Don’t expect players to emulate Kaepernick

Colin Kaepernick will be remembered and respected by current and future professional athletes for taking a stand that cost him his career. That’s why we will never see another pro athlete speak truth to power in the way Colin Kaepernick did.

They all see what and how much he lost.

Kaepernick is this year’s recipient of the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award, which was created in 2013 “to celebrate a new generation of social changemakers,” according to the Muhammad Ali Center website.

It’s a Jtting honor, given Ali was stripped of his heavyweight title during his prime for refusing to be inducted into the armed forces as a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War.

Kaepernick, the former NFL quarterback who once led the San Francisco 49ers to the Super Bowl, became controversial when he refused to stand for the national anthem. He did so to bring awareness to police brutality and racial injustice in America.

When he compromised and took a knee instead of sitting, it still wasn’t enough for many NFL owners and fans alike who believed he disrespected the Vag. Ali famously returned to boxing aWer being suspended three years and reclaimed the undisputed heavyweight title two times over.

Kaepernick lost out Jnancially when he turned infamous.

He walked away from $16.9 million in 2017, which was the player option year in his contract.

Athletes are out to make the most of the relatively small window they have on average to play professionally. It’s not unheard of for players to postpone surgeries and play through injuries, especially in contract years.

Had Kaepernick stayed in the NFL for the past decade, he probably would have cleared more than $100 million in earnings.

Perhaps with college players able to earn incomes through revenue sharing and name, image and likeness, there might come a day where an athlete is Jnancially stable enough that money would not be a consideration if they decided to stage an unpopular protest.

It’d take a special kind of person to voluntarily waive o\ receiving future earnings of the amount Kaepernick was set to earn for a principled stand. It is a cost way too steep for many players.

Kaepernick did sue the NFL, accusing its owners of collusion to keep him out of the league.

In 2019 he received an undisclosed settlement before the case ever made it to trial. Reports at the time said he received less than $10 million, which would be great for me and most of you reading this, but for an NFL quarterback in his prime being essentially paid to go away, it was not much.

The salary was only half of it. What might have hurt more is that Kaepernick lost out on his career. He was just 29 when he threw his Jnal pass.
He was never picked up by an NFL team again, despite his repeated attempts for a tryout. There were those in the league who tried to diminish his skill, but it was always about the protest.

In Kaepernick's Jnal season in 2016, on a horrible 49ers squad that won just two games under former coach Chip Kelly, he came back from o\season surgery to throw 16 touchdowns with just four interceptions in 12 games.

The NFL has an incessant need for quality quarterbacks. Just this week, the Baltimore Ravens traded for career reserve Jacoby Brissett aWer injuries to starter Lamar Jackson and backup Tyler Huntley leW them with third-stringer Joe Fagnano. Kaepernick not being signed by a team was the clearest sign of collusion.

His name lives on through the social justice work he continues to do, but not as much on the football Jeld. Through a recently released memoir, "The Perilous Fight," he will be exposed to a new generation of football fans who never actually saw him play.

Kaepernick will also serve as a cautionary tale of the price to pay for following his conscience.



San Francisco 49ers outside linebacker Eli Harold (58), quarterback Colin Kaepernick (7) and free San Francisco 49ers outside linebacker Eli Harold (58), quarterback Colin Kaepernick (7) and free safety Eric Reid (35) kneel during the playing of the national anthem on Oct. 6, 2016, in Santa Clara, safety Eric Reid (35) kneel during the playing of the national anthem on Oct. 6, 2016, in Santa Clara, California. California. KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES VIA REUTERS



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