

A Practical Suggestion for NFL Players

Dear NFL Athletes,

As a fan rather than a critic, may I offer a suggestion to you regarding the national anthem?

I understand why many of you felt the need to take action this past Sunday.

You felt you were attacked personally by the president of the United States and that some of your teammates and friends were called expletives. So you needed to make a statement.

Some of you even felt that this was a racial attack by President Trump, and so this became a matter of personal integrity and family honor.

Not to make a public statement was to dishonor your teammates, your families, and yourself.

Obviously, this was a difficult decision for all of you, which is why your teams responded in so many different ways. Standing together with arms locked. Kneeling together in unison. Staying in the locker room to avoid bringing politics into football.

Each team gave this careful thought, and I imagine that there were some heated discussions along the way.

But now you face a bigger problem.

The game you love is coming under attack.

Your fans are turning off their TVs and asking for refunds from their cable networks. Some are burning their jerseys.

Why? Because they feel you are disrespecting the American

flag, the very flag that gives you your liberties.

They feel you are spitting on the blood of servicemen who died on the foreign field protecting your freedom. They feel that you have been blessed to be an American, potentially making millions of dollars through sports, but by protesting the national anthem, you seem anti-American.

You might say, "But that's not what this is about. Some of us protested at first to draw attention to social injustice. Now, we're protesting the president's attacks on us. We appreciate the sacrifices made for our freedom, and we love our country. We're being misunderstood."

Maybe so, but the fact is, actions have meaning, and your actions are turning many of your fans away.

And for many other fans, they simply don't want politics brought into the NFL. Can't there be one day in the week—or even a few hours in a day—when things aren't political? Can't we take a break and enjoy watching gifted athletes play their hearts out while we cheer for the home team and jeer the visitors? Why must everything be politicized?

Do you personally enjoy the conflict and the turmoil? Wasn't it a lot more fun when you could just play the game?

I'm sure you respect John Elway, and I think he had some wisdom here. He said, "I understand the players and the way they felt from the comments that were made earlier in the week. They felt they had to go down and kneel, and that's up to them. Hopefully as we go forward, we can start concentrating on football a little bit more. Take the politics out of football. But I think last week was a good show of unity by the NFL, and hopefully this week we can move forward."

In previous years, the NFL has made you pawns in the culture wars.

They threatened to remove the Super Bowl from a city if that city said that men who identified as women should not be allowed to use the women's bathroom. They threatened to punish a state that protected clergy from having to perform same-sex "wedding" ceremonies.

What does this have to do you with playing football? Why should the NFL use your sacrifice—your very bodies and lives—to push its own political agenda?

Last year, after five Dallas policemen were murdered and seven wounded by a sniper, the NFL would not allow the Cowboys to wear a decal supporting Dallas police on their helmets.

Also last year, the NFL threatened to fine players who wore special cleats on 9/11 to remember the 15th anniversary of this terror attack that took thousands of lives. They said this would be a violation of the uniform code.

So, it seems like the league can get very political on some fronts—especially when it's for an anti-conservative cause—but then wants to be totally non-political on other fronts.

And who is affected by this? You and the fans. This is not fair and this is not right.

So, here's my simple proposal. Please hear me out before saying yes or no.

From here on, make it a rule that everyone on the team stands for the national anthem. You're sending a message to America that you respect the flag and the sacrifices made for it. You are not being anti-American.

That will regain many fans you have lost, that will put the focus back on football, and that will take the pressure off. No big decisions to make. No questions that will divide the teams. Just a focus on playing the game you love.

But that's just step one (and, to be candid, I don't think

people who support you will think you are selling out or compromising).

Next, you choose a few players to represent you, and you ask respectfully to meet with the president. He will see you standing for the anthem, and that will speak to him: "Mr. President, we're as patriotic as you are, and we want to make America great. Can we have an hour of your time?"

I actually believe he'll meet with you. That's when you can tell him about all the things you do for your communities. (He's a good PR person. He'll let the whole world know about it.)

And that's when you can raise your concerns about unequal justice and when you can tell him some of his comments stung you personally, as if they were even racial attacks. (I don't believe they were, but I know some of you felt the sting.)

If he says he won't meet, then you take the high ground. You continue to stand for the anthem to unite America behind you, and you make an appeal to your fans: Let's work together for the good of our nation. Here's what we're doing already. And here's where we have concerns Will you join together with us for the good of the nation?

I believe your fans will say Yes, we want to improve our country. Let's join arms and get it done.

What do you think? Does this sound like a winning plan?