

# Sports and Mentoring: Beneficial Partnerships for Black Males

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The involvement of young African American males in community and school-based athletics has been an ongoing conversation not only within the African American community but in the sports community at large. Often when we hear of African American males within athletics; be it collegiate or professional, it is often couched or enveloped in a negative connotation of some sort. But the primary impetus for this case study is to look at the importance of mentoring for African American male youth within community and school-based sports and how this is seen as a lifeline for community service and life lessons. This case study examines one leader's strategic approach to closing the achievement gap and providing mentoring with African American males through the sports-leadership nonprofit organization he manages.*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last two generations members of the African-American community have made significant progress in terms of combating legal segregation racial discrimination as well as economic and educational disparities and divides. There are still momentous barriers that are left as they are vestiges from institutionalized racism that most notably effect academics and economics but within these tumultuous changes there are a few opportunities that surface (Lederman, 2012). One of those avenues is one that is fraught with complexities; sports. It is absolutely essential that we examine the relationship between African-American males and sports as it is fraught with duality.

There are many who subscribe to the school of thought that sports create a greater divide or marginalizes African American men from society. Oftentimes African-American males are put into categories within the framework of sports, one being positive but the other being extremely negative and rather polarizing. Sports offers an opportunity for African-American males from lower socioeconomic levels to use their talent to move to middle-class and upper-middle-class socioeconomic levels though still isolated. Oftentimes sports seem to act as a vacuum that can minimize the value of education. There instances when being a black athlete is a dangerous choice as if an individual cannot be smart, intelligent, and capable and give back to his community but still be an athlete (Watkins, 2010). In some circles the athleticism of African American males is viewed as hyper toxic and almost animalistic. But in this particular case we are going to examine black males in sports as a vehicle for mentorship and leadership which values community, ethics, academic intelligence, emotional intelligence but most of all leadership and service. African-American males experiencing success via advocacy has long been a collective effort in the athletic world during the era of the civil rights movement and beyond. This prominent collective strength has helped to be a weapon against racism in the greater community and chip away at intolerance (Clark, Tanner and Logan, 2015).

## **Challenges of Black Boys**

The African-American Community has often been receptive of sports being an outlet for their young boys and it's seen as a productive activity that facilitates dreams and team building. So what is the landscape like for these young boys who already have fragile identities and their own sets of struggles? Let's examine the geography of what awaits black athletes in high school and in college .African American male athletes have a unique set of challenges with which they must navigate and it actually starts in early childhood. Prager (2011) shares that black boys are not being supported and properly undergirded; frankly society in America has let its black boys down. This is evident whether it be a metropolitan areas, rural areas and not to leave out suburbia. When looking at statistical data we understand the likelihood is increased that African American boys are being ushered into the prison pipeline rather than into the halls of academia more than any other ethnic group in our great America.

Palmer, Wood, Dancy and Strayhorn (2014) share the same sentiment. Early Learning and early childhood African-American boys are unfortunately bathed in a wash of institutionalized racism and negativity upon entering formalized school experiences to include preschool. We are well aware of the expulsion rates which over-emphasize discipline of young African-American males in early childhood and elementary grades based on perception and misunderstanding of behavior. This manifests itself through microaggressions and perceived threats. Oftentimes

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