

Racism in Sports: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Racism in sport is a global phenomenon that continues to persist and manifests in various forms, impacting athletes, the sporting environment, and social interactions. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of racism in sport through a systematic literature review. The research method used a systematic literature review with PRISMA 2020 guidelines through the SCOPUS database using the keywords "racism", "racial discrimination", "sport", and "athlete". From 925 initial documents, after a screening process based on the last five years (2021-2026), English language, open access, and content suitability, 25 articles were obtained for thematic analysis. The results identified three main themes: (1) skin-based racism (44% of articles) manifested through stereotypes, limited facilities, and excessive surveillance of non-white athletes; (2) social racism (28% of articles) that develops through social media and institutional practices with the emergence of subtle forms (aversive racism); (3) specific forms of racism (28% of articles) including verbal abuse, intimidation, institutional discrimination, and normalization through jokes. Thirty-two percent of articles highlighted social media as a primary platform for racism, while the Black Lives Matter movement has been a form of resistance, although its effectiveness remains debated. The study's conclusions indicate that racism in sport remains a persistent global challenge, both directly and through social media. Raising awareness, anti-racism education, stricter enforcement, structural policy changes, and social support are needed to create an inclusive and equitable sporting environment for all stakeholders.

Keywords: Racism; sports; racial discrimination; athlete; social media

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Introduction

Racism in sport is a global phenomenon that continues to attract academic attention due to its significant impact on athletes' social relationships, the sporting environment, and interethnic interactions (Prabowo et al., 2022). Racial discrimination is experienced not only by athletes but also by sports supporters through various forms of social treatment in modern sport (Steblianko et al., 2022). Sport is supposed to serve as a means of social unification regardless of race or cultural background; however, symbols and practices that fuel social conflict continue to emerge in sporting activities (Turkay & Yildirim, 2022). Sport can also be a space where certain ethnic groups experience exclusion, which impacts athletes' identities and social solidarity (Caldwell, 2023).

Power structures within professional sports can create an environment that allows racism and unequal treatment of minority athletes (Newman et al., 2022). Historically, the issue of racism in sports has been a concern since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when Black athletes such as Muhammad Ali and Tommie Smith used the sporting stage to speak out against racial injustice. This development has continued into the contemporary era, where the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has become a significant form of resistance against racism, particularly in South Africa and other parts of the world (Hylton, 2021; Swart & Maralack, 2021).

However, despite decades of anti-racism initiatives, discrimination and inequality persist, even evolving into new, more subtle and difficult-to-identify forms (Doidge et al., 2024). This phenomenon demonstrates that racism in sport is not a problem of the past, but rather a contemporary challenge that requires a deeper understanding and a comprehensive approach. The contemporary challenge of addressing racism in sport is further complicated by the emergence of social media as a new platform for the spread of hate speech and racial discrimination (Kearns et al., 2023; Vanetik & Mimoun, 2022).

Studies show that racism is no longer always seen as overt and violent acts, but often manifests in subtle forms (aversive racism) that occur, for example, on social media (Doidge et al., 2024). Furthermore, some sports authorities still consider racist acts to be commonplace, reinforcing the normalization of discrimination in sport (Devís-Devís et al., 2021; Mashigo et al., 2025). The cases of Azeem Rafiq, who revealed his racist experiences at Yorkshire County Cricket Club in 2021 (Dart, 2023), and Vinicius Junior, who experienced racism in the Spanish league (Villar Cirujano et al., 2024), are clear evidence that racism remains entrenched in the world of sport.

Skin-based discrimination is also evident in education, sporting culture, and social policies influenced by dominant white norms (Swain et al., 2025). Non-white university students in the UK often experience subtle forms of racial discrimination that are difficult to identify and prove (Ward et al., 2024). To comprehensively understand the phenomenon of racism in sport, an adequate theoretical framework is required. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a relevant critical perspective, emphasizing that racism is not an anomaly but a permanent and structural part of society (Howe et al., 2023; Lin, 2023).

