

# United States: Football Players Join BLM Protests; Killer Cop Goes Free in St. Louis

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One year ago, Colin Kaepernick, quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers professional football team, refused to stand, and knelt when the national anthem was played and the U.S. flag was displayed before the game. He was alone in his protest.

At the time, he said, "I'm not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. 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 [cops] getting paid leave and getting away with murder."

In this past weekend's games tens of millions of football fans saw on TV 200 mostly Black players kneel or raise their fists while the national anthem was sung, and the rest of their teams stood solid with their right to protest, arm in arm. Some whole teams stayed in the locker room during the anthem.

It is to be assumed that such actions will take place in college, high school and grade school teams.

Some of the team's billionaire owners, most of whom are Trump supporters and donated millions to him, stood with their teams. They certainly don't agree with their protesting players, as has been evidenced by the refusal of any of them to hire the talented Kaepernick, who has been blacklisted for his protest. They did so for three reasons: one, they didn't want to be seen as obeying Trump; two, they didn't want their players to hate them more than employees generally dislike their bosses; and three, if they started firing Black players who are the large majority of players their teams would be decimated.

This year, joining Kaepernick's protest, some other Black players "took the knee" during pre-season practice games. On September 22, the night before the weekend games were played, President Trump attacked them at a mass rally of his supporters (almost 100 percent white) and said, "Wouldn't it be great" if the teams' owners responded to such protestors by saying, "Get that son of a bitch off the field right now, out, he's fired." He then emphasized with a shout, "Fired!"

Basketball players have also been the subject of Trump's wrath. It's been a tradition that the winner of that sport's professional team gets invited to the White House. Last season's winner was the Golden State Warriors. One of their top players, Stephen Curry, said he wouldn't go to the White House event, "because we don't stand for what our president has said, and the things he hasn't said at the right time."

Trump dis-invited the entire team. Other basketball players then denounced Trump, including LeBron James, who is probably the best known player.

Trump is what spurred last weekend's demonstration by the football players. But the context of the accumulated Black Lives Matter protests of police killings of Blacks, the cops "getting away with murder" as Kaepernick said, and Trump's racist comments and actions since he's been in office

underlies these protests.

One of his comments occurred last month concerning the white supremacist riot in Charlottesville, North Carolina, when Trump put the antiracist protestors on the same plane as the fascist-minded rioters, who killed one antiracist woman, and said that there were “good people” among the Nazis, Klansmen and other white nationalists present.

The context also includes the ongoing protests of a killer cop going free after a September 15 “not guilty” ruling, in St. Louis, a suburb of which is Ferguson, which saw the first Black Lives Matter mass protest.

This case goes back nearly seven years. On December 20, 2011, white officers Jason Stockley and his partner Brian Bianchi, pursued Anthony Smith, who was Black, in a mile-long car chase after spotting him in what they suspected was a drug transaction. In a video obtained by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch Stockley can be heard saying that he is “going to kill this motherfucker.”

Stockley told Bianchi to ram Smith’s car, which released its air bags, causing Smith to stop. Both cops got out, with Stockley carrying a pistol and an AK-47. He fired his pistol several times, hitting Smith five times. He placed his AK-47 back into the police car.

Stockley claimed he fired in self-defense when Smith reached for a gun. But forensics showed that Smith was shot within six inches from Stockley’s gun. A gun was found in the car, but it had only Stockley’s DNA on it, and not Smith’s – it was planted in the car by Stockley.

Tellingly, in 2013, the St. Louis Board of Police Commissioners paid \$900,000 on behalf of Smith’s daughter, who was only one-year-old at the time of her father’s killing, in a wrongful death suit.

The case was first reviewed by state and federal prosecutors in 2012. The District Attorney declined to prosecute Stockley. He was arrested in 2016 on the basis of the forensic evidence and witness statements after pressure from activists and community members.

Unlike in other cases, in light of the overwhelming evidence Stockley was prosecuted. He chose to have a trial by judge, not a jury trial. The case dragged on. Finally, the judge ruled on September 15 Stockley “not guilty,” using such specious arguments as Smith must have had a gun since he was a drug dealer (not proven) – the DNA evidence be damned. The ruling was farcical.

Immediately, that night, peaceful protests erupted, and have continued since. The police responded with violence. One night, after forcibly forcing protestors off the streets, the cops marched and chanted in unison “These streets are our streets!”

On September 17, police surrounded protestors in a move called “kettling,” and attacked. Cops removed protective goggles from some, spraying chemicals directly into their faces. An undercover cop, posing as a protestor, was unrecognized by his fellows, and was knocked down, cuffed and hit several times.

A visiting filmmaker was caught in the kettle, pushed to the ground and dragged away. He reported being sprayed with chemicals, knocked unconscious for 10 to 30 seconds and pepper-sprayed when he came to. Several people who were not demonstrating were caught in the kettle and arrested.

The American Civil Liberties Union is suing the police for “unacceptable, unlawful and unconstitutional behavior.” The suit accuses the cops of ramming a police car into a dispersing crowd, the use of kettling, excessive force, chemical spraying, illegal arrests and destroying people’s video footage of the police actions.

The protests continue.

**Barry Sheppard**

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