



RunRepeat



Racial Bias in Football Commentary

Research Study Findings

In association with the Professional Footballers' Association, RunRepeat has conducted a study on racial bias within football commentary. This is the first time that research of this kind has been conducted within the game to understand if there is a difference in the way that commentators talk about players of different skin tones.

80 games from the 2019/20 season were reviewed from four of Europe's top leagues - Italian Serie A, Spanish La Liga, French Ligue 1, and the English Premier League. The study analysed 2,073 statements across these matches from commentators speaking in English and working for UK, USA and Canadian media outlets, where they discussed 643 unique players of various skin tones.



Key Findings

The findings show bias from commentators who praised players with lighter skin tones as more intelligent, higher quality and harder working than players with darker skin tones.

Players with darker skin tones were significantly more likely to be reduced to their physical characteristics or athletic abilities - namely pace and power - than those with lighter skin tones.

When commentators were talking about players:

Intelligence:

62.60%

of **praise** was aimed at players with a **lighter skin tone**.

63.33%

of **criticism** was aimed at players with a **darker skin tone**.

Physicality:

6.59x

more likely to talk about players with a **darker skin tone** in reference to **power**.

3.38x

more likely to talk about players with a **darker skin tone** in reference to **speed**.

Work Ethic:

60.40%

of **praise** was aimed at players with a **lighter skin tone**.

Why is this Significant?

Players have been unified in their support of the Black Lives Matter movement, sending a strong message about equality. However, the players themselves still have to navigate systemically racist structures, despite their significant platforms and professional success. This racial bias study makes the nuances of that structure apparent.



We now need everyone in football, including commentators and broadcasters, to consider the part they play in furthering implicit bias towards people with darker skin tones. This must be the moment that we all, collectively, begin to address deep-rooted racial stereotypes. pace and power -- than those with lighter skin tones.

We understand that the commentators may not have intended to further racial stereotypes by sharing their opinions about a player's intelligence or physical attributes during a game. However, the narrative of black people's primary value laying in their physicality and not their intelligence dates back to attitudes modern society is determined to eradicate. While this type of unconscious prejudice has become less overt, even subtle racial bias is damaging, continues a legacy of pain and has long-reaching societal consequences



To address the real impact of structural racism, we have to acknowledge and address racial bias. This study shows an evident bias in how we describe the attributes of footballers based on their skin colour.

Commentators help shape the perception we hold of each player, deepening any racial bias already held by the viewer. It's important to consider how far-reaching those perceptions can be and how they impact footballers even once they finish their playing career. If a player has aspirations of becoming a coach/manager, is an unfair advantage given to players that commentators regularly refer to as intelligent and industrious, when those views appear to be a result of racial bias?



**PFA Equalities Executive,
Jason Lee**



Overview of Methodology

In conducting the research, a common methodology was followed to analyse bias within the sports media based on skin tone. Several studies following this methodology have been undertaken in the past, covering bias in other sports, such as the Olympics, College Basketball, and American Football.

1 Selection of Games:
RunRepeat selected a total of 80 games from four of Europe's top leagues (Italian Serie A, Spanish La Liga, French Ligue 1, and English Premier League) from the 2019/20 season.

2 Transcription:
The commentary from each game was transcribed into a text document. All commentators included in this study were commentating in English for UK, USA and Canadian media outlets.

3 Coding (Categorisation of Comments): Every adjectival phrase was recorded and manually assigned to either a positive (praise) or negative (criticism) category.

4 Player Information and Identification of Race:
RunRepeat designated a player as "lighter skin tone" or a "darker skin tone" based on the skin tone attribute from Football Manager 2020, utilising its extensive database.



In Football Manager 2020, each player has been designated a skin tone value from 1 to 20; 1 being the lightest and 20 the darkest. Separation is needed to create the two groups for comparison within the study. All players with a skin tone value of 1-11 were classified as “players with a lighter skin tone”, and all players with a skin tone value of 12-20 were designated as “players with a darker skin tone.”

