recognizes and discusses, at length, variations in coaches’ opinions.

⁴At the January 2017 NCAA annual meeting, chairs of each NCAA Division’s boards/councils expressed support for athlete protests and activism, especially when they revolve around social justice (New, 2017). Even so, there clearly is variance in the coaching ranks (New, 2017).

⁵There also is a notable history of activism among student athletes when it comes to the enforcement of Title IX, which precludes sex-based discrimination in athletics, inter alia (e.g., <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/02/AR2006110201530.html>); (<https://www.npr.org/2012/06/22/155529815/40-years-on-title-ix-still-shapes-female-athletes>)).

with large differentials—74 percent of blacks versus 30 percent of whites approve (see <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2387>). It comes as no surprise that race should explain the difference, given that many African Americans may well have lived through or observed police brutality. Even those who have not experienced it themselves likely feel a sense of linked fate—that is, the belief that what happens to blacks as a group affects them as well (Simien, 2005; Gay and Tate, 1998; Herring, Jankowski, and Brown, 1999).

National anthem protests were not the only ones about racial issues to occur in sports in recent years. In 2014, National Basketball Association players wore T-shirts that read “I Can’t Breathe” during pregame warm-ups—another effort to call attention to police violence against African Americans (Strauss, 2014).⁶ This protest occurred at the college level as well; for example, the entire Georgetown men’s basketball team wore “I Can’t Breathe” T-shirts, as did female basketball players at Notre Dame (White, 2014; Associated Press, 2014). Another protest occurred in 2015 at the University of Missouri, where football players, unhappy with the university president’s handling of racial issues on campus, refused to practice or play until the president resigned (Tracy and Southall, 2015).⁷

Racial differences carry over into yet another issue that is often the subject of student athlete protests. During games, some players have worn wristbands bearing the slogan “APU,” which stands for “All Players United,” to protest NCAA rules forbidding compensation of student athletes beyond scholarships (Patterson, 2013). Support for “pay for play,” as well as allowing college athletes to unionize, also evinces a large racial gap: overall, only about 33 percent favor paying college athletes and 47 percent support unionization, but among nonwhites these numbers increase to 51 and 66 percent, respectively (Prewitt, 2014). Druckman, Howat, and Rodheim (2016) find that this racial gap operates through a stark difference in the way pay for play and unionization are viewed—African Americans are more likely to see these benefits as tools to remediate racial inequalities, which make them more supportive.

In all of the above cases, then, race proves to be a powerful, if not decisive, explanatory variable. African Americans, and nonwhites more broadly, tend to show far greater sensitivity to the inequities being protested. Such awareness may manifest in political alienation and other psychological dispositions that lend themselves to pro-protest orientations. As they have in the past, political protests continue to serve as a means for minority groups to express grievances and call for change. We therefore expect African-American coaches to express considerably more support for student athletes’ protests.⁸

Survey

Our population is all Division I and Division III coaches at NCAA schools. We focused on these two divisions since they offer a contrast; Division I schools can offer athletic scholarships and often invest heavily in athletics, whereas Division III schools

⁶Players for the Miami Heat also protested the 2012 shooting of African-American Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman by posting a photograph of team members wearing hooded sweatshirts and by displaying messages such as “We want justice” on their shoes during a game (Boren, 2012; ESPN, 2012).

⁷A statewide poll (see <http://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/columbiatribune.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/b/66/b66b9a67-7be1-5ee4-a8f9-dbc67a7b8c2a/564a417b8cbb3.pdf>) showed 62 percent overall disapproval of the Missouri protests, but disaggregating by race revealed another sharp difference: 63 percent of whites, but only 38 percent of African Americans, disapproved.

