



Sports, Politics, and Patriotism (11/28/18)

- 00:00:24 Alice M. Greenwald: Good evening. I'm Alice Greenwald, president and C.E.O. of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's program. As always, I want to extend a special greeting to our museum members who are with us this evening, and to those tuning in to our live web broadcast at 911memorial.org/live.
- 00:00:49 So this evening, we are joined by Howard Bryant and Christine Brennan to discuss a timely topic: the intersection of sports, politics, and patriotism. This theme is central to our current special exhibition, "Comeback Season: Sports After 9/11," that opened this past June. "Comeback Season" focuses specifically on the role of sports in the aftermath of 9/11 and explores how sports, teams, and athletes helped during a very dark time to bring people together, to console a grieving nation, and to give us all something to cheer about.
- 00:01:32 One of the reasons we're looking at sports as a window into that particular period of time is because sports occupy a unique place in society, often reflecting the issues of the day. Sports provide a common denominator, a place where differences in socioeconomic status, career sectors, and other affiliations tend to disappear and become irrelevant. For the span of a game, we are all fans, there to cheer on our teams, and we share an unspoken but acknowledged common bond.
- 00:02:08 In the aftermath of 9/11, sporting events spoke to our shared pain and our collective aspirations. They reminded us of our resiliency as a nation. They offered a communal setting for expressions of commemoration and tribute, displays of gratitude to those who serve, and affirmations of a shared patriotic commitment. Traditions were established then that still exist today, nearly two decades later.

- 00:02:39 But it is precisely because sports serve as a social canvas that they also become reflective of particular moments in time. Sports can unify, as they did after 9/11, and they can also accentuate tensions and divisive aspects of our society and our lives. We are extremely fortunate to have with us Howard and Christine to share their insights into how expressions of patriotism became embedded in American sports, why they persist, and how they complicate the world of sports today.
- 00:03:16 Howard is a senior writer for ESPN.com and "ESPN" the magazine. He regularly appears on ESPN programming, including "SportsCenter" and "Outside the Lines," as well as several ESPN radio affiliates. Howard has been the sports correspondent for NPR's "Weekend Edition Saturday" since 2006, and he's the author of five books and a two-time winner of the Casey Award for Best Baseball Book of the Year from "Spitball" magazine. His latest book is "The Heritage: Black Athletes, a Divided America, and the Politics of Patriotism."
- 00:03:55 Christine Brennan is an award-winning national sports columnist for "USA Today" and a commentator for CNN, ABC News, "PBS NewsHour," and NPR. She has been named three times as one of the country's top ten sports columnists by the Associated Press Sports Editors and has covered the last 18 Olympic Games, both summer and winter. Christine was the first woman sports writer at the "Miami Herald," the first to cover Washington's NFL team as a staff writer at the "Washington Post," and the first president of the Association for Women in Sports Media.
- 00:04:36 The NCAA and the Women's Sports Foundation honored her in 2012, during the 40th-anniversary celebrations of Title IX, the law that protects people from discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities, like sports, that benefit from federal financial assistance. Christine is also the author of seven books, including the 1996 national bestseller "Inside Edge."
- 00:05:04 I want to thank both Christine and Howard for sharing their time and their insights with us. And without further ado, please join me in welcoming Christine Brennan and Howard Bryant in conversation with our executive vice president and deputy director for museum programs, Clifford Chanin. Thank you.

(applause)

00:05:25 Clifford Chanin: Thank you, Alice. Let me welcome Howard and Christine, as well. Before... there's so much to talk about, and I, I really want to really offer great praise, Howard, to the book itself. We'll talk specifically about some of it. It brought me back to some of the earliest days when I started following sports, which we'll talk about.

00:05:46 But if we roll it back before 9/11, and as Alice describes, sports is and isn't, and it constantly changes, it seems to me, its role as just fun and games or its role as, you know, this canvas for social expression. And depending on the times, and depending on what point of view you have about the times, people switch their arguments about what the role of sports is.

00:06:14 But I'd like to ask each of you, at the most basic level, what is it that you think brings people to sporting events, and to the intense identification that so many people have with sports in general or the particular sport of their choice? Let me ask Howard to start.

Howard Bryant: I was going to defer to you, since you're the first in everything.

Christine Brennan: No, no. Well, you're the first tonight.

Howard Bryant: You're the first.

Christine Brennan: Please, go.

00:06:39 Howard Bryant: Well, actually, you know, thanks for having us here. I mean, this has been... When you asked in the summertime to do this, I was honored to do it and looking forward to it, and I'm glad we got a chance to make this happen. I think that, to me, the number-one thing is, it's a tribalism, really. I think that there's an identity that we have in, in our culture, especially... it's such a big country, anyway.

- 00:07:04 It... sports allows you to sort of narrow down that feeling of identity, some feeling of belonging. And I think that it's one of those... It's, it's something that has existed so long when you begin to think about even just the pop culture. It's something that you, you feel that it's important to identify with, even if you don't like sports. "Did you watch the game? Did you watch the Super Bowl?"
- 00:07:30 There's this unifying thing, and especially today, when, because, you have so many channels and there's so much media and internet and everything else, there aren't very many events in the culture that everybody is watching or that are a common sort of theme. If you're in New England, and you don't know anything about the Red Sox, people look at you like you're insane. I mean, it's a unifying thing, or something, again, or New York, or whatever, if you're not part of that. And it becomes, it becomes part of your, I think, it becomes part of your, your family.
- 00:08:00 I think that for a lot of people, when they think about sports, it usually comes back to some connection to family members. "My dad watched the game," or "The game was on in the kitchen," or whatever, and you just remember... I talk about it with broadcasters, mostly. It becomes sort of the, the wallpaper of your life.
- You remember sort of your own lineage through, through these games. And what Christine and I talk about... You know, we've talked about this. I mean, you write about it all the time, as well, about the illusion that this is important. It's really not important, but we make it really, really important.
- 00:08:30 Christine Brennan: Yes, what he said, and... (laughing) Can you tell we're friends and like-minded in many, many ways, which is... A great honor to be here with, with you, Howard and Cliff. And, Alice, thank you for that kind introduction, and Harmony, and everybody who planned this, thank you, thank you, thank you. It's just a, a delight and honor to be here, and also... so moving and sobering.
- 00:08:55 Got a chance to see the museum and see the sports exhibit, which is spectacular. And I highly recommend it, if you haven't seen it. And if

people are listening on, on the webcast, to come, make a point of coming here. It's, it's just beautiful, and it remind you of so much good in this country in, at a time when, obviously, there's, there are so many things that we're troubled by. And I live in Washington, DC, so I'm right there, folks. (laughing) And, uh...

Howard Bryant: Lucky you.

00:09:23

Christine Brennan: Oh, yeah, yes. I do love DC, but wow. It's just extraordinary. Anyway, I think, to add on to what you said, Howard, the, the... another word I would use is, it's an escape. Now, when we were growing... when I was growing up, the sports section really was an escape, and, you know, you grabbed that sports section, and I couldn't wait until the "Toledo Blade"-- I grew up in the suburbs of Toledo, Ohio-- the "Toledo Blade" would hit our doorstep, it was an afternoon paper.

And I would literally stand there sometimes, and wait... I knew the paperboy, and then the paperboy was my brother, so when the papers came to our house, I got it about an hour...

Howard Bryant: I hope you knew the paperboy.

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Christine Brennan: I knew the paperboy then, for sure, my younger brother. But at the time, you know, I knew he was coming, whoever was delivering it, and I would wait, I'd kind of hide, because there was a little window right in the door, and I'd kind of hide, and I'd hear the thunk. And then I'd wait, because I thought, I guess I was, like, you know-- how old was I, ten or 12—I thought it would be weird.

