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Even before Brian Flores' lawsuit, NFL had a long road to integrating its football teams

Everything you need to know about Brian Flores' lawsuit against NFL

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NFL, Giants and Dolphins. USA TODAY Randy Maniloff Opinion contributor

USA TODAY NFL insider Mike Jones breaks down former Miami Dolphins' head coach Brian Flores' lawsuit against the

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Earlier this month, in a blockbuster lawsuit filed in New York federal court, Brian Flores, the recently fired Black head coach of the Miami

hiring and retaining coaches and general managers.

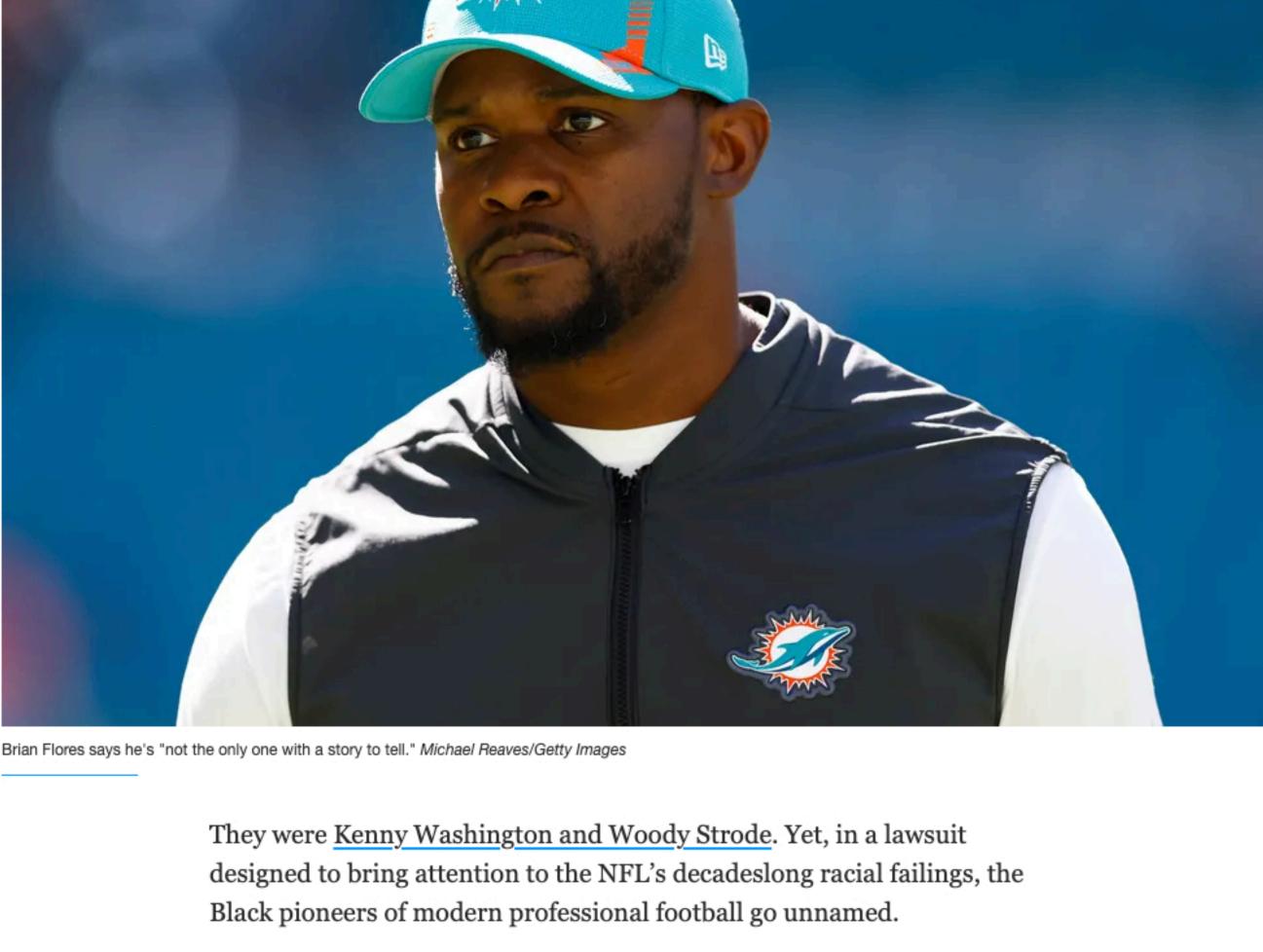
Dolphins, alleged racial discrimination in the National Football League in

70% of NFL rosters, there are only two Black head coaches and just a handful of minority head coaches in the entire league. Flores' complaint discusses the NFL's history of discrimination and absence of Black players on the field in the league's early years. In 1946,

the suit notes, the Los Angeles Rams ultimately signed "two Black

The numbers don't leave room for parsing. While Black players make up

players."



columnist for New York's Newsday, published "The Forgotten First." The book tells the story of the breaking of the NFL color barrier through the

out.

