

**HUSCH BLACKWELL**

**INDEPENDENT  
INVESTIGATION  
REPORT**

Colorado State University

October 4, 2020

Racial  
Climate  
Review

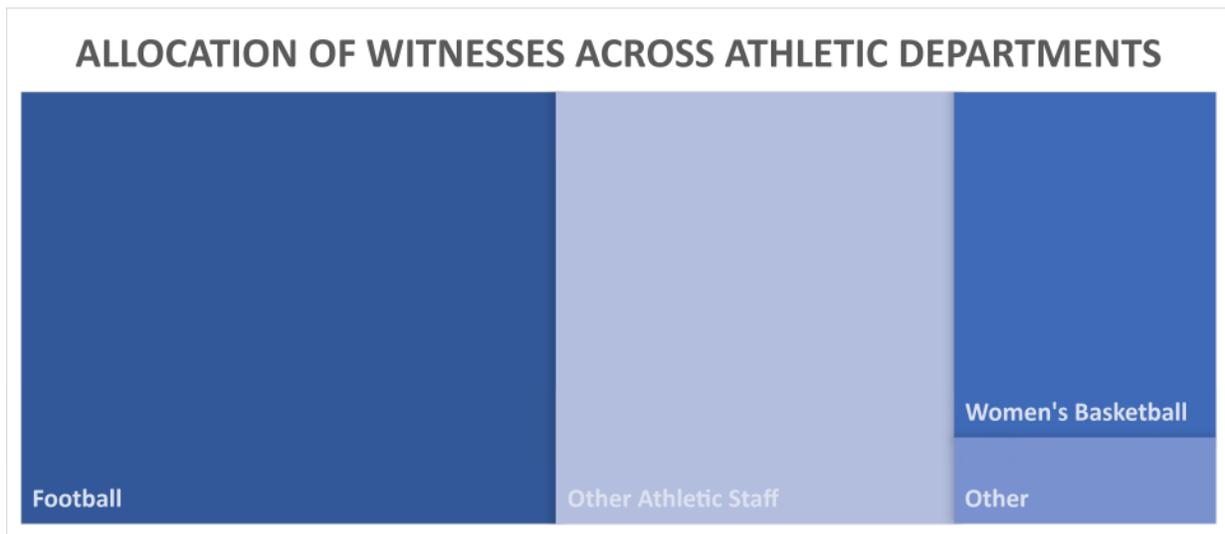
# REPORT OF INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

Colorado State University (the “University”) retained Husch Blackwell LLP to conduct an independent investigation into allegations of racial inequities within the Athletic Department and its intercollegiate athletic teams. This report provides a summary of the information gathered during our investigation.

## Executive Summary

We interviewed 115 individuals, including 49 current and former student-athletes, 63 current and former employees, and three other community members. Our investigation gathered a diversity of perspectives from a large cross-section of the Athletic Department and campus, including student-athletes, coaches, strength and conditioning staff, athletic trainers, administrators, counseling staff, and personnel from student life and academic support.<sup>1</sup> In addition to conducting interviews, we reviewed two years of data collected from the student-athlete surveys completed at the end of each season. We also reviewed the Athletic Department’s mission statement, as well as leadership and cultural competency expectations for Athletic Department staff.

The following chart represents the distribution of witnesses across athletic departments.<sup>2</sup>



Most student-athletes who participated in the investigation disputed allegations of pervasive racial inequities or harassment within their athletic team or the Athletic Department more broadly. Witnesses who expressed concerns identified specific incidents that evidenced racial insensitivity

<sup>1</sup> We are mindful that former student-athletes and employees may harbor positive or negative feelings toward the University depending on the circumstances under which they left their intercollegiate athletic team or employment. In this matter, we are not privy to confidential information about any former student-athletes or employees and draw no inference about their motivation for deciding to participate—or not to participate—in this investigation.

<sup>2</sup> The “other” category includes players from smaller sports programs as well as extended community members.

or reinforced racial stereotypes. Few individuals alleged that such incidents were widespread or tolerated by current coaching staff. In contrast, numerous individuals recounted racial insensitivity involving former coaches in years past and expressed concern that their behavior went unaddressed by Athletic Department leadership at that time.

We also observed that many individuals from different races, teams, and employee roles are personally and emotionally struggling with the national reckoning around issues of racial justice and equity. We heard numerous individuals express anger and frustration around recent national events. Many of them expect their teammates, coaches, colleagues, administrators, and the University to engage in more meaningful and sustained dialogue around issues of race and do more to effectuate change.

## Background

On August 8, 2020, the Fort Collins *Coloradoan* published an article containing numerous allegations regarding racial insensitivity and abusive behavior within the football program and Athletic Department.<sup>3</sup> The University subsequently directed Husch Blackwell LLP to expand its ongoing investigation regarding compliance with COVID-19 protocols to include issues of racial inequity and culture within the Athletic Department, football program, and other intercollegiate athletic teams.