So I waited until he was further away, and I went and grabbed the paper, and I read all about the Toledo Mud Hens, the Detroit Tigers, and, you know, all the things I cared about-- Toledo Rockets football. And it, it really was this, this place I could go and read about. And of course, again, no ESPN at that point. So this is it. This is the first, I get pictures I get a chance to see, the first I get to read about it, the first I can see what the box score was like if it's a baseball game, et cetera, et cetera.

00:10:39 So that was an... it was the escape. And I still think, for many people, Cliff, it is an escape. Or they, they hold it up on a pedestal, hoping it is an escape. I would maintain, actually, sports is much more now a mirror of our society, which I know we're going to get into. And that is what I think troubles some sports fans. I know you get this, I get this, on Twitter, whatever. "Oh, stick to sports." LeBron gets that, right?

Howard Bryant: Yeah.

00:11:07 Christine Brennan: "Can't we just enjoy the game? Do we have to deal with X, Y, Z?" And I know we'll be dealing with all those things.

Howard Bryant: Yes, yes.

Christine Brennan: And my answer, of course, as yours, is, "Yes, we do." But I do understand when someone goes to a baseball game, and from 7:00 to 10:00 at night, they'd like to escape with their spouse and their kids and enjoy the game and not worry about the fact that the center-fielder could be on performance-enhancing drugs and the right-fielder might be charged with domestic violence. I understand that concept. News flash: things have changed. We have information now that we didn't have before. Thank goodness we have that information.

Howard Bryant: Yup.

00:11:45 Christine Brennan: As a consumer, you can now know much more about what you're buying, just as you would a car. If you're going to buy tickets to a game, shouldn't you know about the behavior of people? If you're going to go watch the Washington NFL team, and this Reuben Foster story that has kind of exploded today, rightly so, you should know that. And so that is my take. I know it's yours, as well. But I do get the concept, that old-school feeling, of just going to a game and escaping from the real world. I do understand that concept.

00:12:10 Howard Bryant: Yeah, and it's also a demand. It's a demand that people have even when they, they know better, because the last thing sports is right now is, is an escape for some of the reasons why we're here. And

you can't go to the sporting event and not have the specter of 9/11 on top of you, every game. It's, it's frightening, in a lot of ways.

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And to me, I think that... I think that what happens is, we want to hold on to what we know, even if the world around us is changing. And even if the industry of sports itself is forcing us into a direction we may not want to go. And so, I, I can appreciate it, as well. But the, the number of different areas where sports is not fun-- when you're talking about... whether we're talking about your taxpayer dollars, about where in this town, right, before, I mean, because I lived here-- and I was covering the Yankees during 9/11-- and we remember, immediately after the mayor left office, he gave the Yankees and the Mets quite a gift, two publicly funded stadiums.

Christine Brennan: Mm-hmm.

00:13:18

Howard Bryant: And so... totaling, I think, \$2.6 billion. So all of these different events and these different concepts, they do not escape. You can't go to a sporting event and not have it affect, or have there be some effect, on your daily life.

Clifford Chanin: Well, let's come to the 9/11 moment, because Christine saw the exhibition downstairs, and, you know, we really wanted, in putting that together, to look at that four-month, six-month window after 9/11, where sports really served as a venue for people to express something, whether it was their jubilation in the moment of release, whether it was common sorrow, whether it was just a way of escaping.

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But... and, Howard, you're... You had a piece in the "Times" earlier this year that, you know, couples where we are today, in terms of the kneeling with the flag and so on and so forth, back to September 11. And, you know, "What was once ostensibly, you write, "a unifying moment in the country has helped transform sports, with flags and flyovers, kneelings... kneeling and protests, into the most divided public spectacle this side of Congress." But come back to that, come back to that moment.

00:14:32

Howard Bryant: To 9/11?

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, that moment.

Howard Bryant: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: Because, you know, granted, we live here, those of us who work here and are here, we are in that moment much more than most people are, I would suspect, on a daily basis. But that moment remains extremely powerful.

Howard Bryant: Yeah, and very personal.

Clifford Chanin: And the purity of what that was, I think, remains true.

Howard Bryant: Yeah, no doubt. Chris, you were with us that Sunday night, weren't you? Yeah, Red Sox-Yankees, Sunday night, the ninth. We go have dinner.

00:14:59 It was Chris, me, Jeff Horrigan from the "Boston Herald." And, and we're walking wherever we were, I think we went up... we were on the East Side. And we were walking past a photo... a museum, or I think it was just a, a gallery, and there was that famous picture of the, of the airplane that got caught in one of the buildings here, in the '40s, I think it was.

00:15:20 And I remember Jeff Horrigan said... He still reminds me, every day, he's, like, "Remember that? When we walked past that on Sunday before 9/11?" Tuesday morning, of course, you know, you were working down here, and we remember that day pretty specifically. I remember we were waiting to find out what to do, because we were covering baseball. And it was useless, it didn't have any value.

It was, like, I mean, on that day and every day after that, it just didn't... I remember, myself, thinking, "Why am I doing this?" And being one of the only reporters-- because I was working at the "Record" in New Jersey-- being one of the few reporters who actually lived in Manhattan, they sent

us down to Ground Zero. And so you weren't a sports writer anymore. Now you were a reporter, and you had to go to work.

00:16:01 And so I remember so much of that. I remember, mostly... I remember, I think, just from a personal standpoint, if anyone has ever seen the movie "The Devil's Advocate," the... the film with Keanu Reeves and Al Pacino, when he goes to, you know, Al Pacino is the devil, and he goes to meet him in this final scene, and you're walking down the street, and there's nobody there. I was walking down Eighth Avenue right by Times Square, not a single person in New York City. And I was, like, "This can't be happening." I mean, it was unbelievable, to not see a person in New York, in Times Square at 8:00 in the morning.

00:16:39 And so, you know, it was, it was incredible, just from a couple of things. I think the other thing that I remember, as well, about that was the players not quite knowing what to do and where to fit and where everything was going to... You know, what was their role? And, of course, you remember, the Mets immediately got involved. And they had a relief station in the parking lot at Shea.

00:17:03 And the Yankees didn't really do anything. And they were being criticized for not being patriotic enough. And George Steinbrenner, of course, who was not going to let the Mets upstage him on anything, especially something like this, had to do something. And one of the things that he did was, he hired Ronan Tynan to come sing "God Bless America" in the seventh inning, and they've been doing it ever since.

00:17:23 It really wasn't anything necessarily out of, out of patriotism. It was more out of competition. And it's... now it's become a staple. And so, you know, I could go on all day about all the different things I remember about, about that moment. But what I remember mostly about it, too, was, for those two months-- and the Yankees go to the World Series, and they play a phenomenal World Series against the Diamondbacks-- and you just remember, just a feeling of tension throughout every single game, and things have happened that remain. Now we have metal detectors, and we have conveyor belts going into security. Started then, it's never gone away. They're here now. It's been almost 20 years.

00:18:09 You know, I remember, certainly, the World Series, when George Bush threw out the first pitch. It's a very funny moment, in that... We were all told the president was going to be at the ballpark for game three. But, obviously, you don't want to advertise during that climate. So we go to the ballpark, and everyone's telling us to look up, and there are snipers on the roof, surrounding Yankee Stadium, and on the building across the street.

00:18:34 And... but no one knows if the president is actually in the building or not. So they, they bring the president in, but they dress him up as an umpire. So it's like something out of the "Naked Gun." They never... but they never tell the umpires that the president is one of them, so all the umpires are looking around going, "Who's that guy?"

(laughter)

00:18:53 Howard Bryant: And then they look at him, and they, it's, you know, it's the president. And so it was... there were some pretty... some moments of levity there. But I think what it really was, too, was this... Sports was this, was this place where people were waiting and looking at each other, "Is it okay to be happy? "Is it all right to cheer? Is it okay?" And so at the ballpark, suddenly it became this place when something good happened, that it was, like, "It's okay. You can actually, like, live again."