CRT argues that race remains a fundamental organizing principle in social institutions, including sports, and that racial discrimination is often institutionalized through seemingly

neutral policies and practices. In the context of sports, CRT helps explain why non-White athletes continue to face stereotypes, prejudice, and unequal treatment, and why anti-racism efforts often fail to address the structural roots of these issues (Hill et al., 2024). The application of CRT to sports research allows for a deeper analysis of how power, White privilege, and institutional structures contribute to the perpetuation of racism, as well as how resistance to racism can be effectively pursued.

Although research on racism in sport has grown rapidly in recent years, significant gaps remain in the existing literature. Most studies tend to focus on individual cases or specific sports without providing a comprehensive synthesis of the manifestations of racism across different sports and geographic contexts. Furthermore, although social media has been identified as a significant platform for the spread of racism, little research has systematically examined how racism develops and manifests through these digital platforms (Kearns et al., 2023).

Similarly, research on the effectiveness of anti-racism interventions and the psychological impact of racism on athletes remains limited (Salerno et al., 2023; Wing et al., 2024). This gap highlights the need for a systematic literature review that can identify patterns of racism across sports, understand its development over time, and evaluate effective response strategies. Based on the background and research gaps outlined, this study is formulated with the following questions: What forms of racism emerge in the world of sport based on the literature review? How does racism impact athletes and the sporting environment? How has racism evolved in sport over time, particularly with the advent of social media? What response strategies have been implemented, and how effective are they?

The purpose of this study is to analyze the phenomenon of racism in sport through a comprehensive literature review, focusing on identifying the forms of racism, their impact on athletes, their development in the digital age, and effective countermeasures. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of racism in sport through a systematic synthesis of 25 peer-reviewed articles published in the last five years (2021-2026). Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on specific aspects, this study offers a structured framework for categorizing manifestations of racism in sport into three main themes: skin-based racism, social racism, and forms of racism.

Furthermore, this study identifies social media as an emerging critical platform for racial discrimination and demonstrates the gap between anti-racism declarations and actual practices on the ground. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for sport stakeholders, including sport organizations, policymakers, media professionals, and social media platforms, to create a more inclusive and equitable sporting environment. Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of knowledge in the field of sport sociology but also provides practical implications for efforts to eradicate racism in sport globally.

Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility in the literature selection and synthesis

process (Page et al., 2021). The SLR method was chosen because it allows for the systematic and comprehensive identification, evaluation, and synthesis of empirical evidence on racism in sport (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The literature search was conducted in January 2026 through the Scopus database, chosen for its broad coverage in the social sciences and sport (Zhu et al., 2024).

An additional search was conducted using a snowballing technique by searching the reference lists of identified articles. The search strategy used a combination of keywords and Boolean operators: (("racism" OR "racial discrimination" OR "racial bias" OR "ethnic discrimination" OR "prejudice") AND ("sport" OR "sports" OR "athlete" OR "football" OR "soccer" OR "cricket" OR "rugby")). The use of varied keywords aimed to capture articles discussing various aspects of racism in various sports (Kearns et al., 2023; Sandberg et al., 2024). Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals; published between January 2021 and January 2026; written in English; available in open access; empirical or conceptual studies that address racism in the context of sport. Exclusion criteria included conference abstracts, book reviews, editorials; non-English language publications; studies outside the context of sport; studies that do not directly address racism; and duplicate publications.

The five-year timeframe was chosen based on the significant development of the issue of racism in sports following the Black Lives Matter movement and the increasing attention paid to racism in social media (Black et al., 2024; Doidge et al., 2024; Mashigo et al., 2025). The selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 flowchart with four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). The initial Scopus search yielded 925 documents. During the screening stage, the number of documents was limited by publication year (the last five years) to 437 documents, followed by the journal article type to 273 articles.