⁸African-American coaches also may be more supportive of protests in response to their own personal experiences of discrimination (e.g., Hope and Jagers, 2014).

neither offer scholarships nor invest heavily (<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/our-three-divisions>).⁹ We obtained a full list of the 351 Division I and the 451 Division III schools from the NCAA website (<http://web1.ncaa.org/onlineDir/exec2/divisionListing>). We then randomly selected 36 percent (127) of Division I schools and 14 percent (65) of Division III schools. We oversampled Division I because we anticipated lower response rates given the likelihood of more solicitations of these coaches and because Division I protests are more likely to be noticed given greater media coverage. We then accessed the athletic department webpage for each selected school and obtained the contact information for anyone in a coach position for *every sport*.¹⁰ We included any person in a position that (1) involved direct contact with student athletes in an advisory capacity and (2) was in the domain of athletic performance.¹¹ We defined the population as such because we are interested in any individual who may be seen as having some authority over a student athlete when it comes to athletics. This resulted in a sample of 7,392 individuals to whom we sent e-mails, inviting them to participate in a survey of college coaches focused on issues having to do with student athletes.¹² We assured them of anonymity, mentioning that we would not ask them at which school they work. The survey was mostly conducted from March 16 to March 24, 2017.¹³ Nine hundred sixty-five individuals clicked on the survey, for a response rate of 13 percent, which is in line with online surveys of this sort (Couper, 2008). On the survey, we directly asked if the person would describe himself/herself as “a coach (of any type).” Nine percent of the respondents answered no; we exclude, from our final sample, anyone who did not answer this question affirmatively, resulting in a sample of 873.¹⁴

The survey asked various questions about three distinct protests by college student athletes. The protests included (1) student athletes not standing during the national anthem to protest police violence against the black community, (2) student athletes wearing wristbands with the APU slogan to protest NCAA rules that forbid student athlete compensation, and (3) student athletes wearing any apparel, aside from the APU wristbands, to protest any political issue. The first two topics obviously isolate attitudes toward specific protests that have occurred, while the third topic is meant to capture more general opinions. For each of these topics, we included three types of questions, as follows:

- *Disapproval or approval* of the particular form of protest, on a five-point scale ranging from “completely disapprove” to “completely approve.”

⁹Division II schools lie somewhere in between—they can offer partial athletic scholarships and typically invest at levels less than Division I but greater than Division III (<http://www.ncaa.org/about?division=d2>).

¹⁰Schools varied in terms of providing e-mail contact information directly on the athletic department webpage. For those that did not provide e-mails on the webpage, we accessed the school directories to look up contact information. A few schools in the initial sample neither listed e-mails on the athletic department webpage nor had publicly accessible directories. We dropped those schools from the samples and randomly selected replacements.

¹¹The former requirement means we excluded office managers, facility managers, equipment managers, marketing personnel, and so forth. The latter requirement means that we excluded academic advisors, team chaplains, and nutrition consultants. We did include any position coach, manager, video analyst (as they may deal directly with the analysis of play), and recruiters. The full list of titles we included/excluded is available from the authors.

¹²Our initial sample was 7,753, but 361 e-mails bounced back (making for a 95.3 percent delivery rate). In the invitation, we mentioned that the idea for the survey grew out of an undergraduate class project, which it did. We sent two reminders.

¹³We received a few responses (less than 5 percent of our sample) after March 24.

¹⁴Many of the “non-coaches” listed their jobs as directors of operations, trainers, or video coordinators (we may have misclassified some of these in our initial sampling due to lack of information on athletic department websites; i.e., a lack of a clear job label for some individuals).

- Whether or not the respondent's team should have a *rule* that prevents the given protest, on a five-point scale from "definitely should not" to "definitely should."
- Whether or not each of three *reasons* was why a student athlete would engage in the protest: caring about the issue, being under social pressure, and seeking personal attention.¹⁵ The respondent could check as few or many of the reasons as he or she wanted.

As explanatory variables, the survey included measures of attitudes toward police, such as police job approval, concern about brutality, treatment of minority suspects, and so forth. We combined nine items in total (all of which are listed in the online Appendix, available at <http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~jnd260/publications.html>) to create a single measure of concern about police conduct (where higher values indicate greater concern in general or about conduct toward minorities, as appropriate; $\alpha = 0.77$). We gauged feelings of nationalism using four measures of American identity taken from Huddy and Khatib (2007), combined into one scale ($\alpha = 0.82$). We measured attitudes about racial discrimination with an item asking respondents the extent to which they agree that "racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America" (thus higher scores indicate a belief in less extant discrimination)—in what follows, we refer to this variable as "discrimination skepticism."

