

Sports

Fury as Brees criticizes NFL 'kneeling protests'

Wave of demonstrations sweeps across US

LOS ANGELES: New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees sparked a furious backlash as he refused to support renewed NFL kneeling protests on Wednesday, saying to do so would be "disrespecting" the United States flag. As a wave of demonstrations against police brutality and racism sweeps across the US, many athletes have voiced support for former NFL star Colin Kaepernick, who ignited controversy in 2016 by kneeling during the US national anthem.

Former San Francisco 49ers star Kaepernick, who said he was trying to draw attention to racial injustice, was later frozen out of the league and has been unemployed since being released in 2017. President Donald Trump would later describe Kaepernick and other players who knelt during the anthem as "sons of bitches" who should be fired. Although the kneeling controversy has largely subsided in recent NFL seasons, the issue of player activism has returned following the US protests triggered by the death in police custody last week of an unarmed African-American man in Minneapolis. It has led to speculation that more players may opt to "take a knee" during the upcoming NFL season.

Brees however told Yahoo on Wednesday that he remained firmly opposed to the protests. "I will never agree with anybody disrespecting the flag of the United States of America or our country," Brees said when asked about the possibility of protests. "When I look at the flag of the United States, I envision my two grandfathers, who fought for this country during World War II, one in the Army and one in the Marine Corp. 'Is everything right with our country right now? No, it is not. We still have a long way to go. 'But I think what you do by standing there

and showing respect to the flag with your hand over your heart, is it shows unity."

'Hurtful and insensitive'

Brees's remarks drew an angry response from fellow athletes, both inside and outside the NFL, with many accusing him of misunderstanding the nature of Kaepernick's protest. NBA superstar LeBron James led the criticism, writing on Twitter: "WOW MAN!! You literally still don't understand why Kap was kneeling on one knee?? Has absolute nothing to do with the disrespect of the (flag)_and our soldiers."

The New England Patriots' Super Bowl-winning twins Devin and Jason McCourty branded Brees's comments "a disgrace." "To speak about your grandfathers as if there weren't black men fighting next to them," the McCourtys wrote on Twitter. "Those men later returned to a country that hated them. Don't avoid the issue and try to make it about a flag or the military." Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers didn't mention Brees by name, but stated bluntly in a post on Instagram: "It has NEVER been about an anthem or a flag. Not then. Not now." "Listen with an open heart, let's educate ourselves, and then turn word and thought into action."

The criticism also included barbs from two of Brees's team-mates. "He don't know no better," Saints wide receiver Michael Thomas wrote on Twitter. "We don't care if you don't agree and whoever else how about that." Saints safety Malcolm Jenkins, who has been called the new face of the NFL protests, described Brees as "self-centred" in an emotional rebuke posted on social media. "Drew Brees if you don't understand how hurtful and insensitive

with Woods at one point fearing he may never play again. His feat was hailed as inspirational by a who's who of the sporting world and the following month he became the fourth golfer to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He capped a remarkable 2019 by equaling Sam Snead's all-time record of 82 US PGA Tour wins at the Zozo Championship in Japan in October.

Michael Jordan

Considered the greatest basketball player of all time, Jordan famously signed for the Chicago White Sox baseball team after unexpectedly retiring from the NBA during his prime in 1993, and was given a minor league contract. But his baseball career never took off and he triumphantly returned to the hoops barely a year later, leading the Chicago Bulls to three more championships in 1996, 1997, and 1998. The American claimed he had lost the desire to play basketball after his father's death and wanted to do something different. He retired again in 1998, before returning for a less memorable stint with the Washington Wizards in 2001.

Golden years: 5 great sporting comebacks

SYDNEY: All Blacks legend Dan Carter announced his return to Super Rugby at the age of 38 on Thursday, extending the career of the double Rugby World Cup winner and three times world player of the year. AFP Sport looks at five other athletes who made famous comebacks:

Tiger Woods

The US superstar returned to the summit of golf in April last year at the age of 43 when he ended an 11-year major drought by winning an emotional fifth US Masters at Augusta, 14 years after his last Green Jacket. It followed multiple surgeries and a string of off-course problems since his 14th major win at the 2008 US Open,



Quarterback Drew Brees of the New Orleans Saints

your comments are then you are part of the problem... I am disappointed, I am hurt. Even though we are teammates, I can't let this slide," said Jenkins, who signed with the Saints two months ago.

Brees's remarks came as Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll heaped praise on the role played by Kaepernick. Carroll said society "owes a tremendous amount" to Kaepernick for taking a stand against police brutality and racial

injustice. "I think that there was a moment in time that a young man captured," Carroll told The Ringer's "Flying Coach" podcast. "He stood up for something he believed in - and what an extraordinary moment it was that he was willing to take," Carroll said. "We're not protecting our people. We're not looking after one another. We're not making the right choices," he said. "So I think it was a big sacrifice... and we owe a tremendous amount to him for sure." — AFP

Niki Lauda

Austrian driver Lauda appeared to be cruising to a second Formula One World Championship in 1976 when disaster struck at the German Grand Prix in Nuerburgring. Lauda's Ferrari swerved off the course and struck an embankment, before exploding in flames. Lauda was trapped in the wreckage and suffered severe burns before being pulled to safety. He made an incredible return to racing 43 days later at the Italian Grand Prix but was pipped to that year's drivers' crown by James Hunt. He went on to win two more world championships in 1997 and 1984. He died in May last year aged 70.

Monica Seles

Monica Seles looked poised to rule women's tennis in the early 1990s, becoming the youngest woman to reach the world number one ranking in 1991 before winning three out of four Grand Slams in 1992 with victories at the Australian, French and US Opens. In 1993 she again looked set to dominate, opening the year by winning the Australian Open with a defeat of German great

Steffi Graf. In April, however, Seles was stabbed by a deranged spectator while playing at a tournament in Hamburg. Although she soon recovered from her physical injuries, the emotional scars meant Seles did not return until 1995 and the following year she won her 10th and last Grand Slam at the Australian Open.

Michael Phelps

The greatest medal winner in Olympics history, a burned-out Phelps called it quits after his fourth Games at London 2012 with 18 golds to his name. He spent 20 months on the sidelines, gaining weight, playing golf and being treated for alcohol problems before deciding the water was where he wanted to be, returning for the 2016 Rio Olympics. The American crowned his glittering career with five more golds to extend his all-time Olympic record to 23 gold, three silver and two bronze medals at the age of 31, well beyond the typical peak age for a male swimmer. He has subsequently spoken of a battle with depression since retiring for a second time. — AFP