Furthermore, articles were restricted to English and open access, resulting in 100 articles. At the eligibility stage, an assessment was conducted based on the appropriateness of the title and abstract, resulting in 60 articles. At the inclusion stage, a full-text review was conducted, resulting in 25 eligible articles. The entire selection process was conducted independently by two researchers, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion with a third researcher. Methodological quality assessment was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 by two researchers independently (Hong et al., 2018). MMAT was chosen for its ability to assess studies with various designs (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) commonly found in the sports literature (Kearns et al., 2023).

This instrument consists of five criteria for each study design category. No studies were excluded based on quality assessment, but quality scores are reported for transparency. Inter-rater reliability demonstrated good agreement (Cohen's Kappa $\kappa = 0.82$). Data extraction was conducted using a structured form that included bibliographic information, study characteristics, research objectives, key findings, forms of racism, impacts, and coping strategies. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the extracted data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis process was conducted in six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme discovery, theme review, theme definition, and report writing.

A hybrid (inductive-deductive) approach was used in coding, with themes guided by the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework and emerging data (Howe et al., 2023). Two

researchers independently engaged in coding, and NVivo 14 software was used to assist with data management. From this process, three main themes emerged: skin racism, social racism, and forms of racism. Several steps were taken to minimize the risk of bias. Publication bias was addressed by searching across multiple sources. Language bias was recognized as a limitation due to the restriction to English-language articles. Selection bias was minimized by clear inclusion criteria and the involvement of two independent researchers. Reporting bias was addressed by transparently reporting all findings. A risk of bias assessment for each study was conducted using the MMAT and reported to provide context for interpretation (Hong et al., 2018).

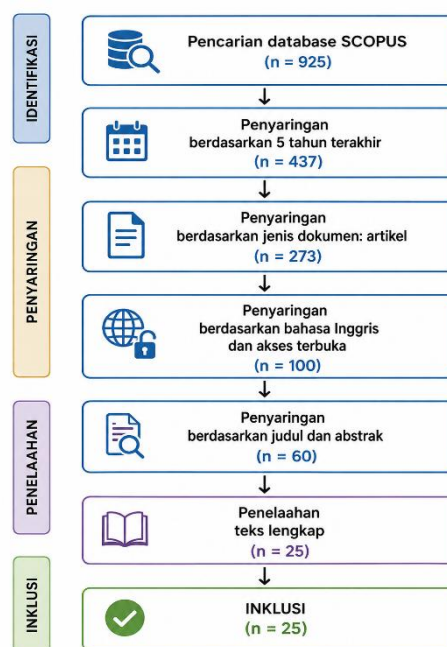


Diagram 1. PRISMA Flowchart

Results

Based on a selection process following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, 25 articles met the inclusion criteria for analysis. The characteristics of the included studies showed diversity in terms of research design, sport, and geographic location. Of the 25 articles, 15 (60%) used a qualitative approach, 6 (24%) used a quantitative approach, and 4 (16%) used mixed methods. The geographic distribution showed that most studies were conducted in Western countries, with the United Kingdom (8 articles), Australia (5 articles), Spain (3 articles), and the United States (3 articles) as the most dominant research locations, while the remainder were spread across South Africa, Canada, Germany, Brazil, Sweden, Norway, and Costa Rica. The most frequently studied sport was football (soccer) with 12 articles, followed by cricket (3 articles), Australian rules football (AFL) (2 articles), and other sports (rugby, motor racing, university athletics) as well as multi-sport studies (8 articles).

Based on the results of the quality assessment using MMAT, all articles showed adequate methodological quality with scores ranging from 6 to 10 out of 10. A total of 18 articles (72%) obtained a score of 8-10 (high quality), 5 articles (20%) obtained a score of 6-7 (moderate

quality), and 2 articles (8%) were conceptual/reflective articles assessed with a different but still relevant approach. Thematic analysis of the 25 included articles resulted in three main themes representing manifestations of racism in sports: (1) skin racism identified in 11 articles (44%); (2) social racism identified in 7 articles (28%); and (3) forms of racism identified in 7 articles (28%). In addition to the three main themes, the analysis also identified four cross-cutting themes that emerged from the articles: social media as a platform for racism (8 articles, 32%), the normalization of institutional racism (6 articles, 24%), resistance movements such as BLM (4 articles, 16%), and the psychological impact on athletes (5 articles, 20%). The complete distribution and characteristics of the articles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of characteristics and findings of reviewed articles