Respondents were asked which sports they coached (and whether it was a men's team, women's team, or both), in which division (I or III) their school competed, their position (which we then used to identify head coaches), how long they had worked in the coaching field generally, and whether they played a sport in college. Finally, we included a number of standard demographic and political variables, including race/ethnicity, gender, age, income, education, political interest, and political ideology (with higher scores indicating a movement toward being more conservative). All question wordings are provided in the Appendix.

Results

Our sample ended up fairly diverse with 9 percent of the coaches being African American and more than a third being women. The average ideology score skews slightly conservative (3.8 on a seven-point scale, moving toward conservative). Further, the sample is very experienced, having spent an average of roughly 14 years in the field, and there is variability in the gender of the team coached (a bit more than half are men) as well as division (one-third are Division III, which perfectly echoes our aforementioned sampling strategy).¹⁶ Just under 40 percent of respondents are head coaches, and nearly 90 percent played a sport in college. (Further sample details are available in the Appendix.)

Recall we included, for each protest, five outcome variables: support for the protest, belief in a team rule *against* the protest, and beliefs about the protesters' motivation being care about the issue, social pressure, and/or attention seeking.¹⁷ We present regression results for each outcome with our main independent variable being a dummy indicator of whether the

¹⁵A respondent also could enter "other" reasons.

¹⁶Percentages of coaches in each sport are as follows: Basketball 15.2 percent, Soccer 12.8 percent, Track and Field 11.7 percent, Football 11.5 percent, Volleyball 10.1 percent, Swimming 8.4 percent, Cross Country 6.4 percent, Baseball 5.7 percent, Softball 5.3 percent, Golf 5.3 percent, Lacrosse 4.5 percent, Tennis 4.0 percent. All other sports were represented by fewer than 4.0 percent of coaches in our sample.

¹⁷For the latter three variables, we *only* included respondents who answered the general support measure since that is a prerequisite to explaining *why* you oppose or support a protest.

respondent reported being an African American.¹⁸ We included three types of control variables: (1) demographics including gender, age, income, and education; (2) political/social attitudes including ideology, concern about police conduct, American identity, skepticism about racial discrimination, and political interest; and (3) career characteristics including playing a sport in college, coaching men, years in the field, head coach status, Division III status, and coaching basketball or football (as these two sports stand out in terms of revenue generation). We suspect conservatives and those with greater discrimination skepticism to be less supportive of protests of any kind, as protests seek to change the status quo and tend to be racialized (see Druckman, Howat, and Rodheim, 2016; Quinnipiac University Poll 2016). Police conduct concern and American identity may matter for the national anthem and political apparel protests given their connections to police behavior and, potentially, patriotism. We do not include these two variables in the APU models since that protest is orthogonal to concerns about the police or patriotism (including the variables does not change the results).

We present the results for the national anthem, APU, and political apparel protests, respectively, in Tables 1–3.¹⁹ We find that race is statistically significant and has a substantively large effect in *every* model. African-American coaches, relative to non-African-American coaches, display vastly more support for all three types of protest and clearly oppose team rules that would disallow such protests. To gauge the substantive effect of race, we calculate the predicted mean scores for non-African Americans and African Americans, holding all other variables constant at their means (using *Clarify*; see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg, 2000). Recall, both the support and the team rule variables are five-point scales. African-American coaches exhibit nearly a full point greater average support score (from 2.26 [$SE = 0.05$] to 3.17 [$SE = 0.19$]) for the national anthem protest, and are roughly a half point (from 3.09 [$SE = 0.06$] to 2.62 [$SE = 0.23$]) more opposed to a team rule. We find similar results for the APU and political apparel protests, albeit slightly smaller differences in support. Specifically, support for APU protests increases from 3.04 ($SE = 0.05$) among non-African Americans to 3.69 ($SE = 0.18$) among African Americans, and support for a team rule against them decreases from 2.49 ($SE = 0.05$) to 1.88 ($SE = 0.18$). Support for apparel protests increases from 2.64 ($SE = 0.04$) to 3.25 ($SE = 0.16$), and support for a team rule decreases from 2.90 ($SE = 0.06$) to 2.18 ($SE = 0.21$).²⁰