The idea for the project was hatched by Glauber a few years back, following an odd realization: An NFL locker room is one of the most diverse workplaces you'll find, but the longtime football journalist had no idea who

accounts of Washington and Strode, along with two other trailblazers, the

This is hardly a surprise to Keyshawn Johnson, the first overall pick of the

1996 NFL draft who went on to an 11-year career as a wide receiver.

Late last year, Johnson, 49, along with Bob Glauber, 66, the NFL

Cleveland Browns' Marion Motley and Bill Willis.

the first Black player was. He needed Google to find

'You can't tell the story of the NFL'

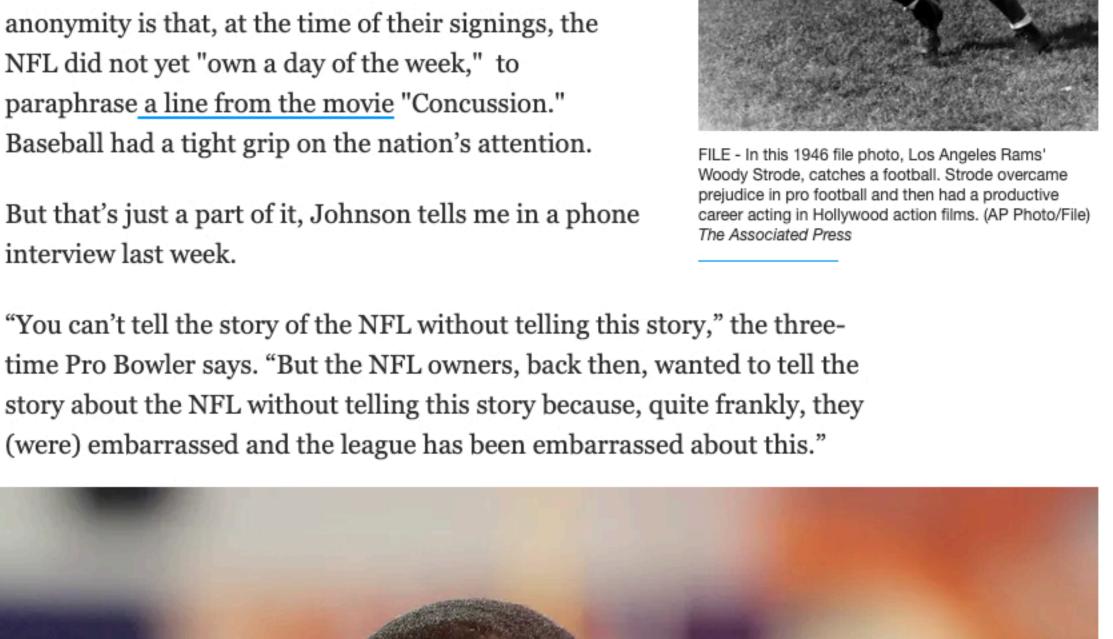
Of course, one reason for these players' virtual