No	Author (Year)	Country	Sport	Design	Main Theme	Key Findings	MMAT Score
1	Takano et al. (2021)	Japan	Multi-sport	Observational	Social	Racism fueled by online news	7/10
2	Smith & Martin (2023)	US	University Sports	Critical Analysis	Skin	Black athletes feel unsafe and unsupported	8/10
3	Mashigo et al. (2025)	Europe	Football	Qualitative Exploratory	Skin	Discrimination related to policies dominated by white leaders	9/10
4	Cleland (2024)	English/Australia	Football	Reflective/Commentary	Skin	The presence of white people can trigger expressions of racism	6/10
5	Kovač (2025)	Europe/Africa	Football	Ethnography	Skin	Racial constructions in football player migration	9/10
6	Villar Cirujano et al. (2024)	Spanish	Football	Descriptive-Comparative	Form	Racism against Vinicius Junior was driven by hatred	8/10
7	Tintori et al. (2021)	Italy	Multi-sport	National Survey	Form	The weak relationship between sport and pedagogy fuels racism	8/10
8	Vadeboncoeur (2023)	US	Racing car	Narrative	Skin	Black identity shifts the perspective of geography from racist to a space of belonging.	9/10
9	Swart & Maralack (2021)	South Africa	Cricket	Narrative	Form	The impact of racism in cricket can lead to death	8/10
10	Rodriguez Alvarez (2025)	Costa Rica	Football	Descriptive-Analytical	Form	Understanding racial exclusion can restore nationalism	7/10
11	Morgan & Wilk (2022)	Australia	Multi-sport	Descriptive-Interpretive	Social	RAP as a mitigation of racism in Australian sport	8/10
12	MacLeod & Newall (2022)	Australia	AFL	Quantitative Content Analysis	Skin	Racial bias in match commentary against non-white players	9/10
13	Washington et al. (2025)	Canada	Football	Qualitative	Skin	Non-black coaches compare black athletes in cultural identity	9/10
14	Devís-Devís et al. (2021)	Spanish	Football	Qualitative Exploratory	Form	The referee considered racism towards Moroccan players as normal.	8/10

15	Dur et al. (2023)	Norway	Football	Field Experiment	Social	Email intervention raises coaches' awareness of racism	10/10
16	Sandberg et al. (2024)	Sweden	Multi-sport	Qualitative Exploratory	Form	Racist jokes have a negative impact on teenagers	8/10
17	Doidge et al. (2024)	English	Football	Digital Discourse Analysis	Social	Aversive racism appears on social media in subtle forms	9/10
18	Kemble (2026)	Australia	Multi-sport	Mixed Methods	Skin	White people's involvement in racism on social media	9/10
19	Black et al. (2024)	English	Football	Qualitative Thematic Analysis	Skin	The "Cultural Marxism" conspiracy is used to criticize anti-racism protests.	9/10
20	Hylton (2021)	US/UK	Multi-sport	Conceptual	Skin/Social	BLM impacts sports institutions but changes remain symbolic	7/10
21	Van Sterkenburg et al. (2021)	Dutch	Multi-sport	Descriptive Qualitative	Social	Dutch media considers race/ethnicity a non-issue	8/10
22	Velija & Silvani (2021)	English	Football	Qualitative	Skin	White coaches engage in bullying and position themselves as outsiders	8/10
23	Wing et al. (2024)	US	Multi-sport	Qualitative Content Analysis	Skin	The perception that black athletes are immune to disease influences clinical care.	9/10
24	Hertting & Molnár (2025)	Sweden	Football	Qualitative Interpretive	Social	Racism via social media against Jimmy Durmaz	8/10
25	Ejekwumadu (2025)	West Africa	Football	Qualitative Ethnography	Form	African players are judged on physical rather than cognitive abilities	9/10

Eleven articles (44%) discussed skin-based racism as a persistent form of discrimination in sports. Findings indicate that systemic racism continues to create an unsafe and detrimental environment for Black athletes due to the dominance of White leadership and cultural expression within sporting institutions, often reinforced by racially biased policies (Cleland, 2024; Hylton, 2021; Kovač, 2025; Mashigo et al., 2025; Smith & Martin, 2023). Smith & Martin, 2023 found that racism at Brigham Young University was so blatant that Black athletes felt unsafe and unsupported.