The race gap echoes the aforementioned divides in other populations (e.g., the public, student athletes). Of equal, if not greater, importance are results on attributions for the protests.²¹ Across all three protests, we find African-American coaches, relative to non-African-American coaches, are much more likely to believe the student athletes who protest do so because they care about the issue. They report much *lower* scores on beliefs that the protests stem from social pressure or an effort to garner personal attention. We calculate the probability (holding all other variables at their mean scores) of believing the given cause is why the student athletes protest. For the national anthem protest, there is a 0.92

¹⁸We do not include variables for other races/ethnicities since our expectations revolve specifically around African Americans rather than minorities in general. Practically, the sample also includes very few other minorities (e.g., just 3 percent of the sample reported being Hispanic).

¹⁹The *Ns* for the regressions shrink for two reasons. First, of the 873 coaches who started the survey, a fair number rolled off, with 662 answering at least one of the three overall protest support questions. Second, there was some nonresponse on three items: racial discrimination skepticism, American identity, and police conduct concern batteries. The central results are robust if we exclude these variables.

²⁰While these race effects are quite notable, support even for African-American coaches is not extremely high, never reaching an average score of 4 on the five-point support scale. Across the entire sample, support is fairly low: 2.33 for the national anthem protest, 3.09 for the APU protest, and 2.68 for the political apparel protest.

²¹Recall that respondents could agree with multiple attributions.

TABLE 1
National Anthem Protest

	(1) Support	(2) Team Rule	(3) Care	(4) Pressure	(5) Attention
African American	0.907*** (0.195)	-0.457* (0.243)	1.647** (0.769)	-1.812*** (0.521)	-1.753*** (0.492)
Female	-0.337*** (0.128)	0.207 (0.160)	-0.358 (0.300)	0.026 (0.249)	-0.012 (0.260)
Age	0.082 (0.095)	-0.090 (0.119)	-0.174 (0.209)	-0.252 (0.185)	-0.346* (0.193)
Income	0.032 (0.045)	-0.049 (0.056)	0.178* (0.104)	0.049 (0.087)	-0.040 (0.091)
Education	0.182** (0.083)	-0.069 (0.104)	0.249 (0.187)	-0.006 (0.163)	-0.387** (0.172)
Ideology	-0.261*** (0.035)	0.244*** (0.044)	-0.291*** (0.081)	0.046 (0.069)	0.188*** (0.073)
Police concern	2.276*** (0.418)	-2.280*** (0.523)	2.746*** (0.989)	-0.313 (0.812)	-2.656*** (0.870)
American identity	-0.302*** (0.086)	0.103 (0.107)	-0.037 (0.204)	-0.110 (0.166)	0.186 (0.174)
Discrim. skepticism	-0.091 (0.084)	-0.002 (0.105)	-0.264 (0.177)	-0.045 (0.163)	0.072 (0.172)
Political interest	0.135*** (0.049)	-0.041 (0.062)	-0.095 (0.112)	0.003 (0.095)	0.075 (0.101)
Played sport	-0.162 (0.152)	0.022 (0.192)	-0.024 (0.342)	-0.058 (0.296)	-0.146 (0.312)
Men's coach	0.204* (0.117)	-0.141 (0.147)	-0.232 (0.271)	-0.014 (0.229)	-0.200 (0.239)
Years in field	-0.014* (0.008)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.022 (0.018)	-0.012 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.016)
Head coach	-0.115 (0.112)	0.243* (0.139)	0.385 (0.252)	0.443** (0.218)	0.171 (0.226)
Division III	0.009 (0.102)	0.039 (0.127)	0.055 (0.231)	-0.048 (0.197)	0.017 (0.206)
Basketball	-0.062 (0.148)	0.136 (0.189)	-0.066 (0.357)	0.179 (0.291)	0.179 (0.305)
Football	-0.199 (0.165)	0.244 (0.206)	-0.338 (0.366)	0.412 (0.327)	0.501 (0.354)
Constant	1.485** (0.644)	3.806*** (0.806)	-0.431 (1.428)	0.725 (1.246)	3.695*** (1.320)
Observations	545	542	545	545	545
R ² /log-likelihood	0.436	0.236	-275.5	-353.2	-328.5

NOTE: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients (for models 1–2)/logit coefficients (for models 3–5) with associated *SEs* in parentheses. Statistical significance is denoted by: *** $p \leq 0.01$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, * $p \leq 0.1$ for two-tailed tests.

