



The big debate

Should athletes be allowed to protest?

There is a long tradition of sports stars being activists, but some say that's not OK.

What you need to know

- In a famous example of protest from 1967, boxing great Muhammad Ali refused to be inducted into the US military on religious grounds and in protest against the Vietnam War. He was stripped of his winning title and banned from boxing for three years.
- A 2019 survey found that most people in the US accept athletes speaking out about political issues.
- A survey found that more than 90% of pro athletes think they should be able to participate in political activism.



Many professional athletes have spoken out on social or political issues. When Tommie Smith and John Carlos won medals at the 1968 Olympics, they stood on the podium with raised fists to protest the treatment of Black people in the US. Tennis icon Billie Jean King boycotted a tournament in 1970 because female players were paid less than male players. And in 2016, football player Colin Kaepernick stirred controversy by kneeling on the field during the national anthem to protest mistreatment of Black people by the police. While many people supported them, others said they should stick to sports. What do you think? Should athletes be allowed to protest?

Yes—athletes have a voice

Freedom of speech—including protest—is a fundamental right in the US. Athletes are citizens with their own beliefs and values, and they have the right to express them. Plus, they are prominent public figures with large followings. When they speak out, it gets attention and brings awareness to causes or issues people might not hear about otherwise. Besides, sports are already political. Many teams receive money from the government for their facilities, and the national anthem is played before games. Many championship-winning teams meet the President. It's not fair to expect athletes to focus only on sports.

No—it's not their best position

One of the best things about sports is that they bring people with different backgrounds and beliefs together. Sports are about unity—it doesn't matter how you feel about political issues if your team is winning. But when athletes protest, it can cause division and disrupt that sense of solidarity. That's not fair to fans. Besides, pro athletes are paid a lot of money to play, not to get political. Athletes should leave protests up to experts and activists. And instead of protesting, athletes can use their platforms in more positive ways, like raising money for charities or supporting a social media campaign for a cause they care about.

YES

Three reasons athletes should be allowed to protest

- 1 The freedom to protest is a basic right, and athletes should be allowed to exercise it just like any other citizen.
- 2 As high-profile figures, athletes can bring attention to causes they care about.
- 3 Athletes should not be required to stay out of politics when politics are already a big part of the sports world.

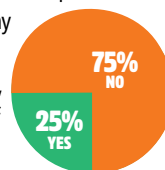
NO

Three reasons athletes should not be allowed to protest

- 1 Sports bring people from many different backgrounds together, but when athletes protest they risk dividing people.
- 2 Complex social or political issues should be addressed by experts and activists.
- 3 There are other, more positive ways athletes can use their fame to address important causes without protesting.

LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if hot cider is better than hot chocolate. You showed a clear preference for the creamy cocoa drink over a sweet, spiced cup of apple cider.



What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote **YES** if you think athletes should be allowed to protest or **NO** if you don't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.