By using this method, the researchers are not interpreting the race of players and the study is based purely on skin tone rather than ethnicity or a researcher’s interpretation of what race a person is.

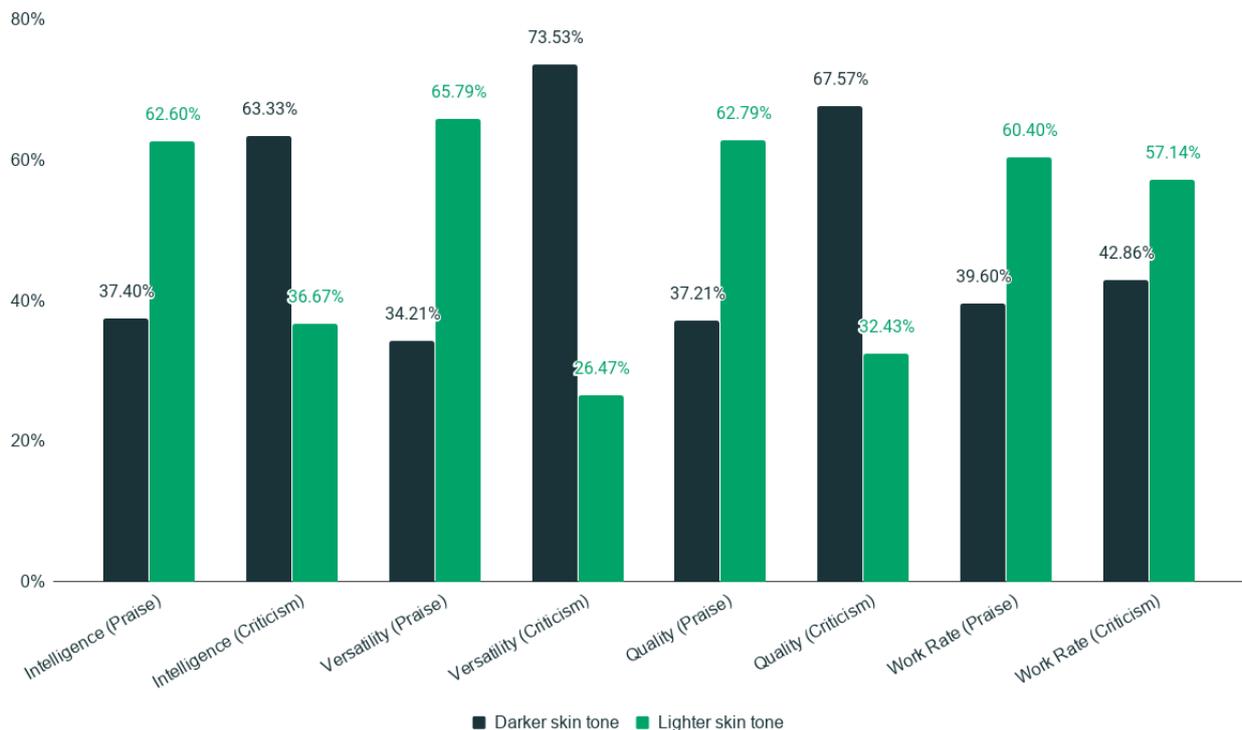
RunRepeat

RunRepeat is a Danish research firm that conducts detailed studies into various sports, with a specific focus on athletic footwear, led by their CEO, running expert and statistician, Jens Jakob Andersen. The company’s research — including ‘The State of Running 2019’, the largest ever study of mass participation running — has been cited in numerous peer-reviewed studies and been featured on the likes of the BBC, New York Times and The Washington Post.



Racial Bias In Football – Results Overview

Split of praise and criticism for each category



When talking about intelligence, versatility and quality, commentators praise players with lighter skin tones and criticise players with darker skin tones.

For more information on the finding of the Racial Bias in Commentary, please visit: <https://runrepeat.com/racial-bias-study-soccer>.