



2017 will be the year I almost stopped being a fan of the National Football League. Commissioner Roger Goddell had already been testing my patience with inconsistencies in officiating, his handling of player misbehaviors and interpretations of rules like “what is a catch” over the past three years. However last year, I was truly disappointed at how the NFL dealt with the players kneeling during the National Anthem. I don’t have a problem with someone wanting attention for their platform. Our forefathers wrote the first amendment for that reason. However, I draw the line at doing this during the National Anthem. Our flag is a symbol of this nation’s pride and our freedoms. People have risked their lives, been injured, or died defending our country.

While other professional sports addressed their players on the need to stand during the anthem, the NFL ignored the situation. Momentum escalated to some players not only kneeling, but clenching Black Panther fists and laughing with each other during the anthem. The media was not helping by filming the players kneeling rather than ones with their hands on their hearts.

Mid-season, when a majority of Houston players took a knee during the anthem, Texans owner Bob McNair finally spoke out with words many fans were already thinking – “the inmates are running the prison.” Many of my relatives and friends stopped watching professional foot-

ball, buying memorabilia and attending games. It was only then the NFL realized the magnitude of their problem.

The league tried to sooth the waters with their players by having meetings with them to discuss their feelings and even run commercials for their platforms. There were creative attempts with having all the players first kneel, and then stand for the anthem with their arms interlocked. They even tried not showing the National Anthem to the TV audiences and having the players remain in the locker rooms until it was finished. The players reappeared on the field during the play-offs for the National Anthem and those who stood, most with their hands on their hearts, were shown on television.

The 2017 – 2018 NFL season officially ended on a positive note. Texans JJ Watt was the winner of the Walter Peyton Man of the Year award which honors a player’s volunteer and charity work, as well as excellence on the field. After initially setting a goal to raise \$200,000 in Hurricane Harvey relief, Watt raised more than \$37 million. He not only did the fundraising, but was very active during the recovery efforts.

Come next season, will fans remember the players like JJ Watt who chose the right moments for their platforms and forgive those who had a lapse in judgment?

That remains to be seen.

