

# NFL players national anthem protests resume at first preseason games

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The National Football League preseason games began last week with many players resuming their protests over police killings and racism by kneeling, raising fists, or staying in their locker rooms during the playing of the national anthem.

Despite attempts by the League, various owners, and President Trump to stop player protests, several players continued to protest for social justice, equality and against police violence by engaging in symbolic acts during the playing of the national anthem.

In May the NFL announced a new policy which prohibited players from engaging in on-field protests and requires all players present on the field to stand for the national anthem. Any team whose players violated this rule would face being fined by NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. This new policy also encouraged individual teams to create their own policies to punish players who engage in on-field protests.

The policy shift by the NFL stemmed from the controversy that first started two years ago when Colin Kaepernick, at the time the starting quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, began kneeling during the playing of the national anthem at the beginning of games. Kaepernick has stated that his kneeling was a protest against the wave of police killings of young black men, which had inspired nationwide outrage.

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color,” he said at the time. “To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.”

Kaepernick’s brave actions, and the subsequent right-wing media assault upon his freedom of speech, inspired widespread protests by professional athletes around the country, including players from nearly every

NFL team. Throughout the 2016 football season dozens of players either took a knee during the playing of the national anthem, raised their fists in protest, or remained in the locker room.

Similar protests were engaged in by both high school and college athletes around the US, an indication of broad support for Kaepernick among the population.

The on-field protests had diminished by the start of the 2017 season, with only a few players continuing to kneel. This changed when President Trump, in an attempt to mobilize his most reactionary supporters and divert attention from his crisis-ridden administration, launched a public attack on the NFL for not cracking down more forcefully on protests, declaring, “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say ‘get that son of a bitch off the field right now, out, he’s fired.’”

Trump’s actions inspired a new upsurge of protests, with entire teams taking a knee or remaining in the locker rooms before games. In many cases, the players were joined by the coaching staffs and in some cases even the owners themselves. Behind the scenes, however, the owners were terrified of the effect Trump’s actions were having on their bottom line and conspired to silence their players. The result was the new NFL policy banning players’ anthem protests.

At the same time, teams issued their own proclamations. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said that he expected everyone on his team to stand for the anthem and not stay in the locker room. His son Stephen added that players who did not follow the team’s directive would be cut.

Cornerback Richard Sherman of the San Francisco 49ers accused Jerry Jones of having a “plantation mentality.”

Other owners have been more conciliatory. Jed York,

whose family owns the San Francisco 49ers, abstained from voting on the new policy. Chris Johnson, the acting owner of the Jets, said players who protested would not be penalized.

As more and more players publicly denounced the ban, the NFL Players Association was compelled to file a grievance in July, arguing that the owners' new policy violated the NFL's collective bargaining agreement.

By late July, with the opening of training camps and faced with the continued resistance by many players to their new ban, the NFL agreed to freeze the enforcement of its new anthem policy while it attempts to work out a potential solution with the union.

At Thursday night's game Malcolm Jenkins of the Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles, who has been one of the most outspoken players in recent years, was joined by his teammate De'Vante Bausby in raising a fist while the anthem was played. As had been customary in the past, Chris Long, a veteran defensive end, stood next to Jenkins with a hand on the defensive back's shoulder.

For Jenkins, who had stopped demonstrating last season after he and a coalition of players secured increased financing for social issues from the league, the preseason game represented a return to his old form. In addition to raising his fist, Jenkins and some of his teammates on the defending champion Eagles took the field for warm-ups wearing T-shirts highlighting various statistics about racial disparities in prison.

"Quite frankly, guys in our league don't like being told what to do, what they can and can't do," Jenkins told Philly.com. "We don't have this type of policies for the other causes we support, whether it be our 'Salute to Service,' or breast cancer awareness, or anything else. It's just when you start talking about black folks, quite frankly. It's disheartening, but we'll continue to be creative."

Miami Dolphin players Kenny Stills and Albert Wilson took a knee during the anthem before their team's game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, while their teammate Robert Quinn raised his fist.

In response to these protests President Trump tweeted early Friday morning, "Be happy, be cool! A football game, that fans are paying sooooo much money to watch and enjoy, is no place to protest. Most of that money goes to the players anyway. Find another way to protest. Stand proudly for your National Anthem or be

Suspended Without Pay!"

Trump has continued to use the anthem protest to inflame and provoke his ultra-right base. He got his intended response later that day when the Broward County Police Benevolent Association called for its union members as well as all south Florida police officers to boycott the Miami Dolphins and the NFL.

In other games, four members of the Jacksonville Jaguars (Telvin Smith, Jalen Ramsey, Leonard Fournette and T.J. Yeldon) waited in the tunnel until after the anthem had concluded before their team's game against the New Orleans Saints, and three members of the Seattle Seahawks (Quinton Jefferson, Branden Jackson and Duane Brown) did the same before their team's game against the Indianapolis Colts.

In a notable shift, however, the 49ers, who had been one of the more active political teams in previous years, did not appear to have any players kneeling during the anthem before their game against the Dallas Cowboys, although Marquise Goodwin, a wide receiver, had his right arm raised for the duration of the song.

Meanwhile, Kaepernick, the player who was the first to protest in 2016, has not returned to the NFL. He filed a grievance early this year against the league, accusing the owners of conspiring to keep him out of job.

Eric Reid, Kaepernick's teammate on the 49ers who also regularly knelt during the playing of the national anthem in 2016 and 2017, is also unsigned. He, too, has filed a grievance against the league.



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