($SE = 0.06$) chance that an African-American coach believes it reflects caring about the issue, compared to a 0.73 ($SE = 0.02$) chance of a non-African-American coach thinking the same. This flips direction when it comes to believing the protests stem from attention seeking, with the respective probabilities being 0.19 ($SE = 0.07$) and 0.57 ($SE = 0.02$). This is remarkably high—nearly every African-American respondent believed caring about the issue is a reason why student athletes protest when it comes to the national anthem. We

TABLE 2
All Players United Protest

	(1) Support	(2) Team Rule	(3) Care	(4) Pressure	(5) Attention
African American	0.660*** (0.193)	-0.597*** (0.193)	1.975*** (0.745)	-1.310*** (0.408)	-1.573*** (0.472)
Female	-0.396*** (0.134)	0.367*** (0.134)	-0.296 (0.273)	0.238 (0.243)	-0.282 (0.251)
Age	-0.126 (0.099)	0.021 (0.100)	-0.144 (0.197)	-0.194 (0.180)	-0.077 (0.184)
Income	-0.009 (0.047)	-0.040 (0.047)	-0.031 (0.094)	0.143* (0.086)	-0.092 (0.087)
Education	-0.049 (0.086)	0.042 (0.086)	-0.036 (0.172)	-0.008 (0.156)	0.086 (0.160)
Ideology	-0.168*** (0.034)	0.219*** (0.034)	-0.178*** (0.068)	0.083 (0.061)	0.234*** (0.063)
Discrim. skepticism	-0.242*** (0.082)	0.188** (0.082)	-0.149 (0.158)	0.024 (0.148)	-0.105 (0.151)
Political interest	0.007 (0.051)	-0.031 (0.051)	0.020 (0.103)	0.069 (0.092)	-0.031 (0.094)
Played sport	-0.105 (0.161)	-0.019 (0.161)	0.027 (0.323)	0.143 (0.292)	0.085 (0.298)
Men's coach	-0.045 (0.123)	0.052 (0.124)	0.005 (0.250)	0.039 (0.224)	-0.323 (0.231)
Years in field	-0.004 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)	-0.002 (0.017)	0.000 (0.015)	-0.002 (0.016)
Head coach	-0.192* (0.116)	0.129 (0.117)	0.080 (0.232)	0.431** (0.211)	0.389* (0.216)
Division III	0.037 (0.107)	-0.008 (0.107)	0.064 (0.215)	0.037 (0.193)	-0.196 (0.197)
Basketball	-0.388** (0.154)	0.444*** (0.156)	-0.097 (0.318)	0.036 (0.282)	0.315 (0.287)
Football	-0.001 (0.173)	0.293* (0.174)	0.054 (0.362)	0.329 (0.319)	0.295 (0.325)
Constant	3.916*** (0.618)	1.918*** (0.620)	1.806 (1.226)	-0.485 (1.123)	-1.147 (1.143)
Observations	548	545	548	548	548
R ² /log-likelihood	0.175	0.175	-308.4	-365.3	-352.9

NOTE: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients (for models 1–2)/logit coefficients (for models 3–5) with associated SEs in parentheses. Statistical significance is denoted by: *** $p \leq 0.01$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, * $p \leq 0.1$ for two-tailed tests.

see similar movements for the APU and political apparel protests.^{22,23} In short, African-American coaches not only differ in their opinions about the protests, but also in terms of

²²African Americans have a 0.94 ($SE = 0.04$) probability of believing an APU protester would care about the issue, compared to a 0.71 ($SE = 0.02$) probability for all other coaches. For apparel protests, these probabilities are 0.92 ($SE = 0.05$) and 0.75 ($SE = 0.02$), respectively. African-American coaches have a 0.15 ($SE = 0.06$) probability of believing an APU protester would be seeking attention, compared to a probability of 0.44 ($SE = 0.02$) for non-African Americans. These probabilities are 0.39 ($SE = 0.08$) and 0.59 ($SE = 0.02$), respectively, for apparel protests.