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

00:19:20 Christine Brennan: Yeah, I was here in the city, actually, for the two weeks leading up to 9/11, which, of course, at the time, I would never have known that, that would be a thing, to be leading up to 9/11. I was covering the U.S. Open tennis, and I think it may be the only time, Howard, that I covered every day of the U.S. Open tennis. I mean, often I would come up for a couple of days or come up for the final weekend or something, but I was here.

00:19:42 And I, I met someone for lunch right around the corner here. And, you know, I remember looking all the way up at the buildings. And, of course, the shuttle that we would have coming back into the city, the hotel wherever we were, on the East Side somewhere... The bus, of course,

every day coming in from, from the tennis center, you know, you'd see the Twin Towers just looming, as... and it was just a given. And the Williams sisters played. I believe Pete Sampras won the men's final, and that was on the ninth. The Williams sisters, eighth, and September 9 was Pete Sampras.

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And then a whole group of us journalists were gathering that night, and I won't go into the details of the story, but one of us-- and she's told the story many times-- she was trying to figure out her flights, and trying to get, see if she was going to upgrade, and she was actually going to fly through Boston, and she was going to do it on Tuesday. And thankfully, because she couldn't get into first class, an upgrade, she took a later flight, because otherwise she would have been on... going from Islip to Boston, and then she would have been on one of the planes. So we always, we are in touch about that, the thought of, you know, just kind of blithely talking about, as we all do, "Oh, I'll take this-- no, I'll take that flight. I'll go a little later," you know, whatever. And so there was that.

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And then on the tenth, I took the train home to DC, where I live, and looked at... I remember as we came under the river and came out to New Jersey, and I looked at the skyline, and if someone had told me I told you this, Cliff, before, as we were getting ready, if someone had told me, "In 24 hours," you know, like, a time traveler tapped me on the shoulder, you know, "In 24 hours those will be gone," it just would have been stunning.

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So it meant something, I think, even more to me personally, just because I was here in the city for so long. And then I agree with you, there was that sense that sports writing was absolutely the least important job on the planet, right? And... and you wanted to write a column. And even then, whatever column I wrote right off the bat, I remember thinking, "This is just, who cares?" You know? And the idea, the question was, "Everything's shutting down. When will they start to play again?" All of that, again, it seemed absolute as irrelevant as anything we've probably ever done as journalists. I will say, though, soon after that, I found out about the Glick family, and Jeremy Glick was on the plane that crashed into Shanksville.

Clifford Chanin: Flight 93, yup.

00:22:00 Christine Brennan: And he was one of the... well, we thought four, there turned out to be a lot more people that were trying to storm the cockpit... an athlete himself. And I got to know the family really well, and I wrote several columns in talking to the, the family and the sisters. And there was a skating exhibition that was planned at Madison Square Garden, several weeks after 9/11, already planned, as an anniversary for a plane crash. The entire Olympic team, or the world championship team, was killed in 1961, 40th anniversary. And Scott Hamilton, Brian Boitano, everyone was going to skate.

00:22:30 Well, they turned it into basically a 9/11 memorial. And Jeremy Glick's youngest sister was a figure skater. And she came out onto the ice at Madison Square Garden-- I came up for that, wrote to DC to cover it-- and skated a tribute to her brother. Now, she was not an elite-level, Olympic-level skater. But Scott Hamilton and Dorothy Hamill and Michelle Kwan, and everyone who was there that day, just cleared the ice, so this young-- I believe she was a middle schooler-- could skate a tribute to her brother. And, and I've been in touch with the Glicks for many, many years. In fact, Harmony knows I took a picture of, of Jeremy on the wall there, just to send it to Jennifer later.

00:23:06 Clifford Chanin: Jeremy's sister is actually on the board of the museum.

Christine Brennan: Which one, Jennifer? Well, there are several, they all start with J.

Clifford Chanin: Alice, I... Huh? Jennifer, yes, I'm sorry.

Christine Brennan: Jennifer. Who was the one.

Clifford Chanin: I drew a blank, yes.

Christine Brennan: No, that was it.

Howard Bryant: Yeah, and, and Cliff, it's really important to remember, when you think about it generationally, and we've talked about this

before, I think that if you are of a given generation, you know, if you're of my dad's generation, World War II is the demarcating line, you know? It's the moment of his generation's life. For my generation, it was the Cold War. I mean, when we were kids, we all... We were afraid of the Russians. I mean, the Olympics were important because of what? The United States versus...

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Christine Brennan: The Soviets.

Howard Bryant: Beating the Russians or losing to the Soviets, or them not coming or us not going.

Christine Brennan: Right.

Howard Bryant: And so it was that. But for this generation, 9/11 has completely dominated their worldview, like it or not. It's not something that they have a choice in.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

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Howard Bryant: And so for my son's generation-- he was born in 2004-- sports, with the flags and the flyovers and the soldiers and all of this, which is not something that we remember... You had moments. Obviously, Whitney Houston singing the national anthem in '91, when the Gulf War started. But those moments went away. If you go back and look at the footage of that, you see all the, the flags at the Super Bowl and everything else, and during the... During the, the NCAA finals with Duke, the very next season, all the flags disappeared, the flags on the uniforms, the flags on the back of the helmets, all of it was gone. But in, in post-9/11 America, all of that... All of those optics have not only remained, but they've also been used for commercial purposes.

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Clifford Chanin: So let me come to this issue of sort of the overlay of two things. Because as we were saying, sort of the clarity of what was needed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, and how sports figured in that, is something that we all acknowledge. And yet, Howard, you write about something, and I'd asked you to define specifically what we mean by "the

heritage," because that is a phenomenon that you track the history of in your book. But it really overlays something else onto the sports scene that's not a contradiction to 9/11, but it is another thing happening at the same time.

Howard Bryant: Yup.

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Clifford Chanin: That 9/11 has. So these are two things with profound meanings, but they don't necessarily fit together all that well. So take us back to the heritage itself. Describe it for us.

Howard Bryant: Yeah, well, I mean, I think that, to me, it came back to the, the notion of, "Stick to sports." I think one of the reasons why I started doing the book in the first place was this... (glass clatters) You almost broke that. That would have been something.

Clifford Chanin: You would not have been the first.

Christine Brennan: He told me to create a diversion...

Clifford Chanin: We've had spillage up here.

Christine Brennan: That wasn't the time.

00:25:54

Howard Bryant: No, no-- no, I think that what it is, is that the, this idea of "stick to sports," and it had become more and more and more prominent in the culture, where...I mean, we always got... we always get emails from people saying, "I just want the game." We've had that. But this, I think post-9/11, became more pronounced. And I think for me, the, the question that I asked was, "Well, when did a black athlete ever stick to sports? When have you ever had to, if you were a black player?"

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Black players got involved in politics at the behest of the culture. If you go back to... If you go back to Jesse Owens, and Jesse Owens in, in World War II with... in, in Berlin. If you go to Jackie Robinson testifying against

Paul Robeson for you know, as an anti... as an anti-communist in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1949. You can take as many different examples of this as you want. I mean, it wasn't until... It wasn't really until the Civil Rights Movement, where you had black athletes advocating for black issues.

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They were talking about American issues and were asked to speak. And so what I found interesting about this was the entire notion of "stick to sports." One, it's ahistorical, because black athletes have always been talking about this, whether you're talking... whether you go back to the '20s or '30s, or whether you go into the '60s, or, or Muhammad Ali in the '60s and the '70s. You had a period in the late '70s and the '80s and into the '90s, up until... up until Ferguson in 2014, or actually, you know, Trayvon Martin being killed, where the players were, were silent or co-opted.

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But this notion that sports had somehow been pure is ridiculous. And not only is it ridiculous, it's, it's not... it's not paying attention to the, the story of the black athlete. And I thought that what was interesting about it was that, that people were telling these African-American athletes, who were suddenly, after all these years of Michael Jordan and all the players not getting involved in anything, and I refer to them as being... hiding behind the tinted glass of their Escalades, now telling them to be quiet, and telling them that politics was not appropriate in their industry at a time when you can't watch a sporting event without the politics of the military in the game. So which, you know, what's it going to be?

