



POLITICS AND SPORTS: KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF MY FOOTBALL

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When did sports get so political? When did ESPN become MSNBC? When did Colin Kaepernick become Mahatma Gandhi?

I love sports. I always have. Growing up, I played every sport I could. Michael Jordan and Bo Jackson posters adorned the walls of my bedroom. Sports remains my passion, and for two decades has been my career. I love that sports allows us a break from daily worries, to lose ourselves in the game – where the rules are clear, where talent reigns supreme, and surprise is always possible.

And I love sports not only for my own selfish reasons, but for what it does for the nation. Sports brings together people of all backgrounds to “root, root, root for the home team.” No other form of entertainment does this. Sure, a movie might be great, but you don’t see Democrats and Republicans hugging and high-fiving after watching *Tropic Thunder*.

I’m not done. Sports are a living civics lesson. Think about it. Every team represents its community—a city, a college, a high school. It is, after all, the *New York Yankees*. The player who wears the team uniform represents that community.

Now, let’s take it one step further: a soldier, also in uniform, represents his country. He is a member, in effect, of the nation’s team. The flag and the anthem are symbols of that team. That’s why every professional sports event in America begins with the national anthem. When you stand for the anthem you are not only cheering for the home team, but for the nation. In short, we begin every sports contest united. Then, of course, it’s game on. But the lesson has been taught. Unfortunately, the unifying power of sports is being trashed.

Who is responsible? The worst culprits are, ironically, the very people who cover sports in the first place—the sports media. How did this happen? There are, of course, many factors. But a good place to start is with four letters: ESPN. 24/7 sports news and highlights—every fan’s dream. That is, until a few years ago. That’s when ESPN realized that it was losing its clout. Their answer? A new approach: sports mixed with politics.

ESPN replaced ratings bonuses with diversity bonuses; gave “woke” analysts like Jemele Hill, Max Kellerman, and Bomani Jones their own shows; and an anti-American former backup quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, more airtime than he got playing time. And because ESPN leads the field, much of the sports media followed suit.

The result? When you go to the sports section of USA Today or Yahoo or even Sports Illustrated, you’re as likely to read about players’ thoughts on the president as you are about their thoughts

on the game.

Here's how insane this has gotten: In August 2017, ESPN pulled 40-year-old Asian American play-by-play announcer Robert Lee from calling a University of Virginia college football game in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Why?

Because in the wake of the violent Charlottesville protests surrounding the removal of the statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, ESPN didn't want to "trigger" its viewers. So, an Asian American named Robert Lee couldn't comment on a game because of an incident involving a statue of Robert E. Lee.

No, I'm not kidding.

You'd think that sports reporters—the guys who eat, drink and sleep sports—wouldn't put up with this nonsense, that they'd know politics has no place on the field. But you'd be wrong. They're just as political as their news desk colleagues.

Why?

Because they're afraid of being called "racist" or "sexist," because they want to be friends with the athletes, because they want to think of themselves as "serious" journalists, and because they come from the same journalism schools as the political reporters.

And because, yes, they're overwhelmingly on the left. Sorry—that's just a fact. Over 80% of sports journalists, according to a survey from The Big Lead, voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election. Less than 4% voted for the other candidate—you know, the guy who actually won. And do we know who those 4% are? Of course not. They want to keep their jobs.

So, how's this new business strategy working out for ESPN? Since 2011, the network has been losing about 2 million subscribers per year. It hasn't turned out any better for the NFL. The league has lost nearly 20 percent of its viewership since 2016.

But you don't see me celebrating.

We need sports. We need that break from our everyday cares. We need its unique ability to unite our communities, our nation. We need the civics lesson.

What else brings Americans together?

It certainly isn't politics.

I'm Clay Travis, host of Outkick the Show, for Prager University.