

Sport and Society

Sports Media

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In the archives of history, sports have often mirrored the most significant shifts in society, serving as both a battleground for social justice and an open space for cultural expression. Over the past five years, this dynamic interplay has intensified greatly, just like many other things in our society. Issues of race, gender, sexuality, and social class have become the center of attention at most dinner tables, social gatherings and news reports. This paper will discuss a significant story from recent years that illustrates the intersection of sports with one of those societal concerns. For my particular topic, I chose one that started all the way back in 2016, yet still brings repercussions to this day in 2024. The following will examine Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the national anthem, addressing racial inequality in our culture.

A national anthem is a usually classical song, which is adopted by a country to somehow state its pride and love for its own. In the United States, the national anthem is a large production put on before many sporting events. This dates back to the beginning of World War I, to boost support for the war efforts. It was played first during baseball games and later on expanded to football, hockey, basketball and other sports. For me personally, and to many people in our society today, the national anthem is when the fans watching and participating give their prayers to the country, their honor and their history. Regardless, if it's your team playing or not, no matter what rivalries are with other teams the national anthem is when everyone comes together. It's a respectful moment of unity. But for the last few years, it became something else, something

dedicated to protests and representing social and racist injustices in the country. This is where the story of Colin Kaepernick is first shown. To illustrate, in 2016, Colin Kaepernick, the quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, chose to sit and kneel during the national anthem leading up to National Football League games. It was shocking for Kaepernick, a well known quarterback, to carry out this gesture. He kept doing this against the instructions of the 49ers. Which was quite surprising to coaches, fans and players around the country. Colin Kaepernick made it known why he chose to do what he did. Explaining why he made it such a big deal during that time. Nothing like this had been done before. Kaepernick tweeted, that his kneeling 'wouldn't stand for pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color'. He even told NFL Media, after the game: '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.' In the past months, and years, many of these issues have been plaguing controversies within our society. While Kaepernick has the power to his first amendment right of free speech not wanting to partake of our country's national hymn, there are many who became extremely offended or shocked when Kaepernick did not show respect for the country that has given him so many opportunities. The national anthem has been a historical, pre-game tradition for so many years, and it is pretty standard for any sporting event. So, it would make sense that this would be perceived derisively to the country. Kaepernick's actions unearthed emotions of anger, upsetting the fans as well as coaches and team-mates, but in fact also creating a wider societal triage, by questioning and debating the topic for the years to come. After the controversy started, the 49ers released a statement on Kaepernick's gesture.

They describe that it is not in their power to tell Kaepernick what he can and cannot do. This statement clearly states that they support Kaepernick in his freedom of speech however,

based on their statement about the national anthem, it seems as if they are more in support of participating in the national anthem. The coach also came out to discuss his thoughts and he said that it is not up to him in regards to what Kaepernick does, he does not have power over his actions. Which is neither in support of him or his actions. By taking a stand for civil rights, other athletes joined Kaepernick, in using their platform and status to raise awareness to issues affecting minorities in the U.S.

Sports all around the world, helps bring people together in some way shape or form. Whether that's on super bowl sunday for a cookout, a seniors last game in High School or a fun Sunday activity for all ages. Sports act as a powerful unifying force, it can bring diverse groups of people together through shared experiences and emotions. Whether it's a local community rallying behind a high school team or fans worldwide bonding over their love for a sport, I believe the commonality of purpose and passion within sports transcends individual differences. Sports events create a sense of community and allow people to feel as if they belong somewhere. It can allow people to escape from the reality of their lives or distress. There are many values that play into sports. These sporting events offer a platform where people can come together, celebrate achievements, and talk about their day to day lives, it allows for very open-ended conversation. This communal experience fosters a sense of solidarity highlighting the unique ability to connect individuals across cultural, social, and geographical divides. The national anthem also falls into that category and gives people a sense of belonging and community which is why this is such an important topic.

Along with sports allowing differences to bring people together it is also a large community that has a lot of inequalities regarding race, gender and sexuality. With our society growing through the new social norms thrown at us over the years, sports also had to change

their rules regarding gender and race. Transgender athletes face challenges regarding their participation in sports categories that align with their gender identity, debates on competitive fairness, biological advantages, and the integrity of women's sports. These controversies often intersect with issues of race, as racial dynamics can influence perceptions of fairness and inclusion, affecting how athletes are treated and perceived in the sports community. For example, black transgender athletes may encounter compounded discrimination, facing both transphobia and racism, which can affect their opportunities and acceptance in sports. This complex interplay of gender and race in sports mirrors ongoing societal struggles with identity, equality, and acceptance, highlighting the need for nuanced discussions and policies that consider the diverse experiences of all athletes.

Throughout the years after Kaepernick took his knee during the national anthem, some stood with him in this stance while some saw him as a privileged black athlete who had disrespected his country. Kaepernick was later released from the 49ers he was not re-signed by another team. Some people believe it was because of his actions toward this controversial topic and some believe it had nothing to do with it. It is hard to know what to believe regarding this topic. Either way, Kaepernick changed history and this will continue to be a topic of discussion.

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