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Do you want these sports to not have a political bent to them? Because if you do, then you shouldn't have induction ceremonies taking place on the field. And you certainly shouldn't have the military on the field paying for all of this and not even telling the public, which is what... which is what's happening. And so you had this collision. You had this collision of patriotism taking place on the field, but now you had this renewed activism on the part of the player, colliding.

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And to me the reason is because of 9/11. The reason why... The, the reason why you're having F-14 flyovers at Cowboys games is because of the commercialism of this day. And my argument, of course, is that, one, "stick to sports" has never existed, but, also, neither patriotism nor protest should be for sale. And today, both are for sale.

Clifford Chanin: Christine, your sense of, you know, this tradition of... certainly within the world of black athletes, but where it comes and goes in terms of the sports that you follow most closely.

00:29:26 Christine Brennan: Well, I think, you know, again, Howard, we've got the ultimate expert on, on a lot of these topics here, which is, which is, fantastic. You know, it's... you know, I think of Muhammad Ali, and I think... we were actually a Joe Frazier house, my dad, and, and I'll tell you why. And you may already have guessed. So my dad was admitted into the Army at the very end of World War II. Couldn't wait, played a year of football at Drake, and then, boom, couldn't wait to get there and was in the occupation of Germany, et cetera, for several years. Very patriotic.

00:30:00 Vietnam comes along, and it was, obviously, a troubling time for everyone. But for a lot of people, a lot of people who had been in the military, as my dad had been a sergeant in the Army, you were kind of a "love it or leave it" kind of guy. You know, "This is the United States. This is what we do." And that's what I grew up with. And my dad was super-smart and quickly, you know, understood as things were starting to deteriorate, it was a much more nuanced thing.

00:30:23 But I do remember when Muhammad Ali, of course, as you know, his story, but as he is protesting and refuses to go to fight in the war. Of course, Cassius Clay, and changes his name to Muhammad Ali. That was not popular. And I'm telling this story on my late father, who would enjoy it, because using him as a touchstone in history. So Joe Frazier, of course, those legendary fights with Muhammad Ali, well, we cheered for Joe Frazier, because my dad was not a fan of Muhammad Ali. And basically, when you're a little kid, and whatever your mom... especially in sports, at that time, it was my dad. Obviously, now moms, millions of moms are into sports, just like their husbands or their brothers or whatever.

00:31:06 But back then, it was more the dad thing. And then, of course, here I am, this, this girl that can't get enough of sports. My dad was my own personal Title IX, as Title IX was being signed by Richard Nixon right at this same time, in June of '72. And so, anyway, we're cheering for Joe Frazier, right? And I'm sure we were not alone.

Howard Bryant: No.

00:31:25 Christine Brennan: And I got to tell you that my father, who passed away in '03, my dad would have been as surprised as anyone, and probably pleasantly so, when this nation stopped a couple of years ago and observed those four or five days of tribute to Muhammad Ali. And, because he would have totally understood that this great country had a sense about it to embrace those who had not been embraced and to understand mistakes that had been made or misperceptions that had been made in... on behalf of, of those who were fighting those battles, as Muhammad Ali was.

00:32:00 And my dad would have seriously and poignantly mourned Muhammad Ali. And so with that in mind, I... Of course, you can't go to the '60s and the '70s without talking about someone like Billie Jean King. And more and more now, I'm thrilled-- and I know, Howard, you feel the same way about this-- that when we talk about social change in sports, we are also talking about women. And Billie Jean King, fighting for equal pay, wasn't just a tennis story, even though that's how it was framed, and that, of course, is a great starting point.

00:32:36 But it was, in fact, very much a story of America, and women like Gloria Steinem and others, the women's movement coming of age, and that's Billie Jean King, and, of course, now, 75 years old and... 75 years young, and still doing the amazing things that she's doing and touching a whole 'nother generation of girls and boys and men and women with her advocacy, so...

00:32:55 Howard Bryant: And also not sticking to sports, obviously, once again. When you're dealing with these topics. The issue is, is that you've got such a platform. The platform is enormous, because so many people are watching. You're gonna, if you want eyeballs on something, just have it take place at a sporting event. And so people say, when they talk about these different protests, or when they're talking about... when they talk about Kaepernick, for example, or when they talk about... or Venus fighting for equal pay, still-- Venus Williams, that is-- well, you know, "Why can't you do just this outside of your job?"

- 00:33:28 Well, because the, the platform is huge. Why do you think... I remember talking to, for the book, talking to Russel Honoré, the three-star general, asking him how he felt about the flags and the flyovers and the... and all of the induction ceremonies, and, you know, why the military belongs in sports. And he doesn't believe that it does. But he also said, "We need to man the force." And this is a place... You're not going to get this kind of advertising anywhere else.
- 00:33:57 So if you're a protester, you're not going to get this kind of attention. And if you're trying to recruit, which is what the Armed Forces is trying to do, obviously. You're fighting however many wars we're fighting right now, and we've gone for 20 years. You need to actually man the force. And so, General Honoré said to me, you know, "If some 14-year-old at a, at a Dallas Cowboys game sees a jet flyover, and that inspires that kid to serve their country, we're not going to get this kind of advertising anywhere else."
- 00:34:29 Christine Brennan: Well, and, of course, as we're talking about the social activism of the '60s and '70s, I mean, obviously, it's, it's, that's kind of the general time period, you know, I do think-- and I don't know what you think about this-- but there's a pendulum. I mean, we see it in, my goodness, we see it everywhere. We see it in politics, an answer and a reaction and an action, back and forth it goes. And, and, for example, you know, you mentioned Michael Jordan. I would mention another name, Tiger Woods.
- Howard Bryant: Also.
- Christine Brennan: And the art of corporate acquiescence. Tiger...
- Howard Bryant: You're being kind.
- 00:35:01 Christine Brennan: Yeah, well, 1996, Tiger comes out, you know, "Hello, world." And he has the ad that I thought was terrific, a commercial. Some of you may remember, Nike. You can find it easily online. "There are golf courses I cannot play because of the color of my skin." It was an incredible statement, and I thought such an important statement to be made.

00:35:20 Well, within a few days, the cascade of criticism from some of the fellow pros, from others in the golf establishment, the sports establishment, and, of course, just general golf fans. "How dare he? How dare he inject politics?" To the point we're talking about. So young Tiger Woods had the right instincts, or Nike had the right instincts on his behalf. Whatever it might be. He had, he would have had to sign off on that commercial.

Howard Bryant: Or his father had the right instincts for him.

00:35:46 Christine Brennan: Exactly. Which, which, I think good old Earl had some good instincts for his son, as it turned out. But within a couple of weeks, that commercial basically was gone. And Tiger then made the decision to move forward in a much more safe manner, which is unfortunate. Bill Clinton invited him to the 50th anniversary of Jackie Robinson. And Tiger said no, and then he told us at the Masters-- he was asked specifically, "Why aren't you going?" "When the president of the United States, President Clinton, invites you?" And he said, "Well, I'm going on vacation."

00:36:19 Howard Bryant: And offers to fly you with a jet, to come get you.

Christine Brennan: Of course. And Tiger already has a jet, and he could have flown anyway.

Howard Bryant: Exactly.

Christine Brennan: And he basically sat there, as only Tiger could, especially Tiger in that, in his, you know, whatever, his 20-something era. And basically, "I'm going on vacation." And it was, frankly, appalling. But that was, that was young Tiger. And so basically, for what, 20, 25 years, Tiger just decided to take... go follow the Jordan model. It's his right, it's a free country. But you certainly can imagine I wrote a few columns about that.

00:36:50 Clifford Chanin: Let me ask, we have two periods of intense polarization in the country. I mean, the '60s being one of them, into the '70s.

