

# Colin Kaepernick and Why the NFL is the New WWE

Nike recently unveiled a huge advertising campaign celebrating the 30th anniversary of its iconic advertising slogan, “Just Do It.” The central star of the new campaign is former San Francisco 49ers Quarterback Colin Kaepernick. As you’ve likely heard by now, his line is, “Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything.”

– Colin Kaepernick (@Kaepernick7) [September 3, 2018](#)

On the surface, Nike’s Kaepernick ad seems like a simple instance of an outside advertiser trying to capitalize on an NFL controversy. But this is problematic given the close relationship between these two entities. Nike happens to be the main supplier of uniforms and apparel for the NFL’s 32 teams.

Given this close relationship, why is the NFL allowing this ad to take place? After all, they have stood by their decision to not rehire Colin Kaepernick. They have insisted that all players stand for the National Anthem. Both of these decisions seem to be at odds with the new Nike ad.

But considering the bigger picture provides some new insight. In essence, the NFL is part of a larger media ecosystem. As such, both the NFL and Nike have an ideological bent and a profit incentive to keep this saga going.

## Looking for Blue State Viewers

Last year, the NFL experienced a ten percent decline in viewership. These declines appear to be in major markets like New York, Massachusetts, and California, which also happen to

be politically blue states. The national anthem kneeling controversy is often cited as the reason for these declines. But changing demographics and family viewing patterns can also explain them. In effect, the NFL may have wanted the issue of “social justice” to add spice to football and entice the younger generation – who pledge allegiance to the concept – back into the game. The same might be said for the NFL’s major media partners: CBS, Disney, Fox, and Comcast.

The stakes are very high. The deals that the NFL and media companies sign are astronomically expensive and lucrative. In 2017, Fox signed a 3.3-billion-dollar deal for five-year rights to Thursday Night Football. This is dwarfed by the combined deal that Comcast, CBS, and Fox signed with the NFL for a nine-year, 38 billion-dollar deal to broadcast Sunday Night Football. Simple economics dictate that these media companies would be able to demand less money from the NFL for these rights if viewership declines, but this is not the case.

For several years now, internet companies, wanting people to cut the cord, have been building video content delivery services. Amazon, Facebook, and Google all have paid video products, and time and time again, the one thing preventing people from changing is the fact that they do not offer sports. Thus, it is in the best interest of the media oligopoly to keep the bids as high as possible to prevent future competition from entering the increasingly beleaguered cable television space. Therefore, keeping the Colin Kaepernick saga going is key to keeping the entire system going.

In particular, the controversy boosts viewers in the specific coastal markets where the declines are the largest and media companies see a way to continue funding an organization which, by all accounts, has flouted the political and social will to keep social justice alive. If they can make the case that keeping Kaepernick in the conversation can boost ratings, then

profit and social justice align once again. The pocketbook is lined and the heartstrings are tugged. And with CBS reporting that it's ratings have jumped 30 percent year over year, it would appear that this narrative could be sold to the NFL, to media companies, and to the public at large. In essence, Kaepernick is good for business and good for the soul.

Perhaps in a few years, when this whole Trump thing is over, Kaepernick will even take the field once again in the redemption story of the decade. But forget sacrificing everything. He would get his job back and the glory of being more than just a quarterback: he would be a social justice legend.

The NFL can play both sides: keep the narrative of controversy going while also keeping media companies happy and fans watching. But once you know this, the real nature of the Kaepernick ad, the NFL, and the media companies ought to be obvious.

The narrative of this saga, with either Kaepernick as villain or Kaepernick as beleaguered hero, benefits everyone involved financially. It represents an effective way to turn football into Pro Wrestling for the "smart" set. It keeps people watching and keeps profits high for both the advertisers, the cable networks, and the NFL. Just like watching Pro Wrestling, it shouldn't be that hard to take one look at the whole spectacle and declare "it's all fake."

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[Image Credit: Twitter-Colin Kaepernick and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [CC BY 2.0](#)]