

# “Stick to sports?” Athletes are speaking out more than ever

Politics have entered sports, and they’re not going away

by Jack Soble

In 2018, politics are a part of everything we do. It seems the world of sports is no exception.

Most significantly, NFL players have made their voices heard on the political landscape by taking a knee during the national anthem as a form of protest against police brutality.

It began with Colin Kaepernick (in August of 2016), then of the San Francisco 49ers, and has spread to much of the football world—including New Trier football.

“What motivated me most to make this decision was mostly Kaepernick and his strength to stand up for what he believes in no matter the outcome,” said senior Jonathan Taylor, who is currently the only Trevian to kneel.

Taylor began taking a knee at New Trier’s victory over Evanston in September of 2017, after the team was told during the week that a good amount of the Evanston team would be doing the same.



Teammates support NT’s Jonathan Taylor as he takes a knee | NT News

Head coach Brian Doll fully condoned Taylor’s decision. “It’s one of those things where we’re supportive of him,” he said at the time, per Pioneer Press. “He’s a great kid, he plays for us and does a great job on the field and off the field.”

Added Taylor, “My coaches and teammates have been extremely supportive throughout the entire process.”

Kaepernick’s protests and the mass demonstrations that occurred in the following months and years were met with outrage and a variety of rebuttals. They ranged from “If you don’t like it, you can leave” from conservatives like President Trump to Kaepernick’s former coach in San Francisco, Jim Harbaugh, saying that he supported Kaepernick’s right to protest and his motivation for doing so, but that he “takes exception to” his methods.

The most prominent message, however, comes in the form of the phrase “stick to sports,” implying that players, teams, and leagues should stay out of politics completely.

Both sides of the aisle have utilized this tactic. On the left, many criticized then-Bills head coach Rex Ryan for introducing then-candidate Trump at one of his rallies. And on the right, Fox News host Laura Ingraham told NBA superstar LeBron

James to “shut up and dribble” when James spoke out against Trump.

There is also a debate over whether or not the teams themselves should get involved. For example, the NHL’s Nashville Predators were shunned when they as an organization endorsed progressive mayoral candidate David Briley.

Likewise, the NFL’s Arizona Cardinals experienced problems when their team’s verified Twitter account posted an article from their website expressing their team president’s support for his high school classmate, then-Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

The concern with teams releasing official statements like this is that they--intentionally or unintentionally--suggest that the message being conveyed speaks for everybody affiliated with that team, which is not true in the vast majority of cases.

In questioning whether players should speak out like this, however, one has to consider the position they’re in. Whichever party or belief system they align with, professional athletes have a platform that allows them to speak directly to millions of people. And when there is a cause or issue that they’re concerned about, many of them tend to use that platform to highlight them.

In the words of Taylor: “I wish to bring attention to people about how everyone in this country is just not treated the same way. Our flag and anthem represents equality for everyone, but that’s not what everyone gets.”

It’s clear at this point that “sticking to sports” is all but impossible. Players are more and more conscious of social and political issues all across the spectrum and they’ve made it clear that they’re not going to stop, and recently they’ve been given encouragement from the very top.

“I encourage all of you not to stick to sports,” said NBA commissioner Adam Silver, per The Hill. “Embrace [speaking up], celebrate it, and let’s use it to build bridges and bring people together.”

In turn, we should let these athletes make their voices heard without fear of backlash. Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution and that does not exclude professional athletes who kneel for the anthem or support a particular candidate.

After all, despite their fame, athletes are citizens, too.

OFFICIAL BALLOT GENERAL ELECTION			
Governor		A little bit about the candidates:	
➡ JB Pritzker Democrat	Advocates for early childhood development, justice for wrongful convictions, pro choice and LGBTQ rights, and supports marijuana legalization		
➡ Bruce Rauner Republican	Believes in fully-funded education, raising minimum wage, keeping income tax permanent, and is pro gun control and pro-choice		
➡ Grayson Jackson Liberal	Focuses on stabilizing the state budget, fighting corruption, and restoring power to individuals and their communities		
➡ Sam McCann Conservative	Wants to replace “crony capitalism,” advocates special tax breaks for the well-connected, fights for second amendment rights, and wants to secure the country from illegal immigrants		
District Representative		-----	
District 9	Consumer advocate of middle and working classes, supports Affordable Care Act	District 9	Believes having an efficient school system, and lowering cost of healthcare
➡ Jan Schakowsky Democrat		➡ John Elleson Republican	
District 10	Focused on building a thriving economy, supports equal education for children	District 10	Supports lowering taxes on families and businesses and healthcare reform
➡ Bradley Schneider Democrat		➡ Douglas Bennett Republican	



## Celebrity activism in politics at its highest in decades

Hollywood, music industry play large role for young voters

by Molly George

Celebrity endorsement can drive publicity for candidates, especially with young voters who pay more attention to what famous singers say than to what politicians say.

Earlier this month, Taylor Swift, known for being coy regarding politics, used her Instagram to speak out about her political views, and urge her followers to political action.

“I cannot vote for someone who will not be willing to fight for dignity for ALL Americans, no matter their skin color, gender or who they love,” said Swift of Tennessee Senate Republican candidate Marsha Blackburn.

She then urged eligible voters to register, saying, “we may never find a candidate or party with whom we agree 100% on every issue, but we have to vote anyway,” appealing to

the new wave of young voters who have turned 18 since the last election.

Swift’s post has been successful in increasing likely voter turnout among her fans, and according to CNBC, it could cause a large ripple in this year’s election.

As of Oct. 1, a record-breaking 800,000 people have registered to vote, according to Time. Most of these came from National Voter Registration Day in September.

Senior Katherine Hillesland said it’s a good thing if “celebrities use their platform for promoting what they think is right,” given the publicity such statements receive.

While the increase in voter registration is evident, there also seems to be a different dynamic at play with celebrity political beliefs and how much celebrities should use their platforms as singers, actors, athletes, or otherwise to discuss their political beliefs.

Senior Grace Lee said, “They have as much a right as anyone, though they should be a little more

careful because they have such a large audience.”

Lee emphasized that when people share their perspectives in positions of fame or publicity, “they have to “research what they say, because people will hold it up to scrutiny.”

“I don’t think it would influence my political views, but for people who aren’t as educated about politics, it maybe would, especially if that’s the only thing they’re seeing,” said Hillesland.

Others believe celebrities shouldn’t speak out on topics outside of their areas of expertise.

On Oct. 6, SNL comedian Pete Davidson said of Kanye, “he’s a genius, but a musical genius. Like Joey Chestnut is a hot dog-eating genius, but I don’t want to hear Joey Chestnut’s opinions about things that aren’t hot dog-related.”

“When a celebrity decides to become politicized, it opens them up to criticism,” said Junior Lindsay Falk.

“The partisan divide discourages people from becoming involved in politics because the polarization minimizes the importance of opinions which is detrimental to participation in democracy in the future,” said Falk.

According to the Washington Post, “Trump likes to say that West has bolstered the president’s support among black voters, but there’s not really any evidence to that effect.”

It’s clear that celebrity opinions make waves, but whether it truly makes a difference in the voting population is yet to be seen, as elections are not until November, but headlines state that voter registration has surged as celebrities support voting.

Social media have been critiqued for how they’ve affected our consumption of news, but it seems twitter has been used as a platform to increase voter registration. Paying attention to celebrities may be one way to get the younger population involved in political activism.