Howard Bryant: And now.

Clifford Chanin: And currently, the last number of years. How do you think the platforms that athletes have in these two different times have changed? The, the impact of advertising, the corporate relationships with both the leagues and the players, seems much more developed than it was 40 or 50 years ago. But, you know, is the platform that Muhammad Ali and Bill Russell, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, that they stood on, the same platform that now LeBron James and Colin Kaepernick are standing on? How does it differ?

00:37:31 Howard Bryant: Well, it differs because the money is enormous. I mean, the money is, it's, it's so big, it's unfathomable, considering that, that Hank Aaron, I believe, in '76, the year he retired, Hank Aaron topped out at \$240,000 a year in salary. LeBron James makes \$35 million a year. And, and so when you start to look at it that way, the, the, the dollars are just astronomical.

00:37:56 And what comes with those dollars is also the... the, the relationships, the corporate relationships. You know, these guys aren't just athletes anymore. I... one of my favorite moments and, obviously, it's, it's just something that can only happen today. I was on the field a few years ago at a Yankee game with Alex Rodriguez, and he and I are sitting there talking, and he says, "Yeah, you know, I was having lunch with Warren Buffett the other day." (laughing) And then I was speechless. I mean, who has lunch with Warren Buffett when you're a third baseman?

00:38:27 I mean, this is what these guys, I mean... but then again, he earned almost three quarters of a billion dollars in salary alone, not including endorsements or anything else. And so there's that. And then there's also the social media part of the platform, as well. I remember doing a story on Carmelo Anthony, and he was saying that one of the reasons why the players got involved post-Ferguson was the amount of viral videos that they see now. That they don't need us anymore. That they're not using traditional media as a conduit anymore. They can sit there on Facebook

or YouTube or Twitter or whatever, and... and they're watching these confrontations between these, you know, black kids and the police.

00:39:06

And they're watching them in real time, or they're watching them themselves, and they're making their own decisions. And so now you have, you have a generation of players who feel a direct responsibility, because they're not using us as a conduit, and they can, they can circumvent traditional media. And then, of course, when that happens, you recognize the power of the player. The power of the professional athlete today is more, is greater than it's ever been.

00:39:35

Christine Brennan: Well, I think... (clears throat): You know, looking at today, which I think is important-- I think we may be headed there with Kaepernick and Trump, and, and everything that that entails. You know, the social activism today I think is extraordinary, and I think will go down in history as a great gift to this country. Certainly, the '60s, they have. And, you know, again, to think of the black-power salute at the '68 Olympics in Mexico City, and they were both sent home, and their lives were altered forever. And, and now, we look at them, of course, as heroes.

Howard Bryant: Yeah.

00:40:11

Christine Brennan: But I think it's... I think more now, we are... because it's such a fractured time, because the president is Donald Trump, because of the level of, you know, disgust with him and, by many in the country, I think we're probably getting a quicker snapshot and a quicker analysis than ever before.

00:40:31

Also, because of the speed of everything and Twitter and just the fact it's all there right in front of us. You don't have to wait a week to get "Sports Illustrated," right? You don't have to wait 24 hours to get your next newspaper. So, of course, it's sped up. And I think the analysis, I think I'm... I feel pretty comfortable myself saying this, that the whole situation with Colin Kaepernick will be studied in the history books, or the holograms or whatever, however kids are studying, you know, 50 years from now. I'm, I'm pretty sure of that. There are so many facets to this. So I, I won't... there may well be questions.

00:41:06 Clifford Chanin: Let me come in a little bit on Kaepernick, because it is such a, an emblematic issue in relation to all this. But, you know, the most recent developments sort of turn it on its head, as well. So Kaepernick is blackballed, essentially, from the NFL for his kneeling during the anthem, and he's not able to play football anymore. It's clear that, you know, there's no interest in bringing him back.

00:41:27 And yet, you know, Nike-- and Nike has been sort of an actor in many of these events, in spite or perhaps because of him being out of the league, but symbolizing a movement-- Nike has now launched a campaign around him. And so what you mentioned before, Howard, the commercialization of this is now transformed, because it's no longer, "You're going to sacrifice your commercial viability if you take this kind of a stand." At least in the Nike view, "You're going to enhance your viability, and you want to be associated with the corporation." How does this, how does this happen?

00:42:04 Howard Bryant: Yeah, well, I think to circle it back, I think the most important thing to remember is that the professional sports leagues are using 9/11 as a way to silence athletes. They're using this veneer of patriotism, even though they're profiting from all of it, to keep their players in line.

At the end of the day, when you deal with, with an industry, it always comes back, as you know, to owners versus players. It comes back to labor. And, and right now, I think that, Kaepernick aside, although he is emblematic of a labor battle, as well, considering that you have Reuben Foster, who three times this year has been... Was he arrested three times?

Christine Brennan: Mm-hmm.

Howard Bryant: Arrested three times for domestic...

Christine Brennan: Twice for domestic violence.

- 00:42:48 Howard Bryant: Twice for domestic violence, and he gets picked up by a team, and Colin Kaepernick, who has committed no crime, and not only has he committed no crime, he was simply advocating for something he disagreed with, which is completely un-American. There's no other way around that. However, the leagues themselves have... They have gone into business in such a way with the idea of patriotism and the idea of soldiers and the idea of all of these different, these different sort of... the, the fallout from, from 9/11.
- 00:43:31 They've used it as a way to control the workforce. And so when you have someone like Kaepernick do what he's done, the argument is, is that he's disrespecting the military, even though he, what he says has nothing to do with the military. I understand, obviously, the different feelings that people have.
- 00:43:52 However, from the standpoint of business, the standpoint of control, what the leagues are doing, what... you know, what they've done is, they have made... they've made a clear line, whether we're talking about the Boston Marathon bombing or whether we're talking about 9/11 or however, you know, this is the point that I was trying to make about how what was a unifying moment is now being used to make money and also to control the, the athletes.
- 00:44:24 And Kaepernick is a really interesting character in this, because... I've been of two minds on Nike. When all of that happened, I... part of me was thinking, "Well, one, Nike is doing..." You know, now you've got... You've got one group, the NFL, that is profiting from patriotism and from militarism. And now you have another corporation, Nike, which is profiting from the forgotten folks out there who support Kaepernick. So they're profiting from protest. Nike and the NFL are business partners. And so the corporation is really who's laughing at everybody, when you think about it.
- 00:45:02 On the other hand, I felt... The way that... The way that, in totality, the NFL and a lot of these municipalities were trying to boycott Nike, the way they've tried to essentially destroy this person, you know, I thought that... that Nike getting involved in this had a lot of value. I think my mind changed on this, simply because when you think about the, the way that the NFL has gone out of its way to destroy this person, who simply had an opinion, really, I thought it was nice to see a counterbalance.

00:45:44

Christine Brennan: Well, Nike shut up Donald Trump, first of all. So that's, that's a positive. Isn't that interesting, though? Because, to follow up on what you were saying, Howard, here is Trump-- this story had basically waned.

Howard Bryant: Yeah.

Christine Brennan: It, of course it started in the summer of 2016, with the...

Howard Bryant: Which, by the way, Christine, which is very interesting, because Muhammad Ali had just died less than three months previous.

Christine Brennan: Right.

Howard Bryant: And everybody was talking about...

Christine Brennan: How great...

Howard Bryant: How great Muhammad Ali was.

Christine Brennan: Right, then the idea of civil disobedience...

Howard Bryant: Exactly.

Christine Brennan: And again...

Howard Bryant: And then this happens.

00:46:18 Christine Brennan: And first you have Kaepernick sitting at a pre-season game, and, like, kind of, people noticed a little, and like, "Oh, look at that." Then you've got the Green Beret telling him, "If you're going to do this, kneel." And then, of course, it became a big deal. And then, though, if we're looking at the arc of the story, there was a lot of attention, and then Kaepernick really wasn't talking. And it, it waned.

