



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 24, 2018

NFL: Players and Personnel Must Stand for National Anthem or Teams Face Fines

After two seasons of frustration at players who refuse to stand for the National Anthem, resulting in a significant drop in fan support, the team owners of the National Football League (NFL) have had enough. In an unexpected move on Wednesday, team owners agreed to a new policy: Teams with players or personnel who do not stand during the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" will be fined.



In announcing the revised policy, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell stated, "This season, all league and team personnel shall stand and show respect for the flag and the Anthem. Personnel who choose not to stand for the Anthem may stay in the locker room until after the Anthem has been performed."

There is little doubt that the protests have damaged the NFL's brand. Prime time television ratings for the NFL were off nearly 10 percent, on average, last season. While there could be other reasons for the sharp decline in viewership, fans cited what they considered protests disrespectful to the country, to the military, and to local police.

It was then-San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick who launched the protests back in 2016. With the passing of time, Kaepernick's taking of a knee during the playing of the National Anthem was imitated by other players and some of his original statements were largely forgotten. Kaepernick, who is no longer in the league, explained his protest this way: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people."

In fact, while the controversy has centered on the playing of the National Anthem, it has been somewhat overlooked that Kaepernick's beef is really with the entire country. He has a special problem with the police, asserting, "There's a lot of things that need to change. One specifically is police brutality. There's people being murdered unjustly and not being held accountable. Cops are getting paid leave for killing people," he insisted. "That's not right by anyone's standards."

But Kaepernick is inconsistent in opposing those who "kill people." During last year's controversy it was revealed that Kaepernick had high regard for the late Fidel Castro, the Cuban communist dictator who killed thousands of people during his long reign.

In contrast, were a player to wave a small Confederate flag during the playing of the National Anthem, to protest the removal of Confederate monuments, he would probably not get Kaepernick's support. In fact, it is likely that any player who did that would probably never play another down in the NFL.

President Trump actually called for the termination of any player who chose to use the time of the playing of the National Anthem to make a political statement. "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a ***** off the field right now. Out! He's fired,'" Trump told a cheering crowd in Alabama last year.

That resulted in a shift in emphasis on the protests away from castigating the police, the flag, and the



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country in general to Trump specifically. NFL veteran Martellus Bennett told Yahoo Finance last month, “A lot of guys jumped into the kneeling thing because of [Trump].... By doing so, though, it lost a lot of the identity of what it was, because now it becomes resistance toward the president, and not resistance toward police brutality.... So, the messaging got switched. And that was a great ploy by the president to flip the message.”

The NFL’s “Game Operations Manual” already stipulated, “The National Anthem must be played prior to every NFL game, and all players must be on the sideline for the National Anthem. During the playing of the National Anthem, players on the field should stand at attention, face the flag, hold helmets in their left hand, and refrain from talking.” Some argued that “should stand” was not the same as “must stand,” but can one imagine an employee in a restaurant getting away with arguing that a rule that states, “Wait personnel should ask patrons if they want dessert,” as meaning that it is optional to ask? For that matter, can one imagine a wait person walking around in the restaurant, serving customers, wearing a baseball cap that reads, “Make America Great Again, Vote Trump!” and making the case that he is just exercising his constitutional right of free speech?

Few employers care who their employees support for office, or their political positions, but not many would tolerate an employee who drove away 10 percent of the customers by making political statements in the workplace, on company time.

So, to clear up any misunderstanding, Goodell said that all league and team personnel *shall* stand and show respect for the flag and the Anthem. In the English language, *shall* is a command, not a suggestion. Another change in the policy, however, is that if players and other personnel do not wish to stand and show respect, they can stay in the locker room — and presumably kneel there, if they like.

The NFL Players Association responded, “The NFL chose to not consult the union in the development of this new ‘policy.’ NFL players have shown their patriotism through their social activism, their community service, in support of our military and law enforcement and yes, though their protests to raise awareness about the issues they care about.”

There is no question that the kneeling during the playing of the National Anthem has “raised awareness.” It raised so much awareness that there was a 10-percent decline in fans watching the NFL games last season, and, yes, the NFL owners are also quite aware of that — which is why they, belatedly, have taken this action in hopes of bringing some of those fans back to their TV sets to watch football, not protests against the country, the flag, and the police.



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