## Report Structure

This report discusses the information gathered during the investigation, with detail around common themes. While our report does recount specific allegations and incidents relayed to us, we recount these allegations and incidents in the context of presenting the perceptions of student-athletes and staff. Some of the more specific allegations and incidents we describe were corroborated by numerous witnesses. Others, however, were disputed and/or were uncorroborated. We were not asked to determine the veracity of any specific allegation or incident. Therefore, inclusion of a given allegation in this report does not reflect a determination that it occurred as reported.<sup>4</sup>

During interviews, themes around potential racial inequities arose primarily in three sports: women's basketball, track and field, and football. We have structured the report to first address the racial climate within the women's basketball program. The report then addresses the racial climate within the track and field program, followed by a discussion of the football program. The report concludes with a summary of racial issues identified within the Athletic Department as a whole.

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<sup>3</sup> "Hidden in Plain Sight": CSU Football Staff Accused of Racial Insensitivity, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, August 8, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> We note that numerous witnesses reported information involving allegations of mistreatment or inequities that do not involve race. That information falls outside the scope of this report and will be provided separately to the University to evaluate and address pursuant to its policies and procedures.

## Summary of Information Gathered During Investigation

### Women's Basketball

None of the current women's basketball players who participated in the investigation characterized the program as having a culture of racism. One current player noted that coaches have asked for feedback and are committed to changing their behavior if they "cross the line." However, several women's basketball players reported incidents that reflect the presence of racial insensitivities or reinforcing racist stereotypes. Those are summarized and set forth below.

The Assistant Director of Diversity and Inclusion reported that the players and Head Coach Williams are "in a good place." The Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs/Student-Athlete Support Services stated that Head Coach Williams has good relationships with his team. He did report that, during exit interviews with players leaving the program, some of them have explained that the University is "not a place for them" and that they experienced difficulty adapting to the University and community's culture. Nevertheless, he has not heard about any racial comments or received any complaints about Head Coach Williams, nor any allegations of racial harassment or abuse by Head Coach Williams.

#### *Comments about Hair*

One former player, who is Black, alleged that Head Coach Williams made racially insensitive comments about her hair. According to this former player, he characterized her hairstyle as "funny" and questioned its cleanliness. When she confronted him, Head Coach Williams issued a "forced apology" and requested she alert him if he said offensive things in the future. The former player stated that she reported this concern during her exit interview. A second former player stated that she observed Head Coach Williams grab the ponytail of a Black player and ask her "is this your hair?" Two current players stated that they did not recall Head Coach Williams or other coaches speaking to Black players about their hair. A third current player stated that the only comments she heard from coaching staff about hair were positive and were made to players of all races.<sup>5</sup>

One current coach did not recall Head Coach Williams making any comments about players' hair, except "from a place of being inquisitive." A different coach, who is Black, stated that Head Coach Williams asked her about her hair because she travels out of state to have it styled. She stated that his questions "did not offend her at all" and were made because "he honestly just did not understand."

Head Coach Williams acknowledged that he has commented about one of his current player's hair. He explained that his comments were only made to educate himself. According to Head Coach Williams, this player, who is Black, needed to take Sundays off in order to have her hair styled. Head Coach Williams denied "making fun" of any player's hair and stated he would not purposely hurt someone's feelings.

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<sup>5</sup> The player did not provide examples of the positive comments.

## *Zoom Call Incident*

One recent incident generated significant commentary from current players and coaches. The team held a Zoom meeting with a diversity coordinator to discuss recent national events and issues involving racial justice. During the meeting, a staff member (Employee #1) made comments to the diversity coordinator that were perceived by student-athletes to be racially insensitive and dismissive. One player explained that Employee #1 was being insensitive to the diversity coordinator's point of view and experience and seemed to imply that "being Black is political."

Players described the exchange as "shocking," "offensive," "awkward," and "uncomfortable to witness."<sup>6</sup> Several players stated that Employee #1 was not adequately listening or "didn't get it." A second player explained that his tone came across as "entitled," and his comments were offensive to individuals who live with racial injustice every day. A third player expressed her opinion that Employee #1, who is White, took the conversation personally and was acting defensive.

One player reported that, after the Zoom call, Head Coach Williams called all the players to discuss how Employee #1's comments impacted them. The team has held several subsequent Zoom meetings to discuss and resolve the situation. Multiple players noted that Employee #1 has apologized, and they expressed their opinion that the situation is now resolved. One player agreed that the issue is resolved but stated that her teammates are unhappy because they do not believe that Employee #1 "was held responsible." A second player stated that his apology seemed forced and was not sincere.

One of the current coaches, who is Black, recalled that the diversity coordinator commented during the Zoom meeting that she felt hurt that no one had reached out to her regarding recent national events. Employee #1 expressed confusion about the appropriate way to initiate a conversation with a Black friend or coworker. According to the coach, Employee #1 asked his question from a place of empathy and understanding. The coach characterized the exchange as a "back and forth with differing opinions" within a meeting that was framed as "a safe place." The coach did not see Employee #1's comments as a problem; rather, it was two professionals with different points of view having a good conversation. Head Coach Williams agreed with this characterization of the exchange but acknowledged that the players perceived Employee #1's comments to be insensitive and to have "crossed the line." One staff member who asked the diversity coordinator how the session went recalled her saying "it was great;" she did not raise any concerns to him about the verbal exchange.

