

Houstonia.
SPORTS

THREE KINGS

HOUSTON'S PRO TEAMS
ARE LEADING THE LEAGUE IN
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

BY JESSICA LODGE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
HOUSTON TEXANS / ZACH TARRANT



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HOUSTON IS CURRENTLY THE ONLY MAJOR AMERICAN CITY WHERE THREE OF ITS PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS ARE LED BY BLACK COACHES.

THREE KINGS

We sat down to discuss opportunity, diversity, good food, great fans, and Houston soul with Astros manager, Dusty Baker, Texans head coach, Lovie Smith, and Rockets head coach, Stephan Silas.

Q&A DUSTY BAKER

As one of only three Black managers in the major leagues, alongside Dave Roberts (and at the time Ranger interim manager Tony Beasley), what are some steps MLB can take to see more Black men (or even women!) managing in the future?

“ I HOPE WE get to a place one day where they won't mention that I'm a Black manager, just that I'm a good manager. I was thinking the other day that, prior to Tony Beasley being hired a month ago, there were two African-American managers in baseball. One in the American League and one in the National League and we both own the best record in each league. Hopefully, this will give other people a chance.”

You had a long and successful career as a player, but perhaps an even more successful one as a manager. What was the defining moment in your life in which you knew managing was the right choice for you?

“ WHEN I RETIRED as a player, I did not think I would get into coaching. My dad told me to go up to Lake Arrowhead to pray on it and ask for an answer. When I got there, before I had a chance to pray, the owner of the Giants saw me checking into the hotel. He tapped me on the shoulder and said 'you need to come join us.' That was probably a defining moment for me. My dad told me that I went up there looking for a sign, and, 'before you even said a prayer or did anything, the sign tapped you on the shoulder.'”

What is one of your favorite things about Houston?

“ I LOVE THE food and the diversity of the city. I also appreciate the fans. They have been great to me.”

What does it mean to you that Houston's major sports teams are led by Black coaches? What do you think it means to the city and the country at large?

“ I THINK IT is a great message for the country. Here in Houston, it shows the acceptance and the amount of diversity that we have in this town. When I was in Chicago managing the Cubs, I was in a similar situation where Lovie (Smith) was the coach of the Bears, Jerry Manuel managed the White Sox, and Bill Cartwright was the coach of the Bulls. But, contrary to when I was in Chicago, I've received very few negative letters here in Houston. Most have been positive. I hope it has been positive for Lovie and for Stephen as well.”

BAKER: SHUTTERSTOCK/RANDY MIRAMONTEZ; MANUEL: JERRY MANUEL FOUNDATION; SMITH: COURTESY OF HOUSTON TEXANS; ZACH TARRANT; CARTWRIGHT: NEA



← Baker, Smith, and Silas meet for a Houston sports royalty summit.

Q&A LOVIE SMITH

The NFL requires that minority candidates be interviewed for all head coaching positions. Can you describe your journey to becoming a head coach and how these new league mandates might evolve to help even more minority coaches in the future.

“ IT'S BEEN MY dream to be a head coach for a long time and I was always encouraged to keep chasing it. I didn't have anybody telling me, 'Lovie, you can't do this' like some others have. It was quite the opposite for me, and that starts with my parents believing in me. I have been incredibly fortunate to be a head coach three times in this league and I'm the only person who looks like me that's received that many opportunities. I don't take that lightly and I know what comes with that. The biggest thing we need to do around the league is give young, minority coaches more opportunities. That's what I've tried to do with my staff here in Houston.”

When coming to a team that is in the process of rebuilding, how do you go about assessing and acquiring talent to construct a winning team?

“ FOR US, it's about setting a standard and building a foundation. Nick (Caserio) has done a fantastic job of bringing in guys who care about football first. They love the game, they want to work hard and they want to be great. Those qualities are extremely important when you are

constructing a team, especially with the amount of young players we have. We know we need to put a better product on the football field for our fans but we're excited about the guys we have in our building and the direction we're headed in.”

As a new head coach, the long term goal, of course, is to win a Super Bowl, but what are some short term goals that you have put in place with your players to build morale and a winning culture?

“ WE HAVE A saying that we ask the guys to do all the time, it's called 'show up and show out.' It's about attacking every day. You show up on time, you stay focused on your daily task, and you're present with your teammates. Then you show out—you come in with a good attitude, you work hard and you put forth your best effort. If we do that, we will get where we want to go.”

How has it been working alongside your son Miles with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, then at the University of Illinois, and ultimately now here with the Texans?

