



THE NFL'S OPPORTUNITY TO STAND

The right to protest doesn't necessarily mean that the protest is right.

While the NFL kneeling saga continues, it is becoming less clear what the kneeling is about.

When it began last season, the kneeling was a protest against alleged police brutality and the incidence of blacks killed by police.

This season, following criticism against kneeling NFL players by the president of the United States, NFL players picked up the pace in a series of kneelings, arm-lockings and various forms of unity expressions during the playing of the national anthem before the start of each game. Yet it is unclear what players are now protesting. Police brutality? Racism? Are they just mad at the president?

Highly paid athletes protesting in the comfort of billion-dollar stadiums under the protective gaze of security personnel does little to evoke the image of historic civil rights protests of the '50s and '60s. Those valiant heroes of our past were largely ordinary people courageously taking extraordinary risks, at great cost, in the name of racial justice.

They stood for freedom.

It is that same freedom that now enables NFL athletes to protest whatever they choose in whatever manner they choose.

So how have they chosen?

They have chosen to protest during the anthem. They have chosen police officers killing blacks as their cause.



THE NFL'S OPPORTUNITY TO STAND (CONT.)

Whether justified or not, loss of life caused by a police shooting is traumatic for the community. Given the legacy of racial injustice in America, that trauma is magnified greatly when the person killed by the police is black.

The lives of black men and women do indeed matter, and NFL athletes have every right to protest the tragic loss of any life, including black lives.

These players recognize that their NFL celebrity status affords them a unique platform to call attention to matters of importance and perhaps even a responsibility to speak out.

And now that the world is watching, the NFL has an opportunity to speak out, in great force, on a tragedy of unspeakable proportion -- the senseless loss of young black lives to black-on-black violence.

While it is true that each year a number of blacks die as a result of being shot or otherwise killed by the police, that number is but a fraction of the number of black people murdered by black people.

In 2015, 259 blacks were killed by police, according to data collected by the Washington Post.

Even if we were to presume that all 259 police shootings were unjustified, that number is dwarfed by the estimated 6,000 black lives senselessly murdered by other blacks.

We live in a nation where blacks make up approximately 13 percent of the population and yet account for more than half of the murders. Shockingly, 90 percent of those victims are murdered by other blacks.

Something is terribly wrong.



THE NFL'S OPPORTUNITY TO STAND (CONT.)

Black-on-black youth gun violence is costing thousands of lives a year. Generations are being wiped out. Witnesses of these murders frequently are unwilling to cooperate with police, allowing many murderers to get away with it -- meaning no justice for that life lost.

To be sure, in the rare instance in which the police officer's actions are unjustified, that officer should account for his conduct -- including arrest and prosecution for murder whenever warranted by the evidence. Even one unjust shooting is one too many.

But contrary to the tone of many protests concerning police shootings, not every police shooting is unjust. In fact, the overwhelming majority are proven to be a reasonable use of force often connected with violent criminal behavior.

Yet none of the 6,000 murders of young black people was justifiable. None. Every single death was preventable. Every single murder demands justice.

The killing must stop.

And the NFL's opportunity? Violence is a constant threat, and blacks are being murdered at alarming rates in cities all over this nation -- including cities that host NFL franchises.

These NFL franchises and athletes can magnify the urgency of this tragic loss of life. Their actions on the field and off can unite them as men of influence who stand for justice. Rather than kneeling in silence, they should choose to stand as men of character and courage and tackle black-on-black violence.

How many more young black men will die at the hand of another black man between the final whistle of last Sunday's game and next Sunday's kickoff?

This tragedy deserves the attention of every American. NFL players may be just the right men to start this protest and stand up against black-on-black violence and give voice to a movement whose time has come in order to save the lives of young black men.

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