Employee #1 denied that his exchange with the diversity coordinator was intended to be offensive. He recalled the diversity coordinator posing a question about how to have conversations with Black colleagues. He responded, asking how he, as a White male, could have such conversations without appearing insincere. He recalled saying: "I struggle as a White male with African American friends as how to show support without coming off as insincere." In his view, his question was genuine and posed within a "safe place" for discussion.

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<sup>6</sup> One player stated that she was not offended by Employee #1's comments.

## *Other Allegations*

Multiple student-athletes, coaches, and staff described an exchange in December 2019 after a photo circulated on social media showing students posing in blackface in September 2019. As several players discussed the incident and the University's response during their warm-up, Employee #1 directed them to stop talking and start their workout. Multiple players reported that one of the players was offended by the exchange and thought Employee #1's response was insensitive and dismissive. According to one staff member, the exchange made the player feel like Employee #1 did not care about how the blackface incident impacted her. Employee #1 disagreed with the characterization of his comments as dismissive, explaining that he and the players discussed the incident at length, and he needed them to return to their workout.

A former player alleged that one of the assistant coaches (Employee #2) made an offensive comment about an opposing team of predominantly Black players, saying, "Black girls are not smart, they are just athletic." The assistant coach denied making the comment and said he may have discussed an opposing team's strategy, but he did not discuss their intelligence. Head Coach Williams did not recall the comment being made, expressing his opinion that the assistant coach would never say that Black players are not smart; he may have said the opposing team plays "wild and crazy." No other players or staff members recalled hearing such a comment. A former player alleged that Head Coach Williams made similar comments, characterizing Black athletes as "super athletic" and White players as "really smart."

Head Coach Williams and a former staff member described a different incident during which Employee #2 was alleged to have used the term "thugs" when speaking to one of the student-athletes about recruiting more players from a particular state. The student-athlete thought the term was inappropriate and insensitive. According to Head Coach Williams, he and the Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs/Student-Athlete Support Services met with the staff member to make clear that using the term was insensitive and would not be tolerated in the program.

One former player accused Head Coach Williams of joking about her race at practice, saying, "She is not really Black." No other players or staff members reported hearing this comment.

## *Track and Field*

None of the current members of the track and field team who participated in the investigation raised concerns about the overall racial climate on the team. One current student-athlete, who is Black, noted that the University is a predominantly White institution and that has been an adjustment for her; in her view, however, the team is always "working together" and there have been no racial issues. One current coach agreed, stating that he does not believe there is a racial issue on the team, which he characterized as "pretty functional." A current staff member reported hearing comments from student-athletes that there is diversity on the team but no diversity on the coaching staff.

One former staff member stated that he left the team because Head Coach Bedard never recognized students of color, causing many of them to leave the team or transfer. The former staff member also alleged that Head Coach Bedard told “lots of little jokes” which made him feel very uncomfortable.<sup>7</sup>

One former member of the team alleged that Head Coach Bedard used the threat of scholarship termination as leverage over minority athletes. According to this former player, the coach assumed that minority athletes would not be able to otherwise afford to attend the University. One current coach acknowledged that a student-athlete thought her scholarship was reduced because of her race; he denied this was accurate, explaining the scholarship was reduced because of her performance. The coach also observed that, in addition to multiple reporting options for allegations of discriminatory treatment, a procedure exists for student-athletes to contest scholarship reductions. Athletic Director Parker stated that Head Coach Bedard is one of the most transparent coaches regarding scholarship allocations, which he awards exclusively based on each athlete’s performance.

A compliance official stated that she has not received any reports that Head Coach Bedard has made racial comments to student-athletes.

## Football and Head Coach Addazio

Witnesses overwhelmingly reported having no concerns about the racial climate within the current football program, though a few raised concerns about the commitment of some members of the coaching staff to broader racial equality. Many current players stated that they have not heard racial comments or experienced racial inequities. One coach stated that he has not observed players being treated differently based on race. A second coach stated that Head Coach Addazio would “not tolerate one word of racial intolerance.” Several coaches and staff members noted that they have not received any player complaints regarding race.

Numerous witnesses commented that the team and coaching staff discussed racial injustice issues at multiple team and staff meetings.<sup>8</sup> Other witnesses noted that Head Coach Addazio has asked diversity and inclusion professionals to meet with the team on several occasions. This was confirmed by the Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs/Student-Athlete Support Services who stated that the football coaches are committed to speaking about racial issues. One coach observed the team has done more to discuss racial issues in the seven months since he’s been there than any other program with which he has been affiliated.

Notwithstanding the largely positive commentary gathered during interviews, several witnesses raised concerns regarding incidents involving Head Coach Addazio and the current coaching staff.

