

49ers fans burn jerseys over player's refusal to stand during anthem

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.31.16

Word Count **562**



San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick runs with the ball during the first half of an NFL preseason football game against the Green Bay Packers in Santa Clara, California, August 26, 2016. Photo: AP Photo/Tony Avelar

Football player Colin Kaepernick took a stand by refusing to stand as the national anthem played. It was a gesture that brought support for the quarterback even as it prompted protests by San Francisco 49ers fans.

Angry fans were burning their Kaepernick jerseys Saturday after the quarterback made headlines for remaining seated during "The Star-Spangled Banner." The anthem played before the team's preseason game on Friday night.

"He says he's oppressed making \$126 million," Shane White, who says he is a lifelong 49ers fan, wrote in a Facebook post that included video of him torching a jersey while the national anthem is played. "Well, Colin, here's my salute to you."

A fan who calls himself Nate3914 set fire to a Kaepernick jersey and told the quarterback "if you don't love our country, get the [expletive] out of it. You should never play another down in the NFL. Move to Canada."

"There Are Bodies In The Street"

Kaepernick, as ESPN's Ian O'Connor points out, broke no team or league rule by refusing to stand. A 28-year-old biracial man, Kaepernick was adopted and raised by white parents who emphasized awareness of his cultural background. Kaepernick, who sat back by the water coolers during the playing of the anthem, said he was well aware that there would be repercussions.

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color," Kaepernick told NFL Media's Steve Wyche. "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."

Kaepernick's team spoke of the symbolism of the anthem while also pointing out that Kaepernick's protest was in keeping with "such American principles as freedom of religion and freedom of expression." His coach, Chip Kelly, supported his right to protest.

The NFL, in a statement, said that players are "encouraged but not required" to stand for the anthem. O'Connor, among others, defended Kaepernick, writing: "This is what American servicemen and women have defended here and abroad — Kaepernick's right to sing the national anthem at the top of his lungs, and to refuse to honor it altogether. As long as he's not interfering with his teammates' right to make their own red, white and blue choices, what's the problem here?"

Former Teammate Is Supportive

Reaction on social media was mixed.

Anquan Boldin, a former teammate of Kaepernick's, stood for the anthem as a member of the Detroit Lions on Saturday night in Baltimore. Boldin's cousin was shot to death by a police officer last year. He told the Detroit Free-Press that he supported Kaepernick's right to make the statement.

"I'm sure he's going to get flak for it, what he did," Boldin said, "but that's the great thing about being in America, you have that option."

Kaepernick emphasized that he had not asked for approval. NFL.com's Mike Garafolo points out that Kaepernick did the same thing in the previous preseason games.

"This is not something that I am going to run by anybody," Kaepernick told Wyche. "I am not looking for approval. I have to stand up for people that are oppressed. If they take football away, my endorsements from me, I know that I stood up for what is right."