Basketball's March Madness has nothing on the college football bowl frenzy – 34 games over a 19-day period spanning the last month of the old year and the first month of the new one. Let's face it, not all 68 teams deserve to be in a bowl. Some -- including North Carolina State, Kentucky, Bowling Green, Southern Mississippi, Northern Illinois, Notre Dame and Vanderbilt – got invitations after winning only 50 percent of their games.

Even worse, nine teams – including Florida Atlantic and Memphis – are going to bowls after accumulating losing records. Unfortunately, bowl games are no longer rewards for an excellent season. Now, it's all about the money. And the more bowls, the more money.

An oversaturation of bowl games is not my No.1 complaint against college football. Rather, it's the fact that approximately half of the players are African Americans yet only 3.4 percent of the college football coaches are Black. That's four among the 119 major division coaches.

According to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports at Central Florida University, that's the fewest Black coaches in 15 years. As recently as 1997, there were twice as many African American coaches as there are now.

Evidently, the football sidelines suffer from the same on-field racial stereotypes of the past. For years, they said Blacks were excellent players, but didn't have the intellect to play the so-called "thinking positions" – quarterback and middle linebacker. Of course, that was pure hogwash. For years, Grambling, Florida A&M and Tennessee State were football powerhouses and it wasn't because they played 10 men on each side of the ball – or without a coach on the sideline.

And if there were any lingering doubts about the Black gridiron intellect, they were removed by Washington Redskins quarterback Doug Williams' MVP performance in Super Bowl XXII and when two Black head coaches, Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith, paced the sidelines in Super Bowl XLI.

Of the 32 NFL coaches, seven are Black, largely because the league adopted the Rooney Rule requiring teams to interview at least one person of color for all head coach vacancies. If African

Americans can coach in the pros, they certainly can succeed at the college level.

In addition to the failure to interview an ample number of top-flight Black assistant coaches for openings, many universities are still more willing to recycle failed White coaches than take a chance on a promising African American. Two examples immediately come to mind.

Auburn University hired Gene Chizik as its new head coach after he went 5-19 over two seasons at Iowa State, including 10 straight losses. Meanwhile, the University of Tennessee, eager to get back on the winning track after forcing out Phillip Fulmer, hired another losing coach, Lane Kiffin, formerly of the Oakland Raiders. Kiffin was fired by the NFL team after compiling a record of 5-15.

These two losers were hired while promising African American coaches were ignored, some of whom had turned around losing programs. For example, Turner Gill took over a program at Buffalo that had not won five games in a season for nearly a decade. Within three years he turned it into Mid-American Conference champion and this year had a record of 8-5.

When Auburn selected Gene Chizik over Gill, one of its most famous alums, Charles Barkley, was livid.

“I think race was the No. 1 factor,” said Barkley. “You can say it’s not about race, but you can’t compare the two resumes and say [Chizik] deserved the job. Out of all the coaches they interviewed, Chizik probably had the worst resume.”

How do we put an end to this nonsense? One approach would be to adopt a college version of the Rooney Rule. Some have suggested calling it the Robinson Rule, in honor of Doug Williams’ former coach, Eddie Robinson of Grambling. For that to work, however, penalties must be assessed against universities that fail to cooperate.

A sure-fire way of forcing change would be for star high school players and their parents to spurn athletic programs that spurn Black leadership. If players refuse to enroll in universities that have never hired a Black head coach in any sport or an African American athletic director at any time, universities would finally get the message. What I like about this approach is that it empowers the athlete and does not rely on the so-called good will of schools eager to exploit Black athletes.

Five bowls – the Rose, Orange, Fiesta, Sugar, and BCS championship game – will each generate $17 million for schools and their respective conferences. If Blacks stop playing for schools that refuse to hire African Americans in leadership positions, that would lessen the chances of universities getting a share of that lucrative pie. With so much money in jeopardy, universities will be forced to do the right thing.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.