In Australia, MacLeod & Newall, 2022, revealed that non-White players in the AFL experienced racial bias directed at their physical abilities in match commentary. Black athletes also faced excessive scrutiny and unfair treatment. Magistro & Wack, 2023, found that Black American football players were perceived negatively by Whites due to the number of fouls they received. In Brazil, De Jesus et al., 2023, reported that over 60% of Brazilian elementary school students had more limited sporting facilities based on race. Nobis & Lazaridou, 2023, showed that racism in Germany hinged on the principle of competition between Black and White players, which was based on both intentional and unintentional racist attributions.

Skin-based racism also affects women and other minority groups. (Ashdown-Franks & Joseph, 2021) found that Black women use running and social media to combat stigma and

discrimination based on their bodies and race. (Ratna, 2026) revealed that Black female soccer players face racial discrimination and unfair scrutiny in sporting environments. (Alexander & Carter, 2022) showed that darker skin tones mean women are more likely to experience higher levels of discrimination and psychological distress than men. Similarly, (Şengün et al., 2022) found that in the games Street Fighter V and Tekken 7, female and dark-skinned characters are more often portrayed stereotypically than lighter-skinned male characters.

Griffin & Harrison (2023) highlighted that race, religion, and sport allow scholars to uncover the relative neglect of Black lives in contemporary society. Seven articles (28%) addressed social racism as manifested through social interactions, media representations, and institutional practices. Findings suggest that racism in sport emerges through verbal abuse and subtle behaviors on social media, often originating from online news reports (Doidge et al., 2024; Hertting & Molnár, 2025; Takano et al., 2021). Takano et al. (2021) found that racism perpetrated by some individuals clearly originates from online news reports.

(Doidge et al. 2024) revealed that racism is no longer always seen as a violent act, but often appears in a subtle form (aversive racism) on social media. (Hertting & Molnár, 2025) showed that racism is not only through direct words, but also through social media in the case of Jimmy Durmaz at the 2018 World Cup.

Research also reveals systemic bias in sports management. (Dur et al., 2023) found that of 500 Norwegian football head coaches, respondents with familiar names were significantly more positive than those with unfamiliar names about reducing racism in society. (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2021) showed that some Dutch media outlets considered race/ethnicity a non-issue, while others acknowledged the lack of racial diversity in sports media.

Morgan & Wilk, 2022, revealed that sporting organizations in Australia act as advocates for social justice, and the Reconciliation Action Plan mitigates racism in sport. Social racism is also linked to the safety and security of sporting events. Nagy, 2023, found that increased enforcement of rules and prevention of illegal behavior such as racism are needed to improve the safety of sporting events. Salerno et al., 2023, showed that racist micro-aggressions and LGBTQ-phobia significantly increase psychological distress in university students. Vanetik & Mimoun, 2022, found that racism increases due to the limited availability of specialized datasets for automatically detecting racist language.

Other issues related to social racism include the representation of Indigenous peoples in global sports. (Šavelková, 2024) found that Indigenous peoples' representation in the Olympics remains limited by rules such as the prohibition of protests as they fight for sovereignty. (Bishop et al., 2024) showed that the recognition of the Negro Leagues in media coverage aims to correct history but can create tension between statistics and past racism. (Kar et al., 2023) revealed that racism in cricket has become a major media focus and sparked unrest among cricket fans. (Khakhalkina & Munko, 2022) showed that the 2021 Tokyo Olympics in Europe were fueled by pandemic fears and exacerbated racist trauma due to hostility towards Asian players and a crisis in fair play values.