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<sup>7</sup> The staff member did not characterize or provide examples of any jokes.

<sup>8</sup> One coach disagreed that the team has had a “real conversation” about race and said this deficiency gives him an “uneasy feeling” about Head Coach Addazio’s stance on race issues. A different coach expressed concern because two coaches who have worked with Head Coach Addazio in the past cautioned him to “be ready for the team and the staff to get more White.”

Several staff members made allegations that imply Head Coach Addazio has fostered an environment that perpetuates racial stereotypes or is unsympathetic to the national dialogue regarding racial justice and equity. One staff member reported hearing him make racially insensitive comments. For example, during a staff meeting discussion after the murder of George Floyd, he recalled Head Coach Addazio stating, “It wasn't that big of a deal because people treated Italians like this in the 60's and 70's.” A second staff member reported feeling offended during a staff meeting when the need for a team rule prohibiting weapons was discussed. In her view, the coaching staff was making stereotyped assumptions that the players, the majority of whom are Black, possessed weapons.

Head Coach Addazio denied equating the murder of George Floyd or the treatment of African Americans to the experience of Italian Americans. He recalled sharing a personal story about the experiences of his family as Italian immigrants. During this story, Head Coach Addazio shared with staff members that, based on his family’s experience as immigrants, he does not tolerate any form of racial harassment or discrimination.

Head Coach Addazio recalled a discussion with staff members about weapons policies. However, during this conversation, he told the staff that he felt it was unnecessary to have a specific policy prohibiting weapons. Head Coach Addazio’s comments about the weapons policy made no statements or assumptions about race.

One staff member reported that a current football player reached out to her in June and raised concerns about racial issues in the program during a virtual town hall meeting. She stated that during the town hall meeting, a Black student-athlete recounted several instances of how he felt demeaned and “called out” because of his race. According to the staff member, Athletic Director Parker attended the town hall and instructed the student-athlete to put the information on his end-of-the-year survey so that the Athletic Department can address the issues. During his interview, this same student-athlete raised numerous allegations of racial bias against former members of the coaching staff. He did not make specific allegations of racial bias against the current coaching staff, although he questioned the current coaching staff’s overall commitment to racial equality and equity. The student-athlete also expressed displeasure about Athletic Director Parker’s handling of his concerns and the Athletic Department’s reliance on student-athlete surveys as the sole means to collect information about racial issues in the program. Finally, he questioned whether current student-athletes are willing to raise concerns against coaches while they are in the program.

Athletic Director Parker denied that he told the student-athlete to put the information on his end-of-the-year survey. Athletic Director Parker stated that he made the comment that he uses the end-of-the-year survey to gather information about the student-athletes’ experiences in the athletic program.

## *Football Team March*

The local media reported allegations that Head Coach Addazio interfered with a team march in support of a Black player who was held at gunpoint by a White male in June while working off-campus. According to the media, Head Coach Addazio refused to allow players to wear Black Lives Matter shirts, make posters, or chant.<sup>9</sup> Several witnesses alleged that the football program did not “do enough” to support the student-athlete and were dissatisfied with the march that occurred. One current player asserted the march was too controlled by the coaches. A player involved in organizing the march stated that the coaches were supportive of the march but asserted too much control. According to the player, the coaches told them not to carry signs and disagreed initially with wearing all black. However, his primary complaint about the march was the lack of media attention. Several other players agreed, stating that, although the student-athlete was supported and the march went well, it should have received more media attention. One staff member asserted that Head Coach Addazio was “callous” in his response to the student-athlete.<sup>10</sup>

Other witnesses stated that the program’s response to the incident was appropriate. One coach recalled that the march was a player-driven event and the players decided what to wear. Several witnesses explained that the student-athlete himself did not want more media attention. One player explained that the team had an immediate meeting and came together to support the student-athlete. In this player’s opinion, the team march was intended to support the student-athlete rather than to be political. One coach agreed, stating that the march was intended to “stand in solidarity” with the student-athlete rather than draw media attention. He explained that the coaching staff was concerned because the student-athlete did not want media attention about what happened to him. A different coach recalled that the student-athlete did not want any signs at the march. One player stated that the student-athlete himself asked marchers to wear black tee shirts.

Head Coach Addazio denied that he interfered with the march or suggested that Black lives don’t matter. He reported that he met with the student-athlete and his parents shortly after the incident to provide support. The student-athlete himself stated that Head Coach Addazio and his position coach have been “really supportive,” and he expressed no concerns with the program’s response.

## *Player Abuse Allegation*

Local media reported allegations from a staff member that Head Coach Addazio humiliated, denigrated, and intimidated a Black student-athlete over academic issues.<sup>11</sup> The article quotes a staff member as saying, “[T]he incident felt eerily similar to Minneapolis police officers’ treatment of George Floyd before a white officer knelt on the back of Floyd’s neck until he died.” The staff member is also quoted as saying, “In that encounter with the Black student-athlete, Coach Addazio

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<sup>9</sup> “*Hidden in Plain Sight*”: CSU Football Staff Accused of Racial Insensitivity, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, August 8, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> This staff member also reported feeling personally mistreated and intimidated when he called Head Coach Addazio about the incident with the student-athlete.

