



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 11, 2017

## NFL Commissioner Tells Team Owners Everyone Should Stand for National Anthem

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell (shown) sent a letter on October 10 to all NFL chief executives and club presidents in which he wrote, "Like many of our fans, we believe that everyone should stand for the National Anthem."



Goodell's letter continued:

We want to honor our flag and our country, and our fans expect that of us. We also care deeply about our players and respect their opinions and concerns about critical social issues. The controversy over the Anthem is a barrier to having honest conversations and making real progress on the underlying issues. We need to move past this controversy, and we want to do that together with our players.

Goodell also noted that during discussions with clubs and players, the league's leadership has "worked to develop a plan that we will review with you at next week's League meeting."

Goodell's letter represents a change of course since a statement he made only weeks ago. After President Trump said during a speech in Alabama on September 22 that he would love it if NFL owners fired players who did not stand for the National Anthem before league games, Goodell responded to the president's statement by saying: "Divisive comments like these demonstrate an unfortunate lack of respect for the NFL, our great game and all of our players, and a failure to understand the overwhelming force for good our clubs and players represent in our communities."

Since then, however, there has been an overwhelming backlash among the teams' fans against those players who have chosen to kneel during the anthem, following a precedent set by former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick. During a game last year, Kaepernick sat down and later took a knee during the playing of the National Anthem, asserting that his actions were a protest against racial injustice.

However, as more and more NFL players have followed suit, especially after Trump condemned their lack of respect for our National Anthem and our country, their actions have become highly controversial. Viewership of NFL games, as well as ticket sales, are down from last year, and some fans have posted videos of themselves publicly burning their team apparel and game tickets in a protest of their own against both the players who show disrespect for our National Anthem and the teams owners who tolerate such disrespect.

Goodell sent his letter two days after Dallas Cowboys' owner Jerry Jones told the *Dallas Morning News*



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that he would bench any player who protested during the anthem: “If we are disrespecting the flag, then we won’t play. Period.”

Trump responded to Jones’ statement by tweeting his approval: “A big salute to Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, who will BENCH players who disrespect our Flag. ‘Stand for Anthem or sit for game!’”

An article on the SportsDay page of the *Dallas Morning News* on October 10 quoted from Jones’ statements during his radio show that morning on KRLD-FM in Dallas.

The writer observed that during the program, Jones repeatedly said he wanted to clarify what is expected of Cowboys players at their workplace for both the players and the team’s fans. Jones said it’s not in the best interest of the Cowboys to be part of this debate. Jones said:

I want them [the players] to have the ammunition to tell anybody that asks them to do anything otherwise or demonstrate during that period of time, that “I don’t get to play if I do that.” This is a workplace issue. I don’t want there to be any misunderstanding as to where I want the personnel of the Cowboys to be when we’re at the No. 1 workplace we have, which is the field and the sideline on game day. I want to do everybody a service, as I should in leading the team, and let’s be really clear about what our expectations are.

When asked “what does disrespecting the flag mean?” Jones replied: “I think you’ll know it when you see it.”

Jones went on to clearly state how he would deal with any Cowboy who refused to stand for the anthem:

If you do not honor and stand for the flag in the way that a lot of our fans feel that you should. If that’s not the case, then you won’t play. That’s nothing new as far as that being my wish or the way I want the Cowboys. As to whether or not I will basically institute or do what I said I would just say ... I would ask anybody to look at my record relative to what I say I’m going to do, and go from there.

During the NFL meeting next week that Goodell referred to in his letter, the team owners will discuss changing league rules to make it mandatory that players stand for the national anthem, *Sports Illustrated* reported on October 10, citing a league spokesman.

*SI* noted that the NFL’s current policy asks that players on the field “stand at attention, face the flag, hold helmets in their left hand and refrain from talking” during the playing of the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

The rule also states: “Failure to be on the field by the start of the National Anthem may result in discipline, such as fines suspensions, and/or forfeiture of draft choice(s) for violations of the above, including first offenses.”

The NFL rules already require the National Anthem be played prior to every game, and also state that “all players must be on the sideline for the National Anthem.”

If the NFL owners need to make further changes to these rules, it should require only minor tweaking of the language, to make clear that these rules are not suggestions, but requirements.

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