



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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August 22, 2017

Mr. Roger Goodell
Commissioner
National Football League
345 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10154

Dear Mr. Goodell,

The NAACP is seeking a formal meeting to discuss what many in our community are viewing as a league-wide set of retaliatory actions against quarterback Colin Kaepernick for exercising his First Amendment rights.

For over a century, the NAACP has fought for the removal of barriers that hinder full participation in our democracy and eradication of discriminatory laws and practices. The exercise of free speech has proven to be a vital tool in bringing to the public's attention often ignored issues of social justice, particularly in the African-American community. The powerful act of utilizing one's platform to address issues of discrimination and inequality has long been employed by many of the world's greatest athletes. From Muhammad Ali's conscientious objection to the Vietnam War and Dick Allen's outspoken condemnation of racism in baseball, to Tommie Smith and John Carlos' iconic black power salute at the 1968 Olympics and Arthur Ashe's prominent fight against the South African apartheid, these athletes have been warriors both on their respective fields and on behalf of the civil rights movements. Even today, members of the NBA, WNBA and additional members of the NFL continue to quietly bring attention to the issue of police brutality and exercise their First Amendment right to express disenchantment with society's failure to live up to the ideals of equal treatment and equal justice for all people. Today, none of us can function within a bubble, and athletes cannot simply be expected to detach themselves from the greater issues impacting our society.

Last season, Mr. Kaepernick chose to exercise his First Amendment rights by protesting the inequitable treatment of people of color in America. By quietly taking a knee during the national anthem, he was able to shine a light on the many injustices, particularly, the disproportionate occurrences of police misconduct toward communities of color. As outlined in your office's public statement, this act of dissent is well within the National Football League's stated bylaws. Yet, as the NFL season quickly approaches, Mr. Kaepernick has spent an unprecedented amount of time as a free agent, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that this is no sheer coincidence.

No player should be victimized and discriminated against because of his exercise of free speech – to do so is in violation of his rights under the Constitution and the NFL's own regulations. If history is any indication, situations like this will continue to persist if they are met with indifference and inaction. The NAACP is fully committed to defending the right to equitable treatment both within and outside the workplace.

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In order to determine the best approach to protecting players from being unfairly persecuted for their political beliefs, we hope to begin a dialogue with you and any other members of NFL leadership who have a vested interest in preserving the league's integrity.

We look forward to hearing from you soon and working together as we move forward on this critical issue.

Regards,



Derrick Johnson
Interim President and CEO
NAACP