Seven articles (28%) discussed specific forms of racism in sport. Findings suggest that racism in sport is a complex phenomenon driven by personal hatred toward specific players, such as that experienced by Vinicius Junior (Villar Cirujano et al., 2024), as well as systemic inequalities and weak pedagogical relationships in educational settings (Tintori et al., 2021).

Villar Cirujano et al., 2024, revealed that the racism experienced by Real Madrid player Vinicius Junior was caused by the perpetrator's hatred toward the player. The impact of these racist practices is devastating, and in certain sports, such as cricket, has been reported to result in death (Swart & Maralack, 2021).

Racism is often normalized by match officials, such as referee abuse of Moroccan players (Devís-Devís et al., 2021), or disguised through jokes that still negatively impact the victims (Sandberg et al., 2024). Devís-Devís et al. (2021) found that Spanish football referees considered aggression and verbal abuse toward Moroccan players normal. (Sandberg et al., 2024) revealed that racist remarks turned into jokes can actually be negative and cause harm. Furthermore, there is a cognitive bias where players from certain regions, such as West Africa, tend to be judged on their physical abilities rather than their intelligence (Ejkwumadu, 2025).

(Ejkwumadu, 2025) shows that football in West Africa is largely judged on physical rather than cognitive ability, and opportunities for talented, smaller players are limited. To address this, a deeper understanding of racial exclusion is needed so that the sport can once again become a positive symbol of national identity (Rodriguez Alvarez, 2025). Other forms of racism include the frequent experiences of Jewish fans with anti-Semitism in football, including serious Holocaust-related taunts (Poulton, 2024). Migrant and Afghan women in Iran face barriers to sport due to the need for inclusion and equal access to sport (Phipps et al., 2025).

Laws are stricter in addressing racial issues but weaker in protecting victims of sexual violence (Radics & Abidin, 2022). In South Africa, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, with its kneeling gesture, was used to address racism in sports (Andrew, 2023). Racism remains prevalent in football and needs to be addressed by raising awareness, challenging stereotypes, and embracing diversity in the sport (De Melo, 2024). The Argentine national rugby team paid tribute to the death of Diego Maradona and racist incidents involving several athletes, including captain Pablo Matera (De Araujo & Giglio, 2022). Racism in sport has persisted for years and requires a solution (Goicochea Elías, 2022).

Feminist activism plays a crucial role in challenging injustice in sports, often facing resistance and pressure (Ahmad et al., 2025). Furthermore, Donald Trump's discriminatory language and narratives are considered to reinforce racial stereotypes against minority groups in society (Kadim, 2022). AI-based systems in sports also have the potential to harbor racial and gender biases that can influence the selection, assessment, and treatment of athletes from certain groups (Kekez et al., 2025). The analysis also identified four cross-cutting themes that emerged from the articles. First, social media as a platform for racism (8 articles, 32%), indicating that digital platforms have become a primary vehicle for the emergence of racism, xenophobia, and ethnic stereotypes against people of color, although platforms such as TikTok and YouTube are also used to express experiences of discrimination through humor (Fuller, 2025; Kearns et al., 2023; Leppanen & Westinen, 2022; Matsuda-Rivero, 2025; Yang et al., 2025).

The use of popular hashtags in news articles emphasizes the seriousness of racism through humorous means (Gutsche et al., 2022). Social normalization and empathy are ineffective in reducing harassment (Whiley et al., 2023). Female journalists are frequently targeted by online attacks with racist content and disinformation (Al-Rawi, 2023). Attempts to

condemn racist humor in the media can actually reinforce discriminatory views, making constructive dialogue difficult (Acosta, 2025). Second, the institutional normalization of racism (6 articles, 24%) indicates that some sports authorities still consider racist acts commonplace (Devís-Devís et al., 2021; Mashigo et al., 2025).