²³When we enter the attribution variables as independent variables in the overall support models, we find that the “care” and “attention” variables are always significant (see Table A1). There is some evidence of partial mediation of the race main effect, although in all cases the race variable remains highly significant. In other words, attributions affect support with “care” generating more support and “attention” leading to less support but the impact of race does not work entirely through those variables.

TABLE 3
Political Apparel Protest

	(1) Support	(2) Team Rule	(3) Care	(4) Pressure	(5) Attention
African American	0.621*** (0.170)	-0.724*** (0.227)	1.513** (0.652)	-0.854** (0.388)	-0.820** (0.382)
Female	-0.071 (0.113)	0.104 (0.152)	-0.870*** (0.299)	-0.331 (0.245)	-0.381 (0.251)
Age	-0.069 (0.084)	0.081 (0.112)	-0.070 (0.209)	-0.100 (0.180)	-0.321* (0.186)
Income	-0.005 (0.040)	-0.034 (0.053)	0.156 (0.102)	0.156* (0.086)	0.096 (0.089)
Education	-0.044 (0.073)	0.020 (0.097)	0.312* (0.182)	0.012 (0.156)	0.006 (0.161)
Ideology	-0.125*** (0.031)	0.151*** (0.042)	-0.277*** (0.081)	0.045 (0.068)	0.111 (0.070)
Police concern	1.994*** (0.366)	-1.729*** (0.490)	0.908 (0.942)	-0.615 (0.789)	-0.912 (0.813)
American identity	-0.102 (0.075)	0.024 (0.101)	0.033 (0.204)	-0.134 (0.163)	0.163 (0.166)
Discrim. skepticism	-0.011 (0.074)	0.002 (0.099)	-0.215 (0.176)	-0.129 (0.160)	0.159 (0.167)
Political interest	0.100** (0.043)	-0.012 (0.058)	0.175 (0.110)	0.077 (0.093)	0.070 (0.097)
Played sport	0.093 (0.135)	0.233 (0.181)	0.145 (0.342)	-0.126 (0.292)	0.614** (0.298)
Men's coach	0.029 (0.103)	-0.234* (0.138)	-0.148 (0.268)	-0.075 (0.223)	-0.316 (0.230)
Years in field	-0.008 (0.007)	0.001 (0.010)	-0.036** (0.018)	-0.026* (0.016)	-0.007 (0.016)
Head coach	-0.014 (0.098)	0.074 (0.132)	0.166 (0.249)	0.198 (0.212)	0.180 (0.217)
Division III	-0.161* (0.090)	0.010 (0.121)	0.039 (0.230)	-0.184 (0.194)	-0.004 (0.200)
Basketball	-0.037 (0.131)	0.108 (0.177)	-0.673** (0.330)	0.065 (0.284)	0.432 (0.297)
Football	-0.020 (0.146)	0.310 (0.195)	-0.523 (0.364)	0.245 (0.316)	-0.004 (0.325)
Constant	2.606*** (0.564)	2.723*** (0.756)	-0.547 (1.402)	0.361 (1.210)	0.847 (1.251)
Observations	545	542	545	545	545
R ² /log-likelihood	0.302	0.174	-279.8	-366.3	-351

NOTE: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients (for models 1–2)/logit coefficients (for models 3–5) with associated SEs in parentheses. Statistical significance is denoted by: *** $p \leq 0.01$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, * $p \leq 0.1$ for two-tailed tests.

what they think about the motivations of student athletes who engage in protests. These attributions may affect how coaches treat players and the types of expectations they establish (e.g., viewing student athletes more as attention seekers than individuals who care about issues). To be clear, we take no normative position on whether protests should or should not be encouraged/allowed—the message of our findings is simply that the aforementioned lack of diversity in coaching ranks creates a distinctive environment around these issues.

