



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 15, 2020

Protests Before Opening NFL Games Prompt Question: “Do Fans Matter?”

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Televised sports have long provided fans with an opportunity to escape the worries of everyday life by kicking back in front of the TV and enjoying the game. Watching sports is a welcome respite from more serious concerns — including the pandemic and politics. This is why the refusal of many NFL players to show respect for the national anthem prior to this year’s opening games were likely to have been viewed as unwelcome distractions and displays of disrespect for our nation.

Playing the national anthem at sporting events began in 1918, during the World Series between the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs. It instantly became a tradition and a unifying exercise that brought together fans of opposing teams. They may have supported different teams, they may have been of different ethnic backgrounds, but they all loved this country.

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This season’s games have been preceded by both “The Star Spangled Banner,” and what some call “the Black national anthem” — *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. Player protests involved either standing or kneeling (or even being absent from the field) during either one or both of these songs. The protests began on last Thursday’s NFL opener, when players and coaches from Kansas City and Houston locked arms at midfield during pregame events in a show of solidarity against “racism.” They were booed by some in the Chiefs home crowd.

Sports website sportscasting.com reported that during Sunday night’s game at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, between the Dallas Cowboys and Los Angeles Rams, all of the Rams, except for two players, remained in their locker room for the Black national anthem and returned to the sidelines for the national anthem. Most players stood, while a group of players kneeled.

Multiple Denver Broncos players took a knee during their first game of the season on Monday night. Negative reactions by fans have been noted by several news organizations that have monitored their posts on Facebook and Twitter. WKYC in Cleveland shared these comments:

- “Thanks for freeing up my Sundays. I will not watch someone disrespect my country and it’s flag. Grow up and play the sport.”



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- “I won’t be watching. Browns fan for over 50 years. It’s over hope [you’re] happy with no fans.”
- “They won’t be thinking the same way when America won’t watch or spend any money on the NFL. Then you will see change! Americans do control what happens on the field!”

The NFL pregame activities even captured the attention of Britain’s *Daily Mail*, which quoted reactions from a few sports fans, including one Denver Broncos fan who posted video of himself setting fire to his Denver Broncos flag.

“Loved watching my Broncos, but I love my country more. To HELL with the NFL and Players! GOD BLESS OUR TROOPS AND GOD BLESS AMERICA,” said the man.

It is ironic that the NFL, which has afforded opportunities for players of all races to enjoy satisfying, very high-paying careers, has become a hotbed of complaints about “systemic” racism.

Photo showing Pittsburgh Steelers players during National Anthem, Sept. 14, 2020: AP Images

Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at wmass@thenewamerican.com.

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