00:46:37 It waned until September, late September of 2017, when Donald Trump goes down to Alabama for that Senate race and, and issues his famous "S.O.B." line. And that was a Friday night-- I actually was in the green room at CNN. I was going to go on Don Lemon's show talking about Aaron Hernandez. And that's... he had, you know, that's had just happened.

Howard Bryant: Also sticking to sports.

Christine Brennan: Yes, exactly-- well, but if I'm on CNN, we're not sticking to sports, right?

Howard Bryant: Yeah, exactly.

00:47:03 Christine Brennan: That's, that's the... Culture and sports, that intersection is now a superhighway, right? Where they, where those two meet, our U.S. culture and sports. And, anyway, and then we're literally flipping. Don, Don Lemon says, "I think this is a big deal." I said, "I do, too," because I'm looking at Twitter, and I'm seeing all the NFL players, "Protest, protest, we're going to protest." And I, I was not... didn't take a rocket scientist. I'm happy to say I said this, but a journalist would have not had his or her, you know, journalist card much longer if you didn't say this, that there would be hundreds of protests that Sunday.

00:47:37 So Trump gins it all up. He just throws that little, you know, that hand grenade, and, boom, it takes off. Again, Kaepernick is now out of the league, if you move on to this year. And again it wanes, until the Dolphins, it breaks that the Dolphins have this... they're going to do the player conduct and going to have potential fines. It blows up again. The NFL says, "Well, we can't do this."

00:47:56 And then it's quiet. But then, then, so, again, it took Trump. But now, Nike-- what is Nike? It's a business. What is Trump? Whatever Trump is, but, obviously, he's a businessman. At least that's the idea, right? Capitalism, right? Free enterprise. Nike makes a business decision, and Trump doesn't like it. He said, "What's Nike thinking?" And I think Nike's thinking, "I'd like to have 50 years of market share."

00:48:19 Because, another, I think, key point here, younger Americans are all about social activism. Those Parkland kids are 18, 19 years old. When they're 50, they're going to run this country. And... they and kids like them. And, you know, God love them, and thank goodness for them. And so what you've got here is a whole, now, generation that is socially active and that is going to buy Nikes because of Colin Kaepernick and because of the social activism. So maybe it doesn't play so well with Dad and Mom and Grandpa and Grandma, but it's playing well with the kids. And who's your future fan base? It's those 18-year-olds.

00:48:54 Howard Bryant: And Nike was also calculated, I was going to say, in one other way, too, because what Nike did, in a very clever sense, was, all of those folks, or a lot of those folks who had been criticizing Nike for 30 years for their unfair labor practices, are now, like, "Yeah, go, Nike."

Christine Brennan: I know.

Howard Bryant: So...

Christine Brennan: Well, yeah, there is that part.

Clifford Chanin: Let me bring LeBron into this, because you describe, you know, his activist trajectory in your book, and in more recent years, he has really stepped forward in this. And, you know, he actually took Trump on directly, in terms of social media comments and so on and so forth. So... and I want to get to some audience questions, as well. But, you know, let's talk about not just LeBron's development, but where he is right now. Because he's the crossing point...

Howard Bryant: Yeah.

00:49:38 Clifford Chanin: ...of extraordinary accomplishment, still on the court, and this major corporate presence with Nike and many other corporations, as well.

Howard Bryant: Indeed, yeah, well, very, very quickly, and I know everyone, people have questions, and I hate when we have these events and people don't get to ask questions they may have. Very quickly, there's a saying in the clubhouse, whether it's baseball, football, whatever, that the smartest guy in the room is the guy with the biggest number of zeros on his paycheck.

00:50:00 LeBron James has the biggest number of zeros on his paycheck. In other words, he's the guy that everyone's going to listen to, and what he does, people are going to follow. Just as was the case with O.J. and Michael and Tiger and the rest of them. And so what LeBron has done is, he has essentially told, by his actions after Trayvon Martin was killed, "It's okay if you want to stand up, if you want to say something. I'm doing it." And a lot of the other players, now that they've got a cover from the big guy, they may feel a little bit more emboldened to, to speak.

00:50:32 And then on top of that, what he's also done, because he is of this new generation, when we talk about wealth, LeBron James is, is worth a half a billion dollars. He's 32 years old. And so, you know, he's, he has got a level of financial protection. It's also going to be very interesting to see what happens to LeBron James, because can you really be an activist when you are the overlord?

00:51:01 Considering his movie company that he owns and the other production companies and his connections with T-Mobile and State Farm and all these... all these corporations that ostensibly people are going to protest, can you be the protester, and the corporate entity at the same time?

00:51:20 Christine Brennan: Thank goodness for LeBron James and the way he speaks out. I'm from northern Ohio. He's from northern Ohio. And even though he's come and gone and come and gone again... (clears throat): It's wonderful to see. If you've spent any time in northern Ohio, in

Toledo, there's, you know, we have trees. It's beautiful, it's green, you know.

But, and Cleveland, and then you go further, Akron, Youngstown, et cetera, obviously Youngstown in the news, with the GM plant closing, what a, what a delight it is to have someone, and I'm not even speaking at all racially here, at all. I mean, just as a, as a touchstone, as a... as a hero for a community and an area.

00:52:02 Opening that school, amazing. The story of the bicycle, he wanted every kid to have a bike, because, of course, he had a bike, and he got a chance to see other places because he rode his bike, and got to meet people that he otherwise wouldn't have met. And he'd like to have kids have that same opportunity. So and while that's going on, as I'm sure you recall, he's getting, you know, hammered by tweets by the president of the United States, which was just unthinkable, and yet, there it was happening. How history will judge that, huh?

00:52:29 I, I think LeBron will win that one, as well. But just when you think about it, LeBron, for all the athletes who get in trouble-- and we've covered a lot of them, black, white, men, women... Not so many women but some women, Tonya Harding, covered Tonya Harding-- talk a little bit about Tonya. Marion Jones cheating, sadly, tragically, unfortunately. You know, you think about... think about LeBron. I mean, the trouble that he could have gotten in, right, as a high school kid, you know?

00:53:02 All the things that could have happened. The people that he surrounded himself with. I did a column, right, that first year he was a rookie. And I talked to the adults who were around him, and his foundation that was beginning. And I thought, "Oh, my gosh, this is impressive. "Whoever helped him get this going, this is a young man who, who's figured it out and is going to go places," because he had a terrific group of adults who were helping him along the way.

00:53:28 And we are a better nation because of LeBron James. Kids are better because of LeBron. He's interesting, he's fun. And, again, it's probably easy in some ways for athletes... I shouldn't say it's easy. It's easier for athletes in some, now, because those lines are divided, because Trump has, his tweets can be so... so, so awful, that it's probably... It may be

easier to speak out. But that doesn't mean they're not going to get incoming, because they get it on Twitter, and they get it from all the social media and everyone who doesn't like what they do.

00:54:05

So I'm not saying it's easy, but I'm saying I think we're seeing more of it across the board. We're seeing, with female athletes speaking out. Lindsey Vonn, you know, at the Olympics, speaking out. All the Olympians who did not go to the White House. We never actually got a clear number, but a lot of them ended up doing work days in the community, going to schools, rather than going to the United States... to the White House, to see the president, the Olympic team-- by far the lowest number I think we've ever seen go to the White House after the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. That just happened a few months ago.

00:54:38

And Adam Rippon speaking out against Mike Pence, stories that I wrote, and a story I broke. So we see it all. But I think LeBron, really, is probably that, that big name, along with Kaepernick, entirely different reasons that they're at the front of the pack and in the headlines, but as I said, I think 50 years from now, those, those two names will be studied as much as any... as part of our culture, not just sports, but as part of our American culture.

00:55:05

Clifford Chanin: Let's see if we have a comment or two, or question. Please raise your hand and wait for the mic. Right here in the front.