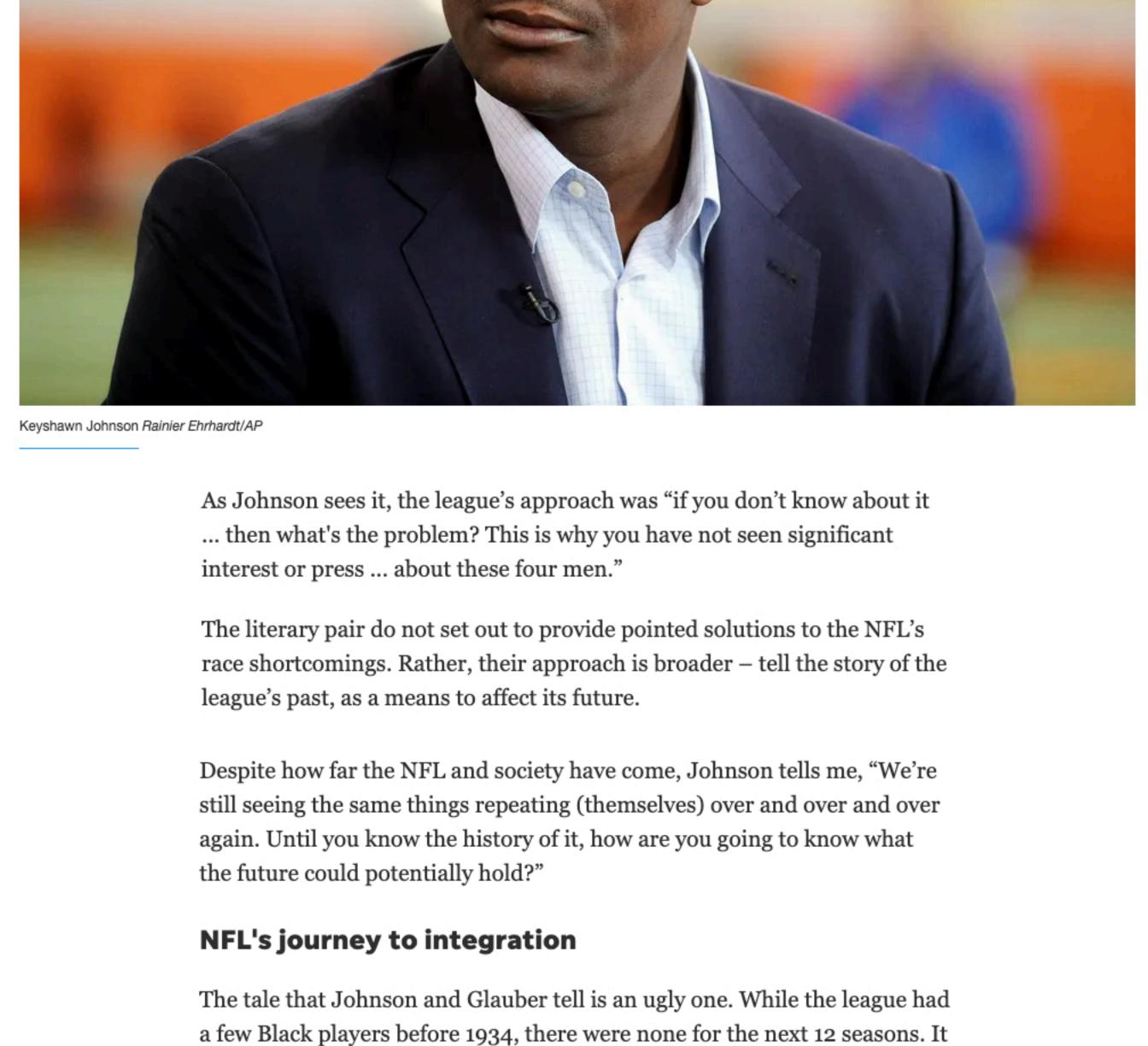
anonymity is that, at the time of their signings, the

But that's just a part of it, Johnson tells me in a phone

NFL did not yet "own a day of the week," to paraphrase a line from the movie "Concussion." Baseball had a tight grip on the nation's attention.

interview last week.





is widely acknowledged that this was the result of an unspoken ban by

had just moved to Los Angeles from Cleveland, where it was no longer

Dreilinger: Why you should root for biathlon, the Winter Olympics'

The color barrier was broken, but widespread integration came slowly.

L.A. Coliseum, the organization was pressured to do so.

Even the Rams' signing of Robinson was not worthy of applause. The team

financially viable. To secure a lease to play its games in the publicly funded

Just to avoid any misinterpretation, the team's press release, announcing Washington's signing, contained a disclaimer: "no precedent is being set."

(They) don't all think the same."

team owners.

weirdest sport

groundbreakers were subjected to discrimination in accommodation, as well as racial taunts, cheap shots on the field that went unpenalized and even credible death threats. The last team to sign a Black player was the Washington Redskins in 1962.

Only 17 Black players were in the league at the end of the 1951 season. The

The co-authors' game plan, for affecting race in the NFL, echoes Winston Churchill's famed warning that "those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it." It sounds pie in the sky. But not after Johnson describes the relationship between the league and its teams. The NFL – what he calls "the shield," a reference to the league's logo – "is independent of (the) 32 owners.

dignity to us: NFL Super Bowl champion So while the league, Johnson says, "is trying to do things from a diversity

Benjamin Watson: Preborn babies don't have to prove their worth,

standpoint ... you don't necessarily see certain teams doing the same thing." NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, Johnson says, "can't tell (the teams) who to hire." As Johnson explains the NFL's operation, there is no single fix for the

league's lack of diversity in coaches and front-office personnel. It requires 32 solutions. As with the integration of Black players, progress can be expected to be incremental. There will be teams that are better than others. Thanks to Johnson and

Glauber's efforts, some will surely make advancements using history as a

guide. Randy Maniloff is an attorney at White and Williams, LLP in Philadelphia and an adjunct professor at Temple University Beasley School of Law.