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1968-2018: 50 Years of Athlete Activism in America

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Overview

Initially in my proposal, I intended on creating an analysis of athlete activism in America based on results from my own field research and examinations of literature research. I planned to interview a number of athletes to obtain a better understanding of why they choose or choose not to advocate for social causes. The goal was to compare the differences in responses between men and women, and athletes of differing racial backgrounds. However, considering the relevance of athlete activism and the current racial and political issues in the country; I felt that it would be more impactful to host an event that could both educate individuals on the history and importance of the topic, as well as provide an opportunity to have a conversation about social injustice and how to progress as a society. Thus, the focus of my project shifted as I sought to develop a meaningful event that would help convey the power of sports to drive social and political reform. After speaking with my advisors, Dr. Nancy Spencer and Dr. Meredith Gilbertson, I decided to host an event where I would give a presentation on athlete activism. The event was open to students as well as professors who were interested in the topic. In my presentation of athlete activism, I explored the history of athlete activism in America as well as compared and contrasted differences in era, gender, and race.
1968-2018: 50 YEARS OF ATHLETE ACTIVISM IN AMERICA

By: Randy Norman

OVERVIEW

- Examples of Athlete Activism from each decade
- Compare & Contrast
- Consequences and Deterrents
- Impact of Activism
- Implications for the future
1968-1977

• 1968 Olympic Games
• Dave Meggyesy
• Syracuse 8
• Battle of the Sexes

1968 OLYMPICS

• Dr. Harry Edwards led “The Olympic Project for Human Rights” (1967)
• During their medal ceremony, Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in protest
• Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and a number of other black athletes chose to boycott the ’68 Olympic Games
Dave Meggyesy

- In 1965 Dave Meggyesy, a linebacker for the St. Louis Cardinals, protested the national anthem to show his views on the war.
- "'Do you want to continue to play football?' And I said, 'Yeah, of course, what's going on?' And he said, 'Well, I've been told by the owner that you better stop your activities or you're not going to be in the league.'" (Hochman, 2017, para. 13)

Syracuse 8

- In 1970, nine football players from Syracuse University decided to boycott an entire season after not being treated fairly.
- "It's dehumanizing. My talents, my own personal desires and wishes and goals and dreams, take a back seat to this thing called race or racism," Allen said. (Herbert, 2017, para. 4)
BATTLE OF THE SEXES

- Billie Jean King was very outspoken about women’s equality in sports.
- In 1973, she defeated male tennis player, Bobby Riggs, in an exhibition known as the Battle of the Sexes.
- “I thought it would set us back 50 years if I didn’t win that match. It would ruin the women’s [tennis] tour and affect all women’s self-esteem” (“Battle of the Sexes,” Para. 7)

1978-1987: TRANSITION PERIOD

- During the ‘80s, professional athletes’ salaries increased dramatically.
- Many players chose not to speak out on social issues for fear of losing out on revenue.
1988-1997

- "Republicans Buy Sneakers Too"
- "I’m Not a Role Model"
- Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf

REPUBLICANS BUY SNEAKERS TOO

- MJ has been criticized for his refusal to speak out on social or political matters
- When asked why he wasn’t in support of U.S. Senate hopeful Harvey Gantt, Jordan was quoted as saying, “Republicans buy sneakers too” (Barnes, 2018, para. 15)
I'M NOT A ROLE MODEL (1993)

PROTESTING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

- In 1996, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (previously Chris Jackson) sat for the national anthem, as he viewed the American flag as a symbol of oppression.

- “It’s good to continue to draw people’s attention to what’s going on whether you’re an athlete, a politician, or a garbage man. These discussions are necessary…” (Washington, 2016, para. 5)
1998-2007

- No War, Shoot For Peace
- Protesting “God Bless America”
- Democracy Matters

NO WAR, SHOOT FOR PEACE

- During All-Star Weekend in 2003, Steve Nash wore a shirt that read “No War, Shoot for Peace”
- Nash was very outspoken about his anti-war beliefs
- He received harsh criticism from athletes and coaches, such as David Robinson and Flip Saunders
- Numerous sports columnists criticized Nash for speaking his mind. (Skip Bayless wrote that Nash should “just shut up and play”.) (Candaele, 2004, para. 4)
GOD BLESS AMERICA

- In 2004, Carlos Delgado of the Toronto Blue Jays vowed not to stand for the playing of "GOD BLESS AMERICA" after the U.S invaded Iraq.
- Received support from team, teammates, and commissioner.
- Delgado was sometimes booed by fans from opposing teams.
- Protest ceased in 2005 when he was traded to the New York Mets.

DEMOCRACY MATTERS

- In 2001, Andonel Foyle founded Democracy Matters, which is an organization that helps educate the youth about politics and encourages them to vote.
- Foyle was very outspoken throughout his NBA career and often made visits to speak at high schools, colleges, and conferences (Candaele, 2004, para. 2).
2008-2018

- Black Lives Matter

2016 ESPY's

- In light of the shooting deaths of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul, Dwayne Wade, and LeBron James requested to make the following speech during the introduction of the 2016 ESPY's
KNEELING FOR THE FLAG

- Colin Kaepernick has been one of the most vocal athletes activist over the past several years.
- His protest started in 2016 when he refused to stand for the National Anthem.
- Green Bay Player Boyer approached him to take knees.
- "To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are people in the street and people doing things that leave and getting away with murder." (Wacquer, 2016, Para. 2)

SERENA WILLIAMS

- Williams partnered with Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) Prior to her return to Indian Wells in 2015.
- "As Dr. Martin Luther King said: 'There comes a time when silence is betrayal.' I won't be silent." (Wong, 2016, Para. 1)
COMPARE & CONTRAST: THEN VS. NOW

- “...there is no question that there are more rewards to be had in the sense of endorsements and so forth and so on. But Black athletes still have not escaped the liabilities of speaking out earnestly and honestly about race and issues of race in American society.” (Waller, Polite, & Spearman, 2012, para. 10)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37MGXLYvOEO


COMPARE & CONTRAST: DIFFERENCES IN GENDER

- Equality
- Impact of “Superstar Status”
- Social Media Platform
DETERRENTS TO ACTIVISM

- Fear of Losing Endorsements
- Lack of Knowledge on a Given Subject Matter
- Advisory of Coaches, Agents, and/or Team Owners

CONSEQUENCES OF ACTIVISM

- Controversy
- Loss of Favoritism by Fans
- Fines
- Blackballed

IMPACT OF ACTIVISM

- Sport should be used for social change
  - Social consciousness
  - Responsible citizenship
    - Obligation to be informed
    - Interdependence


IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- Do not “Shut up and Dribble”
- Progress has been made, still a long way to go
- There is power in protest
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Thursday
December 6th
7:30pm
Eppler 108N

Randy Norman, a senior Honors student in the Sport Management program, will present on 50 years of athlete activism.