<sup>11</sup> “*Hidden in Plain Sight*”: CSU Football Staff Accused of Racial Insensitivity, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, August 8, 2020.

had this attitude that he's bigger and more powerful than the student-athlete. The student was enslaved.”

The staff member reiterated his allegations to us, alleging that Head Coach Addazio interrogated and verbally overpowered the student-athlete, swearing and berating the student-athlete up against a fence until he broke down sobbing.<sup>12</sup> The staff member reported feeling afraid of Head Coach Addazio's anger and demeanor, which he characterized as intimidating, threatening, and “in your face.” When asked how close Head Coach Addazio stood to the student-athlete, the staff member alleged that Head Coach Addazio walked back and forth, with the staff member positioning himself between Head Coach Addazio and the student-athlete. The staff member did not allege that Head Coach Addazio ever stood near or touched the student-athlete. The staff member concluded that the student-athlete was humiliated by the experience, which the staff member explained was inextricably linked to the student-athlete's race. In the staff member's view, the student-athlete had no ability to stop the situation or ask Head Coach Addazio to “back off.” Because the student-athlete had no ability to set a boundary or have any kind of power, the conversation, according to the staff member, was “an enslavement” situation.

A different staff member stated that the reporting staff member called him after the meeting and noted that Head Coach Addazio seemed very angry with the student-athlete, which he worried would have a negative effect on the student. One coach stated that Head Coach Addazio declared in a staff meeting that he was going to berate the student-athlete and then bragged about doing so afterwards.

Head Coach Addazio denied the allegations, explaining that he held a socially distanced meeting with the student-athlete in a parking lot to discuss the student-athlete's academic issues. He recalled asking the student-athlete questions about his issues and encouraging him to attend class.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent conversations occurred with the student-athlete and his family to discuss a plan for the student-athlete to improve academically. Head Coach Addazio recalled that Coach Louie Addazio<sup>14</sup> and the staff member were also present at the meeting. Head Coach Addazio denied mistreating the student-athlete during the meeting or bragging about his treatment of the student-athlete afterwards.

Coach Louie Addazio recalled that the meeting took place outdoors at a football practice field and lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. The group stood in a socially distanced circle, with the student-athlete standing near his bicycle next to a cement barrier. According to Coach Louie Addazio, no one moved closer toward the student-athlete during the meeting. He recalled that the primary focus of the conversation was about the student-athlete's goals and life choices and not throwing away any opportunities. He reported that Head Coach Addazio encouraged the student-athlete to stay in school and obtain his degree. Head Coach Addazio also stressed that the student-athlete was always welcome on the team. According to Coach Louie Addazio, the student-athlete

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<sup>12</sup> The staff member stated the meeting occurred next to the fence in front of the football field.

<sup>13</sup> Specific details about the conversation with the student-athlete have been omitted to respect the student-athlete's privacy.

<sup>14</sup> Coach Louie Addazio is Head Coach Addazio's son.

was crying during the meeting but there was no cursing or angry or threatening behavior; everyone present was sad and upset. Coach Louie Addazio also denied that the student-athlete meeting, or what occurred during the meeting, was discussed at a staff meeting.

The student-athlete in question denied that Head Coach Addazio “laid into him” during the meeting. He recalled feeling “numb” and “like crap” during the conversation but stated that Head Coach Addazio “never got in his face.” The student-athlete reported feeling able to leave the meeting at any time and stated that Head Coach Addazio remained socially distanced throughout the meeting. The student-athlete noted that “a lot of people” have been telling him “it was wrong the way that it happened.” He did not, however, express any concerns about the tone or substance of the meeting. The student-athlete stated he did not feel threatened or intimidated at all during the meeting.

### Former Football Coaching Staff

Numerous witnesses raised allegations of racial insensitivity and mistreatment by former Head Football Coach Bobo, and nine members of his football coaching staff. The allegations predominantly related to racially insensitive comments and jokes. Although many witnesses disputed the allegations of a racially insensitive culture, many current and former players and staff who participated in the investigation alleged that a racially insensitive climate existed in the football program under Coach Bobo’s leadership.

Coach Bobo disputes the allegations of racial insensitivity or harassment. He identified that he treats everyone with respect and dignity, and he stated that he does not accept racial intolerance within his football program. Coach Bobo expressed that he felt hurt when he learned of these allegations. Coach Bobo denied that he made any comments or statements in a racially derogatory manner.

### *Use of the Term “Boy”*

Numerous student-athletes and staff members witnessed Coach Bobo and a former assistant coach routinely refer to players, especially Black players, as “boy.”<sup>15</sup> One staff member who witnessed Coach Bobo using the term expressed his view that Coach Bobo was not racist, but he was racially insensitive. A different staff member, who is White, explained that the term was used with both White and Black players, and he did not interpret it as a racial term. In contrast, one student-athlete and one staff member both explained that although the former assistant coach used the term with players of both races, Black players were more impacted by its use due to the term’s racist history.

