

Tony Dungy Speaks Out on NFL Players Kneeling During National Anthem

Tony Dungy was a guest on ESPN's "Mike and Mike" on Thursday morning. During his visit, the NFL Hall of Fame football coach was asked about the recent practice of players kneeling during the national anthem as a form of social protest, which began last year with former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

Kaepernick, who was released by the 49ers following the season, is not currently on an NFL team. But some NFL players, including Raiders running back Marshawn Lynch and Seahawks defensive lineman Michael Bennett, have also begun to kneel during the anthem as a form of protest.

ESPN host Mike Golic, noting that Cleveland Browns head coach Hugh Jackson [earlier this week said](#) he hoped his players would not kneel during the anthem, asked Dungy how he would have handled the situation.

Here is what [Dungy said](#) he'd tell his team (27:50 mark):

"Think about how you want to attack this. Think about how you can make the situation better. If you really believe that kneeling for the national anthem on game day will bring some attention to this, will illuminate your point, will help make the situation better, then I'm behind you... .

But just don't do it because other people are doing it. Don't just do it because you think it's going to make a statement. If you feel like it's going to help, then I'm behind you. Let's think about it, then move forward... .And let people discuss it. 'Why do you think it's going to help. What are you trying to do?'"

Dungy's nuanced response is important for a couple of reasons. First, he is encouraging his players to dialogue on an issue of controversy and consequence. As he points out later, if players disagree with one another on the given point, they are at least likely to better understand one another after engaging in such a discussion.

Second, Dungy is asking his players to think about what they want to achieve by their protest. He wants them to have a goal.

My primary complaint with Kaepernick's protest was that it was always a bit unclear exactly what he was trying to achieve. If it was indeed simply awareness for social justice causes, Kaepernick certainly achieved that – probably far beyond what he expected.

The topic of social justice, for better or worse, is arguably the primary topic of discussion in our culture today. Kaepernick's actions were not the sole cause of this, but they were definitely part of the catalyst.

Assuming that the goal of kneeling was largely achieved, the question then becomes: Is kneeling during the anthem serving a purpose – bringing still more attention to social justice – or simply causing division?

NFL teams and players will decide for themselves how to proceed on this controversial issue. But they should listen to what Tony Dungy said. At least they'll be making these decisions in a thoughtful and (hopefully) constructive way, and be compelled to think about and explain what they hope to achieve by standing or kneeling during the national anthem.

A final note. Listening to Tony Dungy this morning, something occurred to me. We need more leaders like Coach Dungy. And we need them right now.