



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 8, 2020

NBA Commissioner Considers Leaving Social-justice Messages “Off the Floor” in 2021

After severe ratings drops during the NBA’s 2020 season and especially during the Finals, it appears the league is finally realizing the error of its ways and now hints at leaving messages of social justice “off the floor” next season.

League commissioner Adam Silver told NBA Countdown earlier this week the NBA will likely keep the social-justice messages off the basketball courts and jerseys for the 2021 season, though he carefully avoided explicit mention of the ratings collapse.

“I would say, in terms of the messages you see on the court and our jerseys, this was an extraordinary moment in time when we began these discussions with the players and what we all lived through this summer. My sense is there’ll be somewhat a return to normalcy, that those messages will largely be left to be delivered off the floor,” he explained.



AP Images

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Outkick the Coverage [noted](#) that while several “out of season” sports ratings are suffering as a result of revised schedules, not even the Los Angeles Lakers — and more specifically, LeBron James — seem to attract viewership. Sports Media Watch [reports](#) the 2020 NBA Finals between the Miami Heat and the Los Angeles Lakers, both of which typically draw huge audiences, have had the lowest ratings in the league’s history. (October 9 could mark the end of the Finals if the Lakers defeat the Heat.)

Outkick’s Jason Whitlock, an outspoken [opponent](#) of the Black Lives Matter movement, blames LeBron James specifically for the league’s waning popularity. He took to Twitter to say, “Killing the NBA’s popularity in the US will be LeBron’s legacy. Didn’t have to be this way. Sad. Can’t be the GOAT if you kill the game.”

Whitlock later elaborated on his feelings in an Outkick [column](#):

LeBron James is destroying my love for the game. James, Nike and China have dragged the NBA into a racial propaganda war with the United States as the opposition.

I feel like I’m being forced to choose between love of country and love of basketball.

That’s not a hard choice for me. I choose America. I can survive without the NBA. The NBA apparently can’t survive without pleasing communist-run China.



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Texas Senator Ted Cruz, a self-proclaimed “die-hard Houston Rockets” fan, voiced similar sentiments on *The Sean Hannity Show* on Tuesday night. Earlier that day, Cruz engaged in a [heated exchange](#) with Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban on Twitter, wherein Cuban accused Cruz of rooting for the NBA’s failure. But Cruz asserts the fault of the failure rests squarely on the shoulders of the NBA.

“I think it’s painful watching what the NBA, what they’re doing right now, because they’ve essentially decided that half their fans are idiots and racists and they’re just going to insult them and they’re going to lecture them and when you watch an NBA game now, it’s just the announcers are engaged in political tirades the whole time,” Cruz told Hannity.

According to ESPN’s Adrian Wojnarowski, Silver forced his BLM advocacy on the league in spite of the controversy and even after backlash from some team owners. Silver virtually demanded teams show support for the league’s black players by embracing the controversial slogan.

“Adam Silver told them, ‘Hey guys, this is what we’re going to do to support our players. Our league is overwhelmingly comprised of African American players. This is important. This is a partnership. We need to work together to get through this season and into next year,’” Wojnarowski said on his podcast, *The Woj Pod*.

As such, [300 of the league’s 350 players](#) wore basketball jerseys with the following agreed upon social justice messaging:

Black Lives Matter, Say Their Names, Vote, I Can’t Breathe, Justice, Peace, Equality, Freedom, Enough, Power to the People, Justice Now, Say Her Name, Sí Se Puede (Yes We Can), Liberation, See Us, Hear Us, Respect Us, Love Us, Listen, Listen to Us, Stand Up, Ally, Anti-Racist, I Am A Man, Speak Up, How Many More, Group Economics, Education Reform and Mentor

Likewise, “Black Lives Matter” was prominently displayed across the court where “bubble” games were played.

Silver ensures the league is still committed to supporting social justice, but he now recognizes there are other ways to go about doing that.

“We’re completely committed to standing for social justice and racial equality and that’s been the case going back decades. It’s part of the DNA of this league. How it gets manifested is something we’re gonna have to sit down with the players and discuss for next season,” Silver told NBA Countdown. “And I understand those people who are saying ‘I’m on your side, but I want to watch a basketball game.’”

Senator Cruz has some suggestions.

“Rather than supporting a Marxist organization like Black Lives Matter that’s trying to abolish police departments, which endangers black communities, it would be great to see NBA players and coaches raising money for school choice, for scholarship, for low-income African American kids and Hispanic kids,” he told Hannity. “That could make a real difference, but that doesn’t fit with their social justice agenda.”

As noted by Outkick the Coverage, Silver’s statement seems to indicate tacit recognition “that embedding the social justice advocacy directly into the on-court product hurt the viewership.”

It certainly took him long enough to come to that realization. A September 2 Harris [poll](#) revealed that



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39 percent of the respondents who identified as sports fans felt the league had become too political. An additional 19 percent reported they severed ties with the basketball because of the league's connections to China. That same poll found the NBA to be the most partisan of all professional sports. Just 34 percent of Republicans said they "actively follow" the league, compared to 48 percent of Democrats, the largest gap of any sport, according to *Forbes*.



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