One current player, who is Black, stated that the assistant coach referred to him as a “cow” in addition to calling him “boy.” A second current player alleged that the former assistant coach asked him and other Black teammates if they wanted watermelon and Kool-Aid.

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<sup>15</sup> Witnesses were largely in agreement that the assistant coach used the term. Coach Bobo’s use of the term was also corroborated, albeit by fewer witnesses. Very few witnesses stated that they did not witness one or both coaches use the term.

Several witnesses who confirmed the former assistant coach's use of the term stated that he stopped using the term after a small group of players confronted him about its use. One coach recalled that the former assistant coach spoke with his defensive coaching staff and instructed them not to use the term. Athletic Director Parker stated that he addressed use of the term "boy" with Coach Bobo once he was made aware of its use and instructed Coach Bobo to address the situation.

### *Coach Bobo: Racial Incidents*

Multiple allegations were raised, separate and apart from use of the term "boy," regarding Coach Bobo and his propensity for making racially insensitive comments. A current player stated Coach Bobo was a "funny guy" who was prone to tell inappropriate jokes.<sup>16</sup>

One staff member alleged that Coach Bobo referred to a Black player as a "thug" when discussing his drug use. According to this staff member, Coach Bobo told him "you don't have to be a thug all your life, you know – maybe it's time to stop being a thug." No other witnesses corroborated this allegation. Coach Bobo denied referring to any player as a "thug" and stated he does not use the word "thug" to describe any of his players. Coach Bobo could not recall this alleged conversation.

One former player alleged that Coach Bobo told the team on several occasions "I know a lot of you guys don't have fathers but when you are here, I can be your daddy." This statement was confirmed by multiple players and staff members. One former player stated that he informed Athletic Director Parker about the comment. Athletic Director Parker denied receiving such a report.

Coach Bobo stated that he informs players and their families that they will become part of the football program's family. In conversations with parents, Coach Bobo informs parents that he will treat their sons like his own children. Coach Bobo denied informing players that he was going to replace their parents, and he denied ever using the term "daddy." Coach Bobo stated he works with the players' families to provide support to his players.

One staff member alleged that Coach Bobo told a Black player to "smile for us so we can have some light" when the lights unexpectedly went out during a team meeting. He stated that people laughed uncomfortably, yet nothing was done about it. One current player and coach did not recall Coach Bobo making the comment. However, three players and two staff members stated they were present when the comment was made. Athletic Director Parker denied knowing about this incident. Coach Bobo denied making this comment.

Several staff members alleged that Coach Bobo once commented about a Black female staff member's hair, asking her "is that a weave, or is that yours?" Two current students confirmed witnessing the statement, whereas one coach could not recall the comment.

Coach Bobo denied making this specific comment. He recalled a situation when a Black female staff member took the previous day off work to get her hair done, and the next day he saw the staff

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<sup>16</sup> The player did not provide examples of the inappropriate jokes.

member wearing a hat. Coach Bobo recalled asking her why she covered her hair with a hat after getting her hair done the previous day. Coach Bobo stated he did not intend to embarrass the staff member or make her feel uncomfortable. The Black female staff member stated Coach Bobo never made any racially insensitive comments to her. She stated Coach Bobo gave her days off of work to get her hair done and once asked her why she was wearing a hat after one of her days off. The staff member did not feel this comment was inappropriate in any way. The staff member stated Coach Bobo has been nothing but great to her and was the most supportive Coach she has ever worked for.

One staff member alleged that Coach Bobo told one of his coaches “the next time I hire a black assistant, I need to get one with a black wife.” One coach stated he did not recall the comment. A staff member stated that she witnessed the comment, which everyone took as a joke. A third staff member witnessed the comment but explained that Coach Bobo was simply trying to increase diversity. Athletic Director Parker stated that he did not hear the comment but recalled that Coach Bobo may have said something to him about the comment after it was made.

Coach Bobo recalled making this specific comment. According to Coach Bobo, the football program was hosting a group of recruits and he wanted to make sure that the program displayed diversity at its events. However, several of the minority women that usually attend the events were unavailable that weekend. For this reason, Coach Bobo told his staff members that he planned to hire a staff member with a Black wife.

Several current and former players disputed the allegations and said Coach Bobo is not a racist, never treated them poorly, and loved all players as equals. A staff member stated that he never observed any of the incidents attributed to Coach Bobo or other coaches in media articles. A second staff member said Coach Bobo was “ahead of the time in showing actions against racism” and supported his players’ desire to kneel during the national anthem.

Coach Bobo admitted to using the term “atta boy” with players of all races. He stated that he even uses the term with his own children. Coach Bobo said that after the issue was brought to his attention, he has attempted to curtail the use of the term.

