

Opinion: Kaepernick's "Just Do It" Nike ad puts pressure on the NFL

By Nancy Armour, USA Today, adapted by Newsela on 09.07.18

Word Count **756**

Level **1070L**



Colin Kaepernick is featured in Nike's "Just Do It" 30th anniversary ad. Photo by: Colin Kaepernick/Twitter

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

For two years now, the NFL and its owners have desperately tried to silence Kaepernick and the movement he began. Owners have blackballed the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback and teammate Eric Reid, refusing to sign them 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.

Kaepernick knelt to call attention to police brutality and unequal treatment of black people. Owners threatened to fine or cut the players who joined him in protest.

NFL, Players' Union Still At Odds

In the 2018 offseason, the NFL created a ridiculous rule against players who protest, which only confused 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 the 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," the ad showing Kaepernick's face reads. "Even if it means sacrificing everything."

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

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

Nike Sends Strong Message

For Nike to choose Kaepernick sends a message even powerful Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who took a strong stance on the issue of kneeling during the national anthem, 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.

While the NFL and its owners have been trying to contain the issue, Kaepernick and the other players have been playing the long game. 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.

Similar To Muhammad Ali

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

Cynics 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.

The Ball Is In Your Hands NFL

By signing Kaepernick — and I mean a team giving him a fair chance to compete, not hiding him on the depth chart as a No. 3 quarterback — the NFL can tell the entire country that fighting for a truly equal society is a fight worth having. The league can say 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. Just as some folks angered by Nike's stand will no doubt express their outrage with their wallets, refusing 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 during it, will be remembered for generations to come.

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

Quiz

- 1 One of the article's central ideas is that the Nike ad puts pressure on the NFL to stop penalizing Kaepernick and other players who have protested.
- HOW does the author develop this CENTRAL idea?
- (A) by explaining how no team has signed Kaepernick since 2016
 - (B) by characterizing the controversy as a fight for American ideals
 - (C) by describing the relationship between Nike and the NFL
 - (D) by showing how an NFL owner has responded to the protests
- 2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Kaepernick's actions are similar to earlier civil rights protests that were not acceptable at first.
 - (B) Muhammad Ali eventually became a widely admired and influential figure in American society.
 - (C) Nike may have created the ad as a marketing ploy to make money on a hot-button political issue.
 - (D) The NFL created a rule against players who protest that violates their individual rights.
- 3 The author claims that Nike's ad campaign reflects the company's belief in equality and civil rights.
- Which selection from the article provides sufficient evidence to prove the above claim?
- (A) Nike is not some small, rebellious company that has decided Kaepernick is on the right side in this fight.
 - (B) For Nike to choose Kaepernick sends a message even powerful Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who took a strong stance on the issue of kneeling during the national anthem, cannot ignore.
 - (C) Nike has recognized as much, betting a very large and prominent sponsorship deal on Kaepernick.
 - (D) Cynics will say this is simply a marketing ploy for Nike, a way to make money on an issue everyone is already talking about.

- 4 HOW does the author justify Kaepernick's actions in the article?
- (A) by noting his response to being blackballed and explaining the history of protest
 - (B) by describing his actions in 2016 and sharing his experience with police brutality
 - (C) by providing details about his past and explaining why he sacrificed his career
 - (D) by explaining the reasons for his protest and emphasizing American values