Audience Member: So we've talked about sports and athletes and politics. We haven't really talked about athletes as politicians. I know, you know, there's people like Bill Bradley, Steve Largent... Who do you think...?

Howard Bryant: Jim Bunning.

00:55:33

Audience Member: Who?

Howard Bryant: Jim Bunning.

Christine Brennan: Jim Bunning.

Audience Member: And Kevin Johnson.

Howard Bryant: Kevin Johnson, sure.

Clifford Chanin: Colin Allred was just elected in Texas.

00:55:39 Audience Member: Who do you think... Do you think that some of these athletes who are speaking out about politics now are going to become politicians, elected politicians themselves? Is LeBron going to run for office?

(Bryant laughs)

00:55:53 Howard Bryant: Yeah, I think that... I think that what's interesting about this is that the players have an opportunity now to do anything they want. I mean, I think that's what's been really sort of interesting about watching their development and sort of recognizing that the player doesn't have to be quiet, that their, their citizenship expands when... I think that the players have been told for so long that, "Anything you say is going to hurt your brand."

00:56:21 Or, "Anything you say is going, you're going to be polarizing, and half the..." You know, "Half the population is not going to root for you," or, "They're not going to buy your sneakers," or whatever. But I think that what you have seen today is that I think players... I think the public has, whatever short tolerance they have, there's always this other group of people who are appreciative of what they do.

Christine Brennan: And I think a very interesting, like, kind of a sidebar that probably hasn't gotten as much attention in this election yet... Of course, what did get a ton of attention was, of course, the election of so many women to Congress, in particular, the House of Representatives. And... over 100 women, first time ever.

- 00:57:00 And I actually tweeted out on Election Day, or the day after, whatever, that this is also a victory for Title IX. Because if you look at the ages of these women, Jennifer Wexton, the big Virginia-10, beating Barbara Comstock in one of the the early flips, Democrat-Republican. Jennifer Wexton is 50. I don't know her personally, even though she's only, probably, like, an hour from me. But I know of her. We know, we know people like her, right? 50-year-old lawyer, and now a congresswoman-elect.
- 00:57:33 You looked at some of these military women. There's Amy McGrath in Lexington, who didn't win but was as notable and as publicized as anyone in the election, all of the women basically in their 40s and 50s who won these races. Well, without knowing this as a fact, I think we can pretty, be pretty sure they played little kids' soccer. They played tee ball. They probably played some sports in middle school. They may have played in high school, may have done house league, may have done, you know, varsity, JV, field hockey, volleyball-- you name it.
- 00:58:10 Guaranteed, they all played sports, because Title IX, as it came of age and as our... as it's moved through the demographic, our, our periods of demographics, that they... this is that group. These women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s who played sports and learned how to win, and even more important, learned how to lose at a young age, learned about teamwork and sportsmanship.
- 00:58:33 For generations, we were telling 50% or 51% of our country, "You cannot learn these life lessons. We will forbid you from learning how to lose at a young age and winning. We will not let you play sports. Your brothers, yes-- not you." Well, now, and for 46 years, since Title IX, we are now telling girls, "Yes, you can learn those lessons." And now we're calling some of those girls Congresswoman. And I guarantee you we'll be calling some of those girls president of the United States.
- 00:59:01 The common denominator for all of these women who will be leading the country in the next 20, 30, 40 years, whether it's politics or business or academia, whatever, will be that they played sports due to Title IX. Not that I'm a big fan of Title IX or anything.

(applause)

Clifford Chanin (laughing): Another question. Gentleman there, please wait for the mic.

00:59:25 Audience Member: I see, since we are talking about the parallels of politics and sports, and we see, like, the new age of the WNBA, and they're talking about equal pay and getting their... getting their just due as... and, and the NFL, do you see the more that people talk about their... what their... what their... what they deserve, will it grow the sport? Like, as we talk about 30, 40, 50 years from now, will it, will it benefit the league, as well as the individuals who are... who make up so much of these leagues?

01:00:06 Howard Bryant: I don't think we should talk about 30 or 40 or 50. We should talk about three or four or five. I think that one of the hardest things to deal with today is, generationally, you have a high number, I mean, you've got a generation of people, if you were born... you know, if you born after 1980-- '85, '86, somewhere in there-- you don't know the United States as a strong pro-labor country. You are not used to fighting for yourself. Most times, the employees are the ones tearing each other apart, because we don't believe that we deserve anything.

01:00:42 When the NFL had its issues, and I'm very proud to see that the WNBA isn't doing what the NBA and the NFL did. When I started covering football, you remember this, when the rookies were starting to make more money, the veterans, instead of going after the owners, they went after the rookies. And so that's when they created a rookie wage scale.

The NBA did it ten years earlier, in the mid-90s. Remember when Glenn Robinson got that big contract as a rookie? The veterans, instead of fighting for a bigger share of the pie, they went after their own players. So it's nice to see the WNBA, the women sticking together.

01:01:16 And I was, I was talking to Martina Navratilova about this, and about whether it was... why the women stuck together back in '73, why did the women stick together better than the men? If you look at how the, the Minnesota Lynx have done it, and how a lot of the players on the WNBA

side, how they stuck together better. And, and now you look at what they're doing in the WNBA, contract-wise, you start to see a little bit more solidarity than you do with the men. It's encouraging to see.

01:01:51 How that response... the response they're going to get from the league itself, that's going to be... it's going to be really telling. But I think that, I think that it's really encouraging to see the, the WNBA players recognize that, "Wait a minute, we do have value, and we're willing to see what our value is."

01:02:11 Christine Brennan: And the story really kind of exploded in our consciousness and became a big story outside of the... transcending sports, with that ridiculous travel that the Las Vegas team had to do. And you may have heard this story. If not, you can look it up. It was like a "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles," just trying to get to one game in Washington.

By the time they got to DC after spending the night, I think it was in Denver or Dallas, you know, sleeping in, in, you know, in airport chairs, and doing the same kind of thing that some of us have done, but as professional athletes. Contrasting it with all the, of course, the, the airfare and the jets that other teams, NBA and others, have.

01:02:49 Howard Bryant: And let's not forget that they were inspired also by two other things that took place. One, you've got, you know, the greatest soccer players in America are the women's national team. And they're getting less than the men. And they win all the time, and the men never win anything. And then on top of that, you had the hockey team, the women, the women's, they were hosting the world championships in the United States.

Christine Brennan: And they struck, and they...

Howard Bryant: And they had to strike to get what they wanted.

Christine Brennan: And they got a better deal.

Howard Bryant: Exactly.

Christine Brennan: And then still played and won.

Howard Bryant: And still played and still won.

01:03:19 Christine Brennan: And it is interesting, because if you think about it, the way the women have, have held together. And maybe it does go back to Billie Jean King. I mean, because, you know, when she's fighting those battles, and if you haven't seen the movie with Emma Stone, see it. It's, it's good. But there's that iconic picture of holding the one-dollar bill. They became professionals with each of them getting a dollar, and then, now they're pros.

01:03:39 But, but this was a heroic stand in the sports terminology, not necessarily in the military term. But an incredible risk that Billie Jean King and the others took back then. And who do you see... It's fascinating, you mention the soccer. They've done it a couple of times. Julie Foudy, Mia Hamm, et cetera, back after '99, after Brandi Chastain and the Rose Bowl, and taking off her shirt and all that stuff.

01:04:03 Well, then it was in, like, 2000 and 2001, they did it, and they had to do it again. Well, that's Julie Foudy, and that's that gang, and who do they look to for advice?

Christine Brennan: Billie Jean King.

Howard Bryant: Billie Jean King, sure.

Christine Brennan: So then the hockey players you mentioned, a year and a half ago, they did this. They're the ones that won, then won the gold medal in Pyeongchang, one of the more... Probably my most fun event to cover this year was watching that U.S.-Canada hockey game. It went to overtime and then penalty kick, or penalty shots, and the U.S. wins it,

first time in 20 years the U.S. beats Canada and wins the gold medal. It was terrific, just absolutely a great game.