### *Other Former Coaches*

One current player alleged that a former assistant coach called Black players “bubba” and told them to “farm your own land.” In this player’s view, such comments had a racial undertone and were dehumanizing. A current coach, who is White, recalled hearing the comment but did not interpret it to have racial connotations. Rather, he explained that the phrase was another way of telling the player “do your job” or “you do your job, he’ll do his job, and we’ll all be fine.” A second staff member, who is White, agreed, interpreting the comment to mean “your playing time comes from what you are doing. You are not taking responsibility.”

Several Black players alleged that coaches ignored occasions when their White teammates played a slave scene from *Django Unchained*<sup>17</sup> in the meeting room while laughing and joking. One current player stated that an assistant coach walked into the room and laughed but did not tell them to stop. A second current player said another assistant coach was also present when the movie clip was shown. A third current player recalled the scene being played but not whether coaches were present.

A current player alleged that some of the defensive line coaches were racist. The player, who is White, recalled an assistant coach telling him he was “fucked at birth” because he wasn’t born Black and wasn’t as athletic as his Black teammates.

One former staff member alleged that a former assistant coach made racist comments to him and one of the players. The staff member asserted that many of the players felt reluctant to report to the administration because they believed that nothing would be done to change the behavior.

### Athletic Department Culture

Several witnesses described negative personal experiences within the Athletic Department that reflect racial insensitivity or microaggressions. One staff member, who is a Black woman, said that she was called “aggressive” and “angry” during her performance review. She perceived this to be based on the stereotype of an “angry Black woman.” This same staff member stated that a colleague did not take the September 2019 blackface incident seriously. A different staff member, who is Black, expressed her opinion that she is included in marketing materials solely because of her race, but is excluded from important meetings and engagements.

One member of the football coaching staff stated that the staff should receive more training around working with athletes of color. He observed that a “white savior” mentality exists among some members of the Athletic Department.

One current staff member described intercollegiate athletics as “systemically racist,” noting she is unsure whether it is different or worse at other institutions. A different staff member said she has had numerous conversations with staff who make negative and biased assumptions about the potential academic success of athletes of color. A third coach said diversity is a difficult concept in Fort Collins, making it challenging for her to recruit diverse players because she knows it is a difficult place for persons of color to live.

A different staff member reported that he was very upset with the Athletic Department’s response to racial inequity issues. The staff member explained that, although his office cohort is fairly diverse, they did not talk about national events or racial justice until he raised the issues. This staff

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<sup>17</sup> *Django Unchained* is a 2012 movie. Although the movie was a box office success and received numerous award nominations, it was criticized for its portrayal of African Americans and slavery.

member also stated that he does not support the Together Initiative<sup>18</sup> because he disagreed with how it was rolled out. He noted that the Athletic Department as a whole is not very diverse.

A senior member of the diversity staff stated that he has created a space for students and staff to feel comfortable talking broadly and intentionally around issues of race. As a result, he is aware of reports of students being treated differently due to their race. He also stated that most students or staff have not reported specific personal experiences to him, but that he has rather overheard comments that were “unsettling.”

Other witnesses stated that they have not received concerns from student-athletes about being treated differently based on race. One staff member, who is a woman of color, said that the race-based allegations reported in the media surprised her because she thinks the Athletic Department has a good culture. One staff member, whose child competes on a University intercollegiate athletic team and is Black, stated his child has not relayed experiencing anything that was racially insensitive on the team; but that racial issues at the University more broadly, however, are a different issue. Several student-athletes agreed, commenting on racial issues within the University student body as a whole. One current student-athlete expressed his opinion that the University has not addressed racial issues on campus effectively. He expressed concern that implicit racial bias has become normalized on campus and students have few avenues to engage in open dialogue about racial issues. In his experience, he has only been able to speak out about racial issues when there is a meeting for student-athletes. Moreover, he felt like the topic was only discussed “as a therapy session” and not to effectuate change.

Several witnesses raised concern about Athletic Director Parker’s handling of racial issues within the Athletic Department, especially allegations involving former coaches. One former and one current football player both reported telling Athletic Director Parker about specific racial incidents involving former members of the coaching staff, yet they reported that nothing was done to address their concerns. Numerous witnesses also questioned Athletic Director Parker’s handling of personnel issues associated with the former men’s basketball head coach. A former staff member asserted Athletic Director Parker “would sweep things under the rug” when faced with complaints. One staff member observed that, even though Athletic Director Parker has addressed specific allegations of racial bias, he has not addressed the culture. That same staff member said the Athletic Department has not taken full advantage of the John Mosely leadership program for student-athletes of color. A third staff member stated that he reported concerns to Athletic Director Parker through the “chain of command,” but that nothing has been done to address them. In this staff member’s view, this chronic inaction fosters a culture of nonreporting.

Athletic Director Parker denied that he has not appropriately responded to allegations of racial bias. He stated that he addressed each of the complaints brought to his attention regarding former members of the football coaching staff.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The Athletic Department started the Together Initiative to support diversity and inclusion after George Floyd’s murder.