Third, resistance movements such as BLM (4 articles, 16%) show that this movement is a form of resistance against racism, particularly in South Africa (Hylton, 2021; Swart & Maralack, 2021). However, (Black et al., 2024) found that the conspiracy theory "Cultural Marxism" was used in online discussions to criticize anti-racism protests (taking a knee) at Euro 2020, and 1,388 tweets stated that the taking a knee protest was anti-white. Fourth, the psychological impact on athletes (5 articles, 20%) showed that racism causes significant psychological distress and mental health problems for minority athletes (Mulipola et al., 2024; Salerno et al., 2023; Wing et al., 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study align with Critical Race Theory (CRT), which asserts that racism is a permanent and structural part of society (Howe et al., 2023; Lin, 2023). The persistence of skin-based racism found in 44% of the reviewed articles confirms CRT's central thesis that race remains a fundamental organizing principle in social institutions, including sports. Findings of the dominance of white leadership in sports institutions (Cleland, 2024; Mashigo et al., 2025) confirm CRT's concept of whiteness as property, where white privilege is institutionalized through organizational policies and practices.

Furthermore, the identification of aversive racism on social media (Doidge et al., 2024) reflects CRT's attention to subtle and normalized forms of discrimination that are difficult to identify and challenge. The normalization of racism by match officials (Devís-Devís et al., 2021) and the turning of racism into jokes (Sandberg et al., 2024) also reflect the CRT concept of racial microaggressions—daily insults that accumulate and significantly impact victims' mental health. Social media has emerged as a critical platform for racism in sport, with 32% of reviewed articles specifically addressing this phenomenon.

Findings indicate that digital platforms have become a primary vehicle for the perpetuation of racism, xenophobia, and ethnic stereotyping (Fuller, 2025; Kearns et al., 2023; Matsuda-Rivero, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). This is because the anonymity of social media allows perpetrators to express racist views without immediate social consequences, while platform algorithms often amplify inflammatory content, including hate speech, to increase user engagement. The global reach of social media means racist abuse can reach athletes from anywhere and at any time, creating a persistently unsafe environment.

Findings about female journalists being targeted online with racist content and disinformation (Al-Rawi, 2023) demonstrate a significant gender dimension to racism on social media. The use of popular hashtags to emphasize the seriousness of racism through humorous means (Gutsche et al., 2022) demonstrates a new dynamic in which racism and resistance to it are often mediated through humor and irony. However, efforts to condemn racist humor in the media can actually reinforce discriminatory views, making constructive dialogue difficult (Acosta, 2025). This highlights the complexity of addressing racism in the digital age.

One of the most concerning findings is the normalization of racism by sports authorities and institutions (Devís-Devís et al., 2021; Mashigo et al., 2025). Spanish football referees considered abuse of Moroccan players normal, indicating that racism has become part of the institutional culture of sport. This aligns with the CRT concept of institutional racism—discrimination embedded in organizational policies, procedures, and practices, making it appear neutral or invisible. This normalization has serious implications because when perpetrators and victims perceive racist acts as normal, it is difficult to challenge and change such behavior.

Mashigo et al. (2025) showed that racial discrimination in European football is linked to policy changes by predominantly white and male equality leaders. This reflects structural determinism, where existing power structures limit the possibility of meaningful change. The finding (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2021) that some Dutch media outlets treat race/ethnicity as a non-issue suggests that refusing to acknowledge racism is part of its perpetuation mechanism. Twenty percent of the articles reviewed discussed the psychological impact of racism on athletes. Findings indicate that racism causes significant psychological distress and mental health problems (Mulipola et al., 2024; Salerno et al., 2023; Wing et al., 2024).

