



Written by [Elad Hakim](#) on June 29, 2021

If Athletes Violate Rule 50, They Should be Removed From the Team and Replaced

With the Tokyo Olympics around the corner, several athletes have taken it upon themselves to kneel during the anthem or turn their back on the American flag as a form of protest. These forms of “protest” have become more prevalent in recent years. There is, however, a major distinction between protesting in an individual capacity and protesting while representing the United States. As such, athletes who conduct themselves in this manner while officially representing their respective country should not be permitted to participate, should lose their place on the team, and should be replaced with other athletes who are able to show the proper level of dignity, appreciation, and respect while serving in that capacity.



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The most recent incident involved hammer thrower Gwen Berry. As reported by [Newsweek](#):

“The Star-Spangled Banner” happened to start playing on Saturday while Berry, 31, was standing on the podium after receiving her bronze medal in the hammer throw and earning her spot at the Tokyo [Olympics](#), the Associated Press reported.

Winner DeAnna Price and second-place finisher Brooke Andersen stood still on the podium with their hands over their hearts as the song played, but Berry put her left hand on her hip and shuffled her feet, before turning her body so she was facing the stands, rather than the flag.

Near the end of the anthem, Berry, who is Black, draped her black T-shirt, which had the words “Activist Athlete” emblazoned on the front, over her head.

Berry isn’t the first U.S. athlete to engage in such reprehensible conduct while representing her country. In 2019, U.S. women’s soccer player Megan Rapinoe refused to recite the national anthem before the team’s first World Cup match against Thailand. As reported by [the Daily Caller](#), Rapinoe was quoted as saying, “I’ll probably never put my hand over my heart. I’ll probably never sing the national anthem again.”

Those who “kneel,” refuse to recite the anthem, or turn their backs on the American flag claim that they are doing so to protest inequality and injustice around the country. They are alleged “activists,” and want to get their message out to the world.

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While these athletes are free to express themselves, the act of disparaging and disrespecting the very country that they are representing has absolutely nothing to do with any purported inequality or injustice, and should automatically disqualify them from participating and representing their country.

Their conduct isn't a matter of free speech or freedom of expression. To the contrary, these athletes are free to express themselves on many other occasions when they are not representing the United States of America. For example, if they want to engage in protests or marches, propose legislation to local leaders, promote certain causes, or to make political statements, they may do so. However, this should be done when they are speaking in their personal capacity (or even, arguably, as a player on a professional sports team if the team/league is foolish enough to allow such behavior), and not when they are speaking as a representative of the very nation that they are criticizing, disparaging, and disrespecting. In essence, this is tantamount to a conflict of interest.

The "[Star-Spangled Banner](#)" has been the national anthem since 1931. Kids have been reciting it (and/or the Pledge of Allegiance) in schools for a long time, and it has been the [musical preamble](#) to many of the nation's sporting events for decades. The anthem and the flag are hallmarks of the United States of America. They symbolize and represent the United States and the very heroes who fought for the nation's independence and freedom.

As a matter of fact, it is these very freedoms that have allowed many of these athletes to achieve their dreams. The fact that some athletes, as representatives of the United States, have taken it upon themselves to disrespect the very nation that has provided them with so much opportunity is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. Those who do so should be immediately removed from their respective teams and replaced with those who are willing and able to show the proper level of decorum and respect to this wonderful nation. Notably, this does not mean that athletes must agree with everything that is going on around the country, nor does it mean that some of these athletes do not share similar concerns. Rather, it means that they are able and willing to show respect when it is due even if they seek to promote change by way of activism at the appropriate time and forum.

Fortunately, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has implemented a rule that will prohibit/limit such demonstrations at the Olympics. Specifically, while there have been proposed [changes/recommendations](#) to the rule, in its current form [Rule 50](#) forbids any type of "demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda" at venues and any other Olympic area. As reported by [Outsports](#):

The IOC announced the new regulations on January 9. The rules specifically prohibit displaying any political messaging, including signs or armbands. Also banned: Gestures of a political nature, like a hand gesture or kneeling, and refusal to follow the ceremonies protocol. They also prohibit any such displays within the competition venues and the Olympic Village.

"It is important, on both a personal and a global level, that we keep the venues, the Olympic Village and the podium neutral and free from any form of political, religious or ethnic demonstrations," said an official statement from IOC after the regulation was made public.

As expected, some athletes took issue with this decision. [Rapinoe](#) issued a statement in which she said, "So much being done about the protests. So little being done about what we are protesting about. We will not be silenced." [Berry](#) referred to the IOC's policies as a form of control and an effort to silence



athletes.

This is simply not the case. Nobody is trying to silence athletes. Athletes have a large following and have legitimate concerns that they should be permitted to express. That being said, they should not be permitted to represent the United States while they disparage and disrespect the nation and its core symbols of freedom and sacrifice.

In such cases, a swift and appropriate punishment is needed. More particularly, athletes who engage in such conduct should not be permitted to participate, should lose their place on the team, and should be replaced with another athlete who is able and willing to show the proper level of dignity, appreciation, and respect while representing their respective country.



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