<sup>19</sup> Although specific allegations involving former members of the coaching staff are not addressed in this report, Athletic Director Parker was interviewed about each alleged incident. He denied having previous knowledge about

## *Student-Athlete Drug Testing*

One staff member alleged that Black players are significantly more likely to be drug tested than their White teammates. As summarized below, this concern was not corroborated by our independent review of the 2018-19 student-athlete drug testing data.

The Senior Associate Athletic Director for Health and Performance described that an independent outside entity manages the selection of student-athletes for testing and the testing of the samples. The Athletic Department provides the outside entity with the athletic team rosters and identifies the number of random tests that it wants administered. According to the Senior Associate Athletic Director for Health and Performance, the Athletic Department does not identify the racial background of the student-athletes to the outside entity. Typically, the random testing occurs every two weeks throughout the fall and spring semesters.

In reviewing this allegation, we requested all testing data from the 2018-19 academic year.<sup>20</sup> We also reviewed the racial breakdown of the Athletic Department during the 2018-19 school year. During the 2018-19 academic year, Black student-athletes amounted to 20 percent (79/398) of the overall student-athlete population. After reviewing the testing data, we calculated that 20 percent (40/199) of the random tests were administered to Black student-athletes.<sup>21</sup> This does not corroborate the staff member's allegation that Black student-athletes were "tested eight-times more" than White student-athletes.

## *Student-Athlete Surveys*

Athletic Director Parker provided access to data collected from student-athletes across all intercollegiate athletic teams over the previous two academic years from year-end surveys. Aggregated survey results for student-athletes who completed the survey reveal: 98.0% of student-athletes report not experiencing stereotyping or homophobia on their team; 96.1% of student-athletes report not personally experiencing racism within their team; and 91.4% believed the Athletic Department stresses the importance of diversity and inclusion.

We reviewed individual student-athlete comments submitted during the surveys and observed no comments that raised issues of racial bias, harassment, or discrimination. One football player reported feeling "racial battle fatigue" after a blackface incident on campus and questioned why none of the coaches reached out to players until Athletic Director Parker "made it mandatory." A student-athlete on the Track and Field team observed that the team needs more staff diversity, while a second student-athlete reported there is "subtle racism" on the team that should be

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several of the allegations. For those incidents about which he had prior knowledge, Athletic Director Parker described addressing the incidents directly with the former coaching staff.

<sup>20</sup> The investigators selected the 2018-19 academic year because the 2019-20 testing process was interrupted by COVID-19.

<sup>21</sup> This calculation did not include student-athletes that were subject to additional drug testing due to sanctioning under the University's Drug Education Testing Policy for a previous positive test result.

addressed. A third Track and Field athlete reported differential rules for playing music in the weight room depending on the athlete's race. While one student-athlete from Softball observed that the Athletic Department "could be better about the importance of inclusion," numerous student-athletes commented positively about the welcoming and inclusive environments on their individual teams.

Athletic Director Parker explained that the student-athlete survey is used as a tool to enhance and develop the intercollegiate athletic programs. He meets with every head coach to review the results in-person, emphasize program strengths and weaknesses, discuss areas for improvement, highlight concerns, and set expectations for behavior. In his experience, the coaches take the student-athlete feedback seriously and genuinely strive to improve.

## Conclusion

Student-athletes, coaches, and other staff who participated in the investigation described a range of personal experiences, both good and bad, within their athletic teams and the Athletic Department. Most of the specific incidents described to us alleging racist comments or racial inequities involved former coaches. These incidents, although in the past, are still resonating with students and staff that are currently at the University.

Witnesses generally did not assert that such conduct was widespread or tolerated by current coaching staff. Importantly, the specific allegations reported in the local media against Head Coach Addazio were not substantiated during the investigation.

Numerous individuals recounted racist incidents involving former coaches and expressed concern that their behavior went unaddressed by Athletic Department leadership at the time. Although those coaches are no longer associated with the University, some witnesses expressed skepticism regarding the Athletic Director's commitment to addressing racial bias incidents and the broader culture within the Athletic Department.

In conclusion, we believe that perceptions of the racial climate on individual teams and within the Athletic Department have been shaped by recent national events and the resulting discourse around racial justice and equity. Student-athletes and staff expressed their collective expectation that the Athletic Department will take meaningful steps to address and eliminate any conduct based on racial bias and stereotypes, or any systemic inequities, which may have been ignored or tolerated in the past.

We recommend that the University work with Athletic Director Parker to create action steps aimed at improving the culture of the Athletic Department. These actions steps should include, at a minimum, the following:

- Develop a system for student-athletes to report concerns to an employee outside of the Athletic Department (e.g., ombudsperson or Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity and Title IX), and actively encourage reporting;
- Continue or supplement diversity and inclusion training University-wide, with a special focus on the Athletics Department, to advance empathy-building, racial sensitivity and cultural understanding; and
- Amplify the University's policy statement against retaliation within the Athletic Department.