Salerno et al. (2023) found that racist micro-aggressions and LGBTQ-phobia significantly increased psychological distress in college students. Wing et al. (2024) revealed that the perception of Black athletes as immune to disease impacted their clinical care. Washington et al. (2025) found that Black athletes in Canada face unfair scrutiny and judgment from non-Black coaches. This suggests that sports organizations need to develop psychological support mechanisms that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of minority athletes. Resistance movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) have emerged as significant forms of resistance to racism in sports (Hylton, 2021; Swart & Maralack, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of this movement remains debated. Hylton (2021) questions whether the changes are truly systemic or merely symbolic. Black et al. (2024) found that the conspiracy theory "Cultural Marxism" was used in online discussions to criticize anti-racism protests at Euro 2020, suggesting that resistance movements often face opposition and distortion. However, Andrew's (2023) findings on the use of the kneeling gesture in South Africa suggest that symbols of resistance can have different meanings and impacts across contexts. In South Africa, where racism has a deep history of apartheid, the BLM movement has a stronger resonance and may be more effective in promoting change.

Although various anti-racism interventions have been implemented, their effectiveness remains limited. (Dur et al., 2023) showed that low-cost interventions such as email awareness campaigns can raise awareness among amateur soccer coaches in Norway. However, this study also showed that implicit bias remains a barrier. (Tintori et al., 2021) found that weak links between sporting practices and pedagogy can fuel racism, highlighting the need for improved anti-racism education. (Morgan & Wilk, 2022) showed that the Reconciliation Action Plan in Australia can play a role, but its effectiveness depends on organizational commitment to its implementation.

Based on the findings, several practical implications can be formulated. Sports organizations need to develop comprehensive anti-racism training (Dur et al., 2023; Moustakas & Kalina, 2023), independent reporting mechanisms for racist incidents, strict sanctions

(Newman et al., 2022; Devís-Devís et al., 2021), and leadership diversity targets (Mashigo et al., 2025). Media professionals need to avoid reinforcing racial stereotypes in commentary (MacLeod & Newall, 2022; Kemple, 2026) and increase diversity in sports journalism (van Sterkenburg et al., 2021). Social media platforms need to improve automated detection of racist content (Vanetik & Mimoun, 2022), respond more quickly to reports (Black et al., 2024), and hold repeat offenders accountable (Doidge et al., 2024). Policymakers need to strengthen legal frameworks (Nagy, 2023) and fund anti-racism research and interventions. Educators need to integrate anti-racism education from an early age (Tembo & Bateson, 2024) and implement CRT in the curriculum (Howe et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study concludes that racism in sport remains a persistent global problem, manifested in three main forms based on an analysis of 25 reviewed articles. Skin-based racism (44% of articles) remains predominant through stereotypes, limited facilities, excessive surveillance, and unfair treatment of non-white athletes, particularly Black athletes and dark-skinned female athletes. Social racism (28% of articles) is further perpetuated through social media, media coverage, and institutional practices, with the emergence of more subtle forms of aversive racism that are difficult to identify and address. Specific forms of racism (28% of articles) include verbal abuse, physical intimidation, institutional discrimination, symbolic expressions, and the normalization of jokes and taunts that are often considered normal by sports authorities.

The development of racism in sports shows a significant shift from overt discrimination in stadiums to digital spaces, with 32% of articles focusing on social media as a platform for racism. The anonymity, platform algorithms, and global reach of social media create new challenges in addressing racism. While resistance movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) have emerged as a form of resistance, their effectiveness remains debated, as the changes they bring tend to be symbolic rather than systemic. The normalization of racism by sporting institutions and the lack of consequences for perpetrators reinforce a perpetual cycle of discrimination, while the psychological impact of racism on the mental health of minority athletes is increasingly confirmed by research.

Based on these findings, comprehensive and coordinated efforts are needed to create an inclusive and equitable sporting environment. Sports organizations need to implement anti-racism training, independent reporting mechanisms, stringent sanctions, and leadership diversity targets. Social media platforms should improve detection of racist content and accountability for perpetrators, while policymakers need to strengthen legal frameworks and fund intervention research. Early anti-racism education and the implementation of Critical Race Theory in curricula are also essential foundations. Future research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of interventions, cross-cultural studies, and the long-term impact of racism on athlete well-being to support evidence-based policies to eradicate racism in sport.

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