



The NFHS Voice



NFHS Celebrates High School Leaders During Black History Month

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director

 @KarissaNFHS

The NFHS is proud to join with many other groups across the country in celebrating Black History Month. Since the desegregation of schools in the 1960s – thanks to the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King and many others – there have been numerous African-Americans who have played prominent roles within the NFHS, our member state associations and 19,500 high schools across the country.

As we reflect on African-American leaders in high school sports administration the past 60 years, we start in 1994 and the state of Kentucky.

It is hard to imagine anyone accomplishing more at all levels of high school athletics than the late **Louis Stout**, who became the first African-American to direct a state high school association when he was named commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) in 1994.

As a high school basketball player, Stout led the state of Kentucky in scoring (30.9) and rebounding (24.0) as a senior at Cynthiana High School. He also was a highly success basketball coach at Lexington Dunbar High School and was one of the state's best umpires during a 26-year baseball and softball officiating career.

Stout served 23 years as assistant commissioner of the KHSAA before landing the commissioner's position, where he served until his retirement in 2002. Stout's legacy was his success in recruiting more minorities as high school coaches and officials.

Another trailblazer from Kentucky in 1994 was **Alvis Johnson** – the first African-American president of the NFHS. Johnson, who was athletic director, football coach and track coach at Harrodsburg High School for 22 years, was a tremendous leader during his three years on the NFHS Board of Directors in the early 1990s as the NFHS addressed many financial challenges.

Six years earlier, the late **Joe Haynes** of Mississippi was the first African-American to be appointed to the NFHS Executive Committee when he was chosen for a three-year, at-large position in 1988. Haynes contributions to education included serving as a teacher, principal, deputy superintendent and superintendent, and he also was a high school football official.

In 1975, Haynes became one of two African-American football officials in the Southeastern Conference, and he was chosen as a National Football League official in 1984 and worked games until his retirement in 1992.

Seven other African-Americans have been chosen to direct state high school associations, including six who currently hold CEO positions.

The first black female to direct a state high school association was **Rhonda Blanford-Green**, who was named executive director of the Nebraska School

Activities Association (NSAA) in 2012. After three years with the NSAA, Blanford-Green currently is in her fourth year as commissioner of the Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA), where she was assistant commissioner for 16 years before accepting the Nebraska position.

Jerome Singleton is the longest-serving African-American state association director. Singleton was named commissioner of the South Carolina High School League (SCHSL) in 2005 after 10 years as assistant and associate director. Other current state association executive directors are **Bernard Childress** (2009), Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association; **Que Tucker** (2015), North Carolina High School Athletic Association; **David Jackson** (2016), Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association; and **Donna Polk** (2020), Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association. **Larry White**, longtime assistant director of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA), retired last year after three years as NJSIAA executive director.

Singleton (2017-18) and Jackson (2018-19) followed in Alvis Johnson's footsteps as the second and third African-Americans, respectively, to be elected president of the NFHS Board of Directors.

We also want to recognize several African-Americans who have directed our member association in the District of Columbia, including **Otto Jordan**, **Troy Mathieu** and **Marcus Ellis**, among others.

At the local level, nine African-American coaches have been inducted into the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame. Heading that list is **Robert Hughes**, now 92 years of age, who is the winningest high school basketball coach in history from Fort Worth, Texas, and who also was elected to the Naismith National Basketball Hall of Fame.

In 2018, **Dorothy Gaters**, who has coached girls basketball at John Marshall High School in Chicago for 45 years, became the first black female coach to be inducted into the National High School Hall of Fame.

Other black coaches include **Russell Blunt** of North Carolina, **Taft Watson** of South Carolina, **S. T. Roach** and **William Kean** of Kentucky, **John Campbell** of Indiana, **Harry Breland** of Mississippi and **Oliver Elders** of Arkansas.

Forty-four incredible black athletes have been inducted into the National High School Hall of Fame, led by the legendary **Jesse Owens** and **Jackie Robinson**, and other luminaries such as **Archie Griffin**, **Jackie Joyner-Kersey**, **Cheryl Miller**, **Oscar Robertson** and **Herschel Walker**. Can you imagine the storied history of high school sports without these individuals?

And we would be remiss without mentioning the contributions of **Elliot Hopkins** and **Maurice Meriweather**, the longest-serving male and female African-Americans on the NFHS administrative staff. Since 1999, in addition to serving as editor of high school baseball rules, Hopkins has become a national leader in hazing prevention and student leadership efforts. Another 20-year employee, Meriweather joined the staff in 2000 and, in late 2018, was selected for the new position of NFHS Chief Talent Officer.

While these individuals are some of the more influential black leaders in high school sports in our nation's history, we also want to recognize the thousands of teachers, coaches, officials and administrators of color who have provided athletic and performing arts opportunities to countless students for many decades.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her third year as executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head

the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.