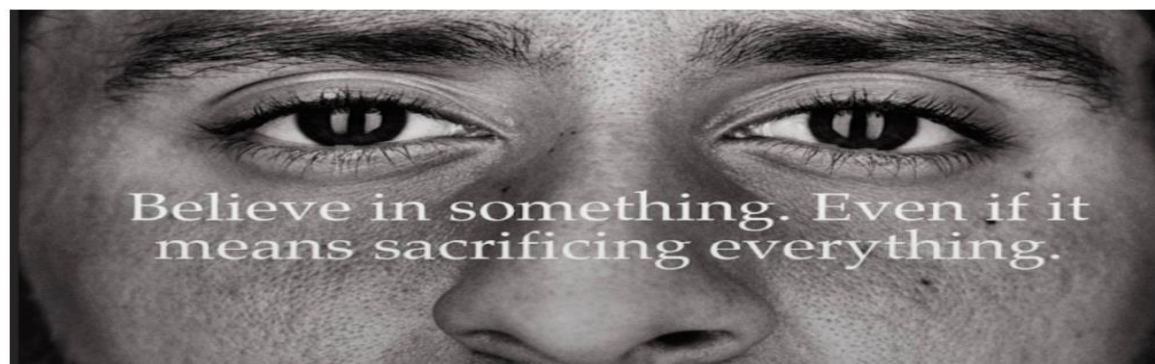


Opinion

Opinion: Nike takes stand on NFL player protests with Kaepernick ad



Decades from now, Americans will look back at the NFL player protests. They'll wonder how anyone could have seen them for anything but a plea for equal rights. When Americans think about the protests, Colin Kaepernick's new Nike ad will be one of the enduring images.

For two years now, the NFL and its owners have acted against Kaepernick. They've desperately tried to silence him and the movement he began. The owners have refused to sign the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback and teammate Eric Reid to new contracts.

In 2016, Kaepernick started protesting the "The Star-Spangled Banner" before games. He knelt during the playing of the national anthem instead of standing.

A Plea For Equal Rights

Kaepernick knelt during the national anthem to call attention to police brutality and unequal treatment of black people in the U.S. Other players began protesting too, and owners threatened to fine or cut the players who joined him.

In the 2018 offseason, the NFL created a ridiculous rule against players who protest, which only served to confuse matters more. The rule said players can stay in the locker room during the national anthem but must stand if they're on the field. In July, the players' union, a group that protects players' rights, blocked that rule from taking effect this season.

Does the NFL want to go down on the wrong side of history? Because that's how future generations will see it, as the Nike ad released September 3 made clear.

"Believe In Something"

"Believe in something," the ad reads. "Even if it means sacrificing everything."

Kaepernick, whose face is shown in the ad, has sacrificed his career.

Nike is not some small, rebellious company that has decided Kaepernick is on the right side of this fight. It is one of the world's largest companies, a setter of trends and judge of what's cool.

It is also one of the NFL's biggest partners, the official clothing company of the league.

Nike Sends Message On Player Protests

For Nike to choose Kaepernick sends a message even powerful Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who spoke out against the protest, cannot ignore. This is bigger than a hot-button issue in an election season. It is bigger than a group of fans who choose to be angrier at the method of protest than the message behind it.

This is about America. It's about whether we actually honor the ideals we champion or simply pay lip service to those notions of liberty and justice for all.

Through The Lens Of History

The NFL and its owners have been trying to contain the issue. Meanwhile, Kaepernick and the other players have been thinking about the long-term results. America's civil rights protests in the 1960s were wildly unpopular when they were occurring, if you go back and research the polls and opinions of the time. However, those protests are now viewed as heroic and essential to our ongoing struggle for equal rights. The NFL protests will be viewed much the same way through the lens of history.

Nike has recognized as much. They are betting on it with a very large and important sponsorship deal for Kaepernick. They hope he'll one day be seen like Muhammad Ali. A revolutionary who outraged the establishment's accepted beliefs in his heyday, Ali eventually became a widely admired and leading figure once society caught up.

Doubters will say this is simply a marketing ploy for Nike, a way to make money on an issue everyone is already talking about. Perhaps. Yet that doesn't reduce the burden on the NFL.

Or the stakes.

The league can continue to dither, trying to satisfy everyone while pleasing no one, and be remembered as an organization that put expedience ahead of justice. Or it can be bold.

An NFL Team Should Sign Kaepernick

If a team were to sign Kaepernick, the NFL would send the entire country a message. It would say fighting for a truly equal society is worth it. A team should give him a fair chance to compete and not just make him its No. 3 quarterback. If a team does this, the league would show it recognizes the passions the player protests have produced, but there is nothing dishonorable about holding our country to account.

There will be some backlash, sure. Some folks angered by Nike's stand will no doubt express outrage with their wallets. They'll refuse to buy shoes, shirts or anything else with a swoosh on it.

So be it.

Doing the right thing isn't always easy, especially in the moment. Still, this moment, and who stood for what, will be remembered for generations to come.

It's time to take a stand, NFL. Go ahead and do it.

- 1 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *Does the NFL want to go down on the wrong side of history?*
2. *It's about whether we actually honor the ideals we champion or simply pay lip service to those notions of liberty and justice for all.*
3. *The NFL protests will be viewed much the same way through the lens of history.*
4. *Still, this moment, and who stood for what, will be remembered for generations to come.*

What CENTRAL idea does this evidence support?

- (A) History will judge the NFL for how it handles the Kaepernick controversy.
- (B) Future generations will be proud of the way the NFL has stood up for Kaepernick.
- (C) Americans want the NFL to remember that their football players have rights.
- (D) The NFL should not do anything that will detract from football's popularity.
- 2 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) When Americans think about the protests, Colin Kaepernick's new Nike ad will be one of the enduring images.
- (B) In the 2018 off-season, the NFL created a ridiculous rule against players who protest, which only served to confuse matters more.
- (C) A revolutionary who outraged the establishment's accepted beliefs in his heyday, Ali eventually became a widely admired and leading figure once society caught up.
- (D) If a team were to sign Kaepernick, the NFL would send the entire country a message.
- 3 Which of the following claims is MOST supported by evidence in the article?
- (A) Refusing to stand for the national anthem has angered the NFL and football fans.
- (B) Creating more rules about protests will not help the NFL resolve the controversy.
- (C) Choosing Kaepernick for their ad campaign will anger many Nike customers.
- (D) Protesting for civil rights and equality is an important part of American history.
- 4 A student claims that Kaepernick's protest has been effective in promoting equality for black people in America. Does this student have enough evidence to support their claim? Why or why not?
- (A) The claim is supported; the author cites how Kaepernick has become an admired and leading figure.
- (B) The claim is not supported; the author does not fully explain how the NFL will continue to punish players for kneeling during the anthem.
- (C) The claim is not supported; the author fails to explain the impact the protest has had on the treatment of minorities.
- (D) The claim is supported; the author encourages NFL teams to sign Kaepernick for the approaching football season.

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