



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on September 25, 2017

Villanueva: The Truly Brave NFL Player

In the midst of all the controversy about players in the National Football League (NFL) choosing to “take a knee” during the playing of the National Anthem to protest alleged systemic police mistreatment of African-Americans, one player stands out for courage, Pittsburgh Steelers offensive tackle Alejandro Villanueva. It is easy to follow the multitude, but it takes courage to do what Villanueva did Sunday.



Steelers Coach Mike Tomlin told a CBS reporter that his team would not participate in the National Anthem before Sunday’s game, but would instead remain in the locker room until it was over. Tomlin explained his position: “You know, these are very divisive times for our country and for us as a football team, it’s about us remaining solid. We’re not going to be divided by anything said by anyone.” He added that he told his players “if you feel the need to do anything, I’m going to be supportive of that — as Americans you have that right. But whatever we do we’re going to do 100 percent, we’re going to do together. We’re not going to let divisive times or divisive individuals affect our agenda.”

Villanueva, however, stood just outside the tunnel leading out of the locker room, with his hand over his heart as the National Anthem was played. A West Point graduate, Villanueva was an Army Ranger who served three tours in Afghanistan. Certainly, that demonstrated courage, and his action on Sunday demonstrated courage of a different sort.

While the media, both regular and sports, have concentrated on the “courage” of those players who have chosen to kneel during the playing of the “Star Spangled Banner,” and opine that they are simply “exercising their rights,” one must wonder about the rights of the players who do not agree with the demonstrations. It is highly likely that many of the players who remained in the locker room during the playing of the National Anthem would have preferred to be on the field honoring the flag and the country. To do so, however, risked incurring the wrath of the head coach — and teammates.

Villanueva, however, took that risk. His action now exposes him to the wrath of his fellow teammates, who could very well view him as disloyal to the “team.” And a coach who may view him as “just not a team player.”

Yahoo! Sports certainly gave the impression that they view Villanueva as the bad actor in this story, not those players who take the knee, or choose to remain in the locker room. “After the game,” Yahoo reported, “[Coach] Tomlin was clearly miffed, and that’s understandable too: football coaches and players preach about football being the ultimate team sport.”

Of Villanueva, they commented, “Villanueva didn’t follow that tenet on Sunday, undercutting his coach and his teammates.”

Kaepernick, on the other hand, an open admirer of a brutal communist dictator, Fidel Castro, is not likewise castigated by Yahoo for bringing division to his team, and to the NFL in general.

Former Dallas Cowboys receiver Michael Irvin was critical of President Donald Trump’s call for the owners to fire players who kneeled during the National Anthem, arguing that he was denouncing



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“African-American players exercising their first amendment right.” (Of course, Trump said nothing about players being white or black.)

Last year, during the presidential campaign, Democratic Party nominee Hillary Clinton told reporters outside a fundraiser in Florida, “I applaud what [Colin Kaepernick] is doing. He makes great points, and if sitting down during the National Anthem is his way of registering his protest, then we must respect that.”

But one must ask if Clinton would insist “we must respect that” if a football player or coach was protesting, say, same-sex “marriage,” or abortion? What if a player announced he was going to kneel during the National Anthem to protest against illegal immigration?

When former Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow, an evangelical Christian, began kneeling in prayer after touchdowns, other NFL players and coaches did not praise his starting a conversation, or say he is “just exercising his constitutional rights.”

As Selwyn Duke wrote last year, “Would the NFL be tolerant of an athlete who sat for the Anthem as a protest against big government?”

Or what about a player who refused to stand so as to protest the taking down of Confederate statues?

The answers are obvious, as is the hypocrisy of the NFL and most national media. The player who has demonstrated the greatest courage in all of this is clearly Alejandro Villanueva — but you won’t read that opinion on Yahoo.

Update: *Soon after this article was written, Villanueva appeared to fold under the pressure. He now says he regrets his actions. This well illustrates that many players are undoubtedly feeling pressure to go along with the protests.*

Photo of Alejandro Villanueva: [Jeffrey Beall](#) via [Wikipedia](#)



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