

An Open Letter to the National Football League: why I will not patronize the NFL

by Phillip W. Weiss

From 1921 to 2016 the National Football League or NFL staged football games. During that time the league grew from a small operation comprised of franchises worth a few thousand dollars to the largest sports conglomeration in the United States, with franchises worth billions of dollars. It is a story of success approximated but not equaled in the annals of sports.

In 2016 things changed. For reasons known only to the NFL and to date never fully explained, the NFL decided to add political demonstrations to their program. These political demonstrations took the form of NFL players, who are employees of the various teams which comprise the NFL, kneeling during the playing of the United States National Anthem. These demonstrations occurred on property owned or leased by NFL teams and with the approval of the NFL owners. According to reports, the purpose of the kneeling is to protest against racial injustice in the United States. To date, the NFL continues to permit and host these demonstrations, in obvious support of their employees who kneel.

According to reports, in 2018 the NFL adopted a rule which requires all NFL personnel, including players, to stand during the playing of the National Anthem, but gives the players the option of remaining in the locker room while the anthem is being played. That is even worse. To willfully refuse to be present for the playing of the National Anthem is another form of political protest, in this case taking the form of a boycott. What is wrong with the NFL? Why does the NFL harbor such contempt for the country that has made it so rich?

Please understand: the NFL has a right to use its property to promote and disseminate a political message and that their employees have a right to respond in any lawful manner to the playing of the National Anthem. Indeed, I fully recognize, support and endorse their right to free-speech. However, I do not have the need nor do I believe it reasonable for the NFL to expect me or anyone to pay an admission to an NFL game to watch, and therefore subsidize, employees of NFL teams exercising their First Amendment rights. To put it another way: I don't want to pay money to watch a political demonstration. That their employees can do on their own dime, not mine.

By allowing their employees to use NFL facilities to promote a political agenda, the NFL is engaging in blatant hypocrisy. Below is an excerpt from NFL Football Operations:

Occasionally, a player's actions on the field may fail to live up to the league's expectations. On-field action is governed not only by the rules of play, but also by a code of conduct, established by the league and the NFL Players Association, that specifies the behavior that will not be tolerated and the minimum punishments for each transgression.

It's the job of the compliance officers within NFL Football Operations to make sure that players adhere to this code and exhibit exemplary behavior during every one of the 332 preseason, regular season and playoff games. In doing so, the compliance team helps to fulfill the NFL's responsibilities to players, officials and business partners, as well as to the game's young fans and their parents.

Does that code of conduct allow NFL employees to conduct political demonstrations on the field? Does that code of conduct permit NFL employees to show disrespect

on the field? Does that code of conduct permit NFL employees to sulk on the field? Does that code of conduct permit NFL employees to show their disdain for the United States on the field? When the NFL decides to take its own code of conduct seriously (presuming that the NFL has a code of conduct) and stops demonstrating scorn for its fans, then I will consider patronizing the NFL again. Until that happens, I will take my business elsewhere.

Sources

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New policy requires on-field players, personnel to stand for anthem
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NFL preseason sees kneeling, raised fists, during national anthem
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