Aside from our race result, we find that political ideology has a consistent significant effect across outcome variables (other than the social pressure motivation and, for the general apparel protest, the attention-seeking motivation). As individuals become more conservative, they are significantly more likely to oppose protests and support team rules against protests, and less likely to believe the protesting student athletes do so because they care about the issue. For the anthem and APU protests, conservatives also believe to a greater degree that the protesting reflects attention seeking. Thus, we find that race is not the only substantive factor here; coaches (regardless of race) with a liberal bent prove more likely to support the protests and to view their purposes in a positive light.

For the anthem and political apparel protests, we find that concern about the police leads to significantly greater support for the protest and less support for the rule (and for the anthem, affects attributions of “care” and “attention”). This appears sensible insofar as the anthem protest explicitly focused on police brutality and several political apparel protests have been aimed at the police (e.g., Strauss, 2014). For the APU protest, skepticism of racial discrimination significantly decreases support for the protest and increases support for a team rule. This coheres with prior work that finds a substantial racial element to opinions about student athlete benefits (Druckman, Howat, and Rodheim, 2016).²⁴ Finally, it is intriguing that female coaches are, all else constant, less supportive of the national anthem and APU protests. The former protest is not particularly gendered but the APU has a gender component—unionization of and/or compensation for student athletes could have negative implications for female athletics (e.g., Boyle, 2016). We suspect that had we explored protests on other issues, particularly those concerning gender equity (i.e., Title IX enforcement), our results on gender and perhaps on race would have been different. When it comes to other variables, we are hesitant to make inferences given that some will be significant by chance, given the number of models run.²⁵

Conclusion

The landscape of sports is rapidly changing, and this is clear when it comes to college athletics. A media transformation has made college sports, of all kinds, regularly available to fans and alumni (e.g., Nixon, 2014:41–44), and this visibility often puts student athletes under a microscope with their behaviors routinely monitored. It also means that student athletes have a platform to take stands on issues, including those of direct relevance to themselves (e.g., the APU protest) or the larger society (e.g., the national anthem protest). Whether and to what extent it is appropriate for student athletes to use their visibility to make political statements is a thorny issue. They represent a team and a school and, at least for scholarship athletes, have agreed to abide by certain rules (e.g., training rules). Protests invariably involve taking one side on an issue, and doing so can be polarizing and/or counter to the school’s interest. But student athletes also are students, and thus otherwise free to engage in the types of protests studied here. Our goal was to not settle what is or is not appropriate. Rather, we sought to understand the opinions of coaches who play a central role in what student athletes can and/or want to do. Our findings accentuate

²⁴The inconsistent role of discrimination skepticism for the other protests likely reflects its strong relationship with police conduct concern, which is a more proximate cause of opinions in those cases (i.e., the two correlate at -0.52).

²⁵Some of the other findings, however, are sensible such as more political interest leading to greater support for protests, and coaching high-revenue sports making one less supportive of the APU.

the central place of race in matters of sport: as with so many other issues concerning sports, race is central when it comes to attitudes about protests.

Our results suggest that the lack of diversity among college coaches is not just a matter of numbers but also involves beliefs. This raises the question: To what extent and how do coaches' opinions affect student athletes? While it seems relatively clear that coaches possess power and influence (e.g., Kassing and Anderson, 2014), more work is needed to identify, in the domain of college athletics, how that influence manifests. Past work illustrates the impact of coaches' backgrounds and views on how they relate to and care for players within college sports (e.g., Fisher et al., 2017; Newman and Weiss, 2018; Roxas and Ridinger, 2016). However, it remains unclear just how far such dynamics extend to adjacent domains such as athletes' political activities. This is tricky, in part, because student athletes assuredly choose their schools/teams due to the presence of coaches who act in particular ways and hold specific attitudes. There is therefore a need to explore coach–student athlete interactions at the recruiting stage as well as throughout the student athletes' careers. Attention also needs to be paid to coaches' public statements (e.g., via media outlets) that can influence student athletes' expectations. What we have shown is that race—as well as ideology, gender, and other attributes—likely plays a crucial role in how coaches navigate the politicization of sports. This continued politicization means that coaches and athletes face choices that have political ramifications. Unraveling the nature of coach and student athlete relationships is of critical importance for understanding contemporary politics.

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