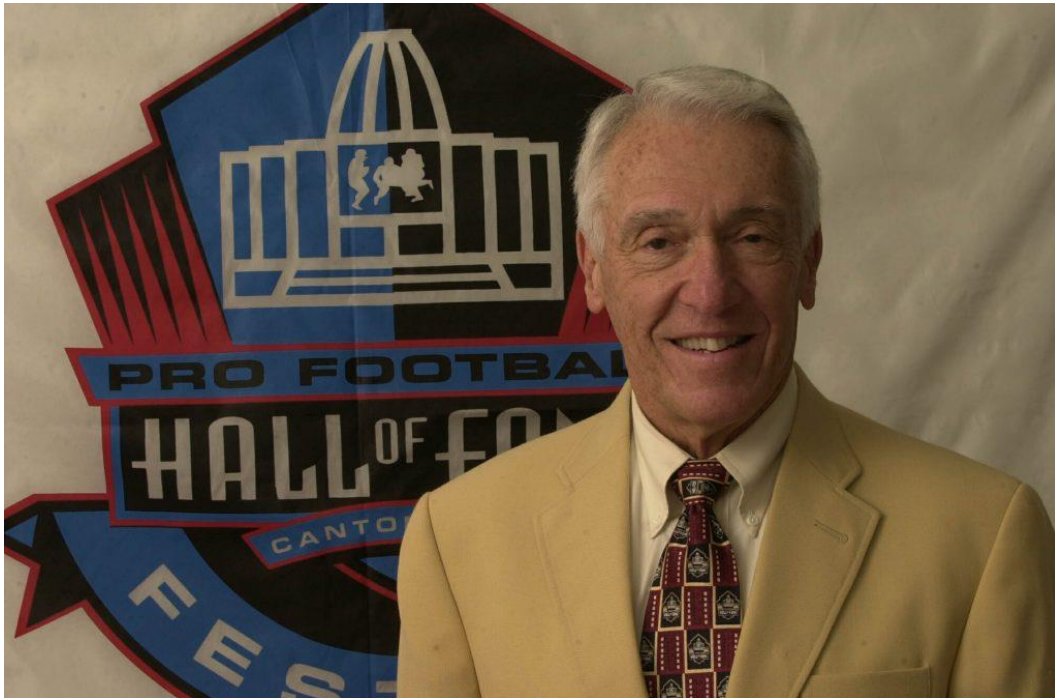


THE BUFFALO NEWS

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Marv Levy: Kneeling for the anthem disrespects our country



By [MARV LEVY](#)

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Editor's note: The following is an op-ed piece Marv Levy wrote last year in response to the ongoing discussion about NFL athletes kneeling during the national anthem. He shared it with Buffalo News enterprise reporter Tim O'Shei during a recent interview in Chicago. It's [referenced in that profile story](#) and we present it here in full:

As a former coach in the NFL, I do feel compelled to comment on how I would have approached addressing this oh-so-misguided way in which Colin Kaepernick and several of his followers have chosen to express concerns about any continuing acts of racial prejudice that occur here in our country; a country that has done (and continues to do) so much to fight it and, yes, which I and so many others acknowledge, still needs to do more in dealing with despicable acts of prejudice that still occur.

I would call those players in and speak with them. I would convey my opinion that there are so many better (AND FAR MORE EFFECTIVE) ways to speak up, and that by dishonoring our flag, our country, our national anthem, the men and women who serve, and so much more, some of these well-intended (and, also, blessed with talent and lavishly compensated) young men do injury to their cause and cast insults upon many of the great Americans – past and present – who strive for a land with “Liberty and Justice for All.”

I would tell them that their methods show disdain for so many of the young people (both men and women of multiple races) of their own generation who serve now in our armed forces with compensation that is minuscule in comparison to theirs and who are subject to far more life-threatening dangers than they are.

I would let them know that they dishonor the 360,000 Union Soldiers who gave their lives during the horrible carnage of the Civil War that finally resulted in the elimination of the horrors of slavery. I would tell them that they are showing disdain for President Abraham Lincoln, who risked so much (including his own life) in order to preserve a nation that sought to embrace freedom for all, and that they are acting in a manner contrary to that reflected by respected civil rights activists like Martin Luther King Jr., who championed the cause of equal rights via peaceful and patriotic methods and who earned the respect and admiration of a vast majority of Americans of all races.

I'd tell them that they have turned away from honoring the 16 million men (and some women, too) with whom I served during World War II, 407,300 of whom died in battle, in a war to topple Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, one of the most heinous villains and bigots in the history of the world.

I'd tell them that they are even showing disrespect for a renowned group of African-American airmen who were members of the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. I am referring here to a squadron known as the Tuskegee Airmen. They flew 15,000 missions over North Africa, Sicily and Italy. Sixty-six of those men were killed in action. Thirty-two others were shot down and became POWs. The Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded to 150 of these honored – and honorable – Tuskegee Airmen. I am proud to say that I served in the same U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II that they did.

Yes, back there during World War II the troops were still segregated. We all, nevertheless, viewed these Tuskegee Airmen with great respect and great regard. And I am proud to note that just a year or two later, in large measure due to the inspiring and admirable way in which these men had conducted themselves and to the happy approval of almost all of us who served, President Harry Truman mandated that the armed forces were to be totally integrated. Another step forward. And yes, I do know that there are still more steps in that direction that need to be taken, but you don't do it by kneeling down during the playing of our National Anthem.

These current “kneel down” NFLers are also showing disrespect for some great African American athletes and heroes from my boyhood days such as Joe Louis (in my opinion the greatest heavyweight boxing champion ever). When World War II broke out, Joe Louis immediately enlisted in the U.S. Army, and he served throughout the entirety of that war,

foregoing high salaries and personal safety, all for his country and its constantly evolving-for-the-better ideals.

And how about Jesse Owens, an African American member of the USA's 1936 Olympic track team who was the winner of four gold medals during those Olympic Games that were held in Berlin, Germany, that year? When the irate Adolf Hitler refused to present the winner's medals to a black man like Jesse Owens, Jesse, nevertheless, stood proudly at the podium, hand over his heart, and joined – tears running down his cheeks – in the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner." What tremendous respect from the great majority of Americans he engendered for himself and for his country on that day.

I would, of course, let them know that there is a proper place and time to speak out against bigotry and injustice, but by doing it during the playing of our National Anthem on game day it hurts – it doesn't help – their cause.

And finally, I'd say, "OK, guys, that's it. Now let's go get ready for Sunday's game against the Miami Dolphins, and, Colin, the only time I hope you kneel down is when you might have to run the final 30 seconds off the clock in order to preserve our narrow lead."

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