

NFL in perspective

Foreword: *I started writing about this subject a year after it first grabbed the headlines. It's been evolving ever since, but it's about time I finished since a settlement has been agreed upon.*

Super Bowl LII (Feb. 2018) is long over, an exciting game. How did they come up with Roman numerals? Pretentious and catchy, but can the average fan write or interpret Roman numbers? But I am digressing already. Let's go back to the middle of the 2017 season.

Unless you were hiding in a cave, you could not have escaped the barrage of tweets, retweets, protests, point and counterpoint involving some players in the NFL, league officials, owners, the public, and of course, POTUS himself, regarding some players' conduct during the playing of the National Anthem. One Sunday, even VPOTUS dived in, or rather, walked out. Other statements followed, from the NFL Commissioner, to the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, to former Chicago Bears coach Mike Ditka (he of the erectile dysfunction drug Levitra fame). There were countless others weighing in.

Let's put this organization, the NFL, in perspective. According to the latest statistics, the total revenue of the league is over \$13 Billion. That is big money, but it ranks them below companies like Conagra, which makes a lot of margarine and canned spaghetti. Below Aramark, that company that supplies cafeterias with your favorite entrees. Chicken fried steak anyone? The NFL would have to grow revenues by 20% to exceed Goodyear Tires' business. However, I have my own preferred comparison. If you combine the U.S. diaper markets, for infants and the incontinent, including all brands, the sales exceeds the revenues of the NFL. Poop trumps touchdowns. No instant replays needed.

The most valuable franchise in the NFL, in fact in all of professional sports, is the Dallas Cowboys. Their revenue is estimated at around \$1 Billion. (Being privately owned, they do not publish their finances.) Respectable, but let's again consider some other products. My former employer, Procter & Gamble, has a number of billion dollar brands. Among them are Pampers & Luvs aforementioned baby diapers, Always feminine protection, and Charmin, euphemistically referred to as bath tissue. Toilet paper. Of course P & G has its competitors, so the total market for each of these three product categories is larger than P & G's billion dollar plus share. Therefore, Americans spend more on any of these products, one of which is flushed down the toilet immediately after its use, than the Dallas Cowboys' total revenue.

As for those NFL stadiums, the American version of the Roman Coliseum, it is the local taxpayers who have been funding most of the cost of construction. Both ESPN and Fox Sports have calculated that over the last twenty years, NFL stadiums have been subsidized to the tune of \$7 Billion. 90% of the cost of our beloved Cincinnati Bengals' Paul Brown Stadium was financed by the public. That's in a town where the poverty rate still hovers just below 30%, among the worst in the country. As for all major league sports, the Big Four of football, baseball, basketball and hockey, author and Harvard professor Judith Grant Long has estimated that taxpayer subsidies for major sports facilities have amounted to \$12 Billion between 2000 and 2012. Now soccer is getting into the act. Hey, let's get in on the action. Don't miss this opportunity before the public wises up. The Nashville soccer team has just scored \$275 million from TN taxpayers. Joe Six-Pack continues to subsidize the billionaire owners. FC Cincinnati is

NFL in perspective

on its way to a new stadium on the city's west side, with help from Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

The minimum salary for a rookie in the NFL is \$465,000 a year. If he makes it to the fourth year, salary jumps by 50%. After that, it's free agency, the sky being the limit. Tell me again what a few players, with some owners in "solidarity," are protesting? The average NFL franchise is estimated to be worth \$1.4 Billion. Oh, the "protest" has effectively petered out. No player on any of the teams has taken a knee during the playoff games. Certainly not in any of the Super Bowls.

But let's not forget that there are principled players out there. One is Chris Long, who played for the Super Bowl LI winning Patriots and as luck would have it, for the LII winner, Philadelphia Eagles. Long has donated a year's base salary to educational causes.

The player who started it all, Colin Kaepernick, has donated \$1 million to various causes. He has sued the NFL for collusion, since no team has tried to sign him to a contract for the 2017 & 2018 seasons. They came to a settlement early in 2019. Perhaps he can return for the 2019-20 season.

Well, we thought that was the end of it. But not quite. Mr. Kaepernick objected to the Betsy Ross flag on the latest of Nike's shoe design. Nike then stopped the introduction. One could credit or discredit Nike for either being principled, politically correct or pusillanimous. But apparently, Nike's sensitivity to the concerns of male athletes, even unemployed ones, doesn't extend to female athletes.

Allison Felix is the winningest female track and field athlete in Olympic history with six gold medals. She has been a Sports Envoy for the U.S. Department of State. After Ms. Felix had a child, Nike offered her a new contract with a 70% cut in pay. Take it or leave it. Facing a backlash, Nike has revised its policy. Ms. Felix has signed with a new sponsor.

This essay has morphed from a discussion about the NFL to Nike and female athletes. Before we get into another controversy, I better close this out.

Mario E. Orosa

October 8, 2017

Updated July 26, 2019