“ IT'S SPECIAL. My wife MaryAnne and I have three sons and I never pushed any of them into coaching, but when Miles told me he wanted to coach, I was excited to bring him along. He has worked long hours cutting up film and grinding on the basics when he first started. Miles is a fantastic coach. In our defensive scheme, coaching linebackers is a critical part but I know that group will be ready every week because they have a coach like Miles.”

AN UNLEVEL PLAYING FIELD

A SHORT HISTORY OF CITIES WITH THREE OR MORE CONCURRENT BLACK MANAGERS

2003-2004
CHICAGO

CUBS
DUSTY BAKER



WHITE SOX
JERRY MANUEL



BEARS
LOVIE SMITH



BULLS
BILL CARTWRIGHT

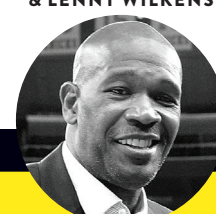


2005
NEW YORK

JETS
HERM EDWARDS



KNICKS
HERB WILLIAMS (PICTURED BELOW)
& LENNY WILKENS



METS
WILLIE RANDOLPH



What is one thing you enjoy doing in the city of Houston?

“ **BEING THE HEAD** coach of the Texans is my dream job. I'm a product of Texas high school football so I know how much it means to this city and this state.”

What does it mean to you that Houston's major sports teams are led by Black coaches? What do you think it means to the city and the country at large?

“ **I'M A BIG FAN** of the other teams. Dusty Baker has been a friend for a long time and [I'm] getting to know Stephen. We realize how special it is to have three men that look like us coaching in the same city. That doesn't happen very often, especially in a major city, probably the only city in the country where that's the case. We all have busy schedules, but we try to attend each others' games and practices.”

Q&A STEPHEN SILAS

As a former assistant coach, what was the process of transitioning into a head coach role like? And what were some helpful lessons you may have learned from your father, Paul, who was also a head coach in the NBA?

“ **GROWING UP AROUND** my dad I wanted to be like him. He was a player for 16 years in the NBA and I wanted to do that but I wasn't good enough (laughs). He was a coach in the NBA for even longer. So the time that we spent together was talking about basketball, me going to his practices, watching film, or just watching games. Becoming a coach kind of happened organically. Then I became an assistant coach, moving around the league working for Golden State, Dallas, and Charlotte. And, as you move up and you have success you see that you can do the job.”

You began your tenure as head coach with the Rockets in 2020, and played most of that season with a roster of young and injured players. What did you learn from that experience, and how are you adjusting for the future?

“ **I LEARNED** a lot that first year. There was a lot that happened as far as trades and different

guys coming in and out. There was COVID and just so many things. As an assistant coach, you're very concentrated on the x's and o's and the one or two players you're responsible for. But when you become a head coach, you're responsible for your staff, for interacting with management and ownership, and the media. There's so many people that you have to form relationships with. That was a learning curve for me early. Moving forward, I definitely feel more comfortable in those kinds of situations. They say experience is the best teacher. I'm not excluding myself from that. Having the experience that I've had for the last few years has made me an infinitely better coach.”

Can you describe the feeling of being one of 15 Black coaches in the NBA, and do you think the league should incorporate rules that lead to more diversity and inclusion at the head coach position?

“ **YES.** I'm all for inclusion, always for everybody. It should be an even playing field for everybody. So whatever that looks like, that's how it should be, whether its rules or policies, everybody should have an equal opportunity for every position. Slowly but surely, more and more guys are getting opportunities to the point where I was at the head coach's meeting in Chicago looking around the room and there were 14 other guys who looked like me which is a really cool thing. But what we don't want it to be is a spike. We want it to be something that's just normal and something that continues to happen.”

Can you tell me one thing you love about the city of Houston?

“ **OH MAN,** I've lived in Charlotte, I've lived in New York, I've lived in the Bay, and I've lived in Dallas and there's a special kind soul that Houston has that no other city I've lived in has.”

What does it mean to you that Houston's major sports teams are led by Black coaches? What do you think it means to the city and the country at large?

“ **IT MEANS A LOT.** At first, I thought it was just a really cool thing. But then when we took the picture and had the city in the background, and I felt the camaraderie and the brotherhood and the advice that [Dusty and Lovie] gave me, it was something that I'll always cherish for sure.”

2021-2022 HOUSTON

ASTROS
DUSTY BAKER



ROCKETS
STEPHEN SILAS



TEXANS
DAVID CULLEY



BAKER: SHUTTERSTOCK/RANDY MIRAMONTEZ; SILAS: COURTESY OF HOUSTON TEXANS/ZACH TARRANT CULLEY: CC/WIKIMEDIA

VISIT
SugarLand
TEXAS

December 11 to December 23, 2022



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