

Another view of the field

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Hollywood, MD - The new National Football League (NFL) season will be underway soon and already there are threats and promises from individuals announcing they will “boycott” the season by staying away from the games—not buying tickets and not watching on television. It has always been every Americans’ right to not be a football spectator so these individuals are to be commended for exercising their God-given rights. Shopping centers, restaurants, movie theaters and loving spouses welcome you with open arms. However, the reason they have announced their boycott is not as meritorious as they may think.

Yes, the American flag is a great symbol of freedom and of love for this nation. And, yes, the players who are kneeling rather than standing during the Star-Spangled Banner are showing a lack of respect for tradition, American flag protocol and etiquette. While kneeling (or, as it has become known in today’s lingo “taking a knee”) is a sign of reverence and respect, it’s not what you are supposed to do during the National Anthem. There can be no dispute that the actions of a handful of players show a blatant disregard for conformity and propriety. It is, however, a stretch to declare these same players are demonstrating a lack of love and appreciation for America and even more convoluted to affirm they--and the entire league---are “disrespecting our Armed Forces.”

That last assumption is quite egregious. The National Football League supports three nonprofit organizations that in turn support military personnel and their families. Among the nonprofits, the United Service Organizations (USO) has received commendable support from the NFL. The league doesn’t just throw dollars at the USO—players give of their time to visit Armed Forces personnel overseas. This past summer a young teenager who is a member of a military family stationed at a base in Germany, observed, “they [NFL players] don’t just care about themselves. They care about the people around them.” Atlanta Falcons offensive lineman Ben Garland, an Air Force Academy graduate, spent his 30th birthday this past summer on a USO/NFL tour of Germany and Italy. Other NFL players did a USO tour in Japan. The league’s lavish generosity toward the USO didn’t just happen overnight. It started 50 years ago, back when—due to the Vietnam War—the Armed Forces wasn’t all that popular. The league has supported USO programs and has rendered aid to USO centers to cover expenses and facility renovations.

The NFL also partners with the Pat Tillman Foundation—a scholarship program for U.S. military veterans and their spouses, the Wounded Warrior Project and the Bob Woodruff Foundation. If you think about it, the NFL and its players ought to be asking these boycotting fans— “what have you done lately to support the troops?”

To be sure, there are NFL players who don’t appreciate freedom and the sacrifices made to maintain it. The league has had—and likely still has—its share of rogues, criminals and narcissists. What profession doesn’t? Do all the “boycotting fans” start their workday by saluting the flag and singing the National Anthem? The people who sanctimoniously declare they won’t be watching the NFL are mistaking jingoism for patriotism. Worse, they’re more concerned about what others are doing during the anthem than what they should be doing during the anthem.

With that said, I and millions of others are ready for some pro football. We’ll stand and salute the flag as if no one is watching us—because no one should be. God bless America. God bless our troops. And God bless the NFL, too.

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