01:04:34

Well, Foudy is there, Julie Foudy, now working for ESPN. And she's waiting to hang out with the players. She's covering it, and she said, "I'm a little embarrassed." And I said, "Oh, no, no, don't be embarrassed. Do what you want to do." And she's hugging them, and they're thanking her, because they looked to her for advice on their holdout. So the hockey looks to Foudy, Foudy and the soccer players look to Billie Jean King. It's a direct link, and it... And it is a wonderful storyline.

01:04:59

Howard Bryant: But, also, let's not forget something else, and that the difference is the money. The qualifying offer for Major League Baseball, if you want, to if the team wants to retain a player, I think this year, it's \$18 million. How do you stick together...

Christine Brennan: Right.

Howard Bryant: When you're being offered, at the very least, \$18 million? Whereas the women are making \$90,000 a year.

Christine Brennan: Exactly.

01:05:25

Howard Bryant: So the money is so great, you're not... You know you're not going to get any sympathy from the public. "Oh, man, you turned down \$18 million, poor baby." You know, I mean, no one's going to look at you as some sort of labor leader. They're not going to view you that way. On the other hand, the definition of exploitation is you not receiving your percentage of the pie. So if the owners are making 60% or 67%, and you're making 33%, even if your 33% is eight or nine billion dollars, the players believe they have an argument. It's hard to argue that.

01:06:00

Christine Brennan: And what you were just saying about how it's tougher to fight for it, if, you know, and to be a cohesive unit, then how remarkable, really, is Venus Williams?

Howard Bryant: Oh, exactly.

Christine Brennan: Because there she is, making her millions upon millions upon millions, and she's still out there fighting that battle. Wimbledon was the last of the four Grand Slam tournaments to, to have equal prize money, and that happened in 2007. And interestingly, U.S. Open was the first. Can anyone guess? It was... the other three were all in the 2000s. U.S. Open? 1973.

Howard Bryant: '73...

01:06:31 Christine Brennan: Very good. So again, the impact of Billie Jean King. But how remarkable then, that Venus, with all her money-- she could kick back, have a drink with an umbrella in it. She doesn't have to do another thing. And instead, she's writing the op-ed for the "Times" of London and fighting like crazy, and then got that prize money. It makes it even all the more remarkable. Also, we're a little bit apples and oranges here, because if we're talking professional sports in the truest sense, for women, it's really just tennis and golf where they're making tons and tons of money.

01:06:59 And, again, I think some of those golfers, you would have a hard time... In fact, I know for a fact, I've asked them why they won't, like, boycott the U.S. Open to get somewhat better prize money. Because if you look at what, what the U.S. Open men's golf winner makes compared to the women's, it's a joke. But they won't, they'd never boycott it. But also, they're making millions themselves. Not as much as Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson. But they're, they're doing very, very well. But the difference when we talk, say, about soccer or about ice hockey, these are national governing bodies.

Howard Bryant: That's right.

01:07:29 Christine Brennan: And these are Olympic sports, where you'd even make a stronger case that capitalism actually should be thrown out the window. This is for the good... these are nonprofits. For the good of the game. frankly, you should pay the women more if you want to encourage

more girls to play that sport, right? The carrot in front of, in front of it. So there's a lot of issues there when you deal with our Olympic sports.

Clifford Chanin: Let's see if we have one more before we finish. The gentleman in the back there. Yeah.

01:07:58 Audience Member: So I have a two-part question. First, thank you for coming out tonight on such a cold night.

Howard Bryant: It's not that cold.

Audience Member: It's pretty cold for me. (laughing) So two-part question. One is just, what's your take on patriotism, and what I think is starting to morph into a form of nationalism, being an integral part of sports, when in other industries and other forms of entertainment, you're not seeing that same level of nationalism or patriotism?

01:08:28 And then the second question is, second part of the question is, as you look over the next three, five, ten years, do you still see sports and patriotism/nationalism being as intertwined, or do you see it getting stronger or weaker?

01:08:43 Howard Bryant: Well, I think that it's... I don't think it's going anywhere, and I don't think it's going anywhere for a couple of reasons. I think the first one is, it's the power of 9/11. I think that this country has not reconciled with everything that that day did to this country, what it did to the industries. I also think that the industries, especially sports, all of them, have mastered the financial element of it. They know how to make money off of patriotism. It's a huge, huge, huge moneymaker.

01:09:12 And when you watch TV, and you see during the Salute to Service month in the NFL, you see the teams are dressed in camo. You know, they're wearing camouflage for a sporting event, which I think is inappropriate. And no matter how much you say, "Oh, well, a small portion goes to us, but rest of it goes to..." Well, you can give that money to military families. You can give that money without dressing them up in a costume like this, especially when you're fighting, you know, when, when if you,

you hop on the Cost of War website from Brown University, when essentially 40% of the world's countries have an American presence of military in it, and there's no money for I think that it's not going anywhere.

01:09:57 I think one of the things that was encouraging to me working on this book was the number of, of veterans who don't like what they see. There's a section in the book, a chapter, chapter seven is called, "Props," because they don't want to be called... They don't want to be treated as props. They need jobs. They need respect. They need medical care, they need attention. They don't need billionaires making money off of them. And this is the government that's doing this.

01:10:26 And this is something that is... is inappropriate to me. I also think that, I remember asking a Red Sox executive last year, you know, "Why do you guys still sing 'God Bless America' "in the seventh inning? It's been almost 20 years post-9/11." And he told me point-blank, "Because we don't want to be the first one to stop, "because we'll get killed for looking unpatriotic. We don't even know why we do it. Nobody pays attention to it. Nobody cares. It's just that if we... if we stop, you know, we don't want the president coming down on us calling us unpatriotic." I said, "So in other words, you're all just following the leader?" And, like, "Yeah, pretty much."

Christine Brennan: Yeah.

01:11:02 Howard Bryant: So, to me, that's, that's even worse. At the very least, if you're going to do something, do it out of conviction. And if you're going to do it, do it with transparency. If you go look at the report from the late John McCain and Jeff Flake, "Tackling Paid Patriotism," you have the Milwaukee Brewers charging the Wisconsin National Guard \$80,000 a year to sing "God Bless America." I mean, this is a moneymaker. This has nothing to do with patriotism. And it undermines everything that we're talking about here.

01:11:35 Christine Brennan: Yeah, I think it's a great question, and I think some of it may... the answer may hinge on who is elected president in 2020. Because if we've got four more years of Donald Trump, then I think we know, you alluded to, you don't want to get that tweet, you know...

Howard Bryant: But the leagues were doing this under Obama, as well. They've mastered the money.

Christine Brennan: Well, they were. Right, but now we're in a whole... It's, it's been almost weaponized, you know, in a way that...

Howard Bryant: It has been weaponized.

01:12:05 Christine Brennan: Yeah, and, and again, the weapon can just be the... just be Twitter and social media. But that's a powerful weapon, especially for any company. Again, I think Nike has done something very interesting. Ask they gave cover, I think, to athletes... We really haven't seen too many athletes this year, NFL players kneeling. But in some ways, victory was achieved, because of what Nike did.

01:12:23 Again, Nike is a very complex company, and there are lots of issues and lots of tangents about the Nike conversation. But at its core, vis-à-vis Kaepernick, what Nike was saying was, you know, "We're with you." And that kind of shut everybody up. So a couple of thoughts. Will there be other companies that jump in, one way or the other, on some issue, maybe even unforeseen, in the next few years?

Certainly, with the 2020 Olympics, you had at least one U.S. women's soccer player, Megan Rapinoe, taking a knee. Happens to be one of the best players, greatest pass in U.S. soccer history, male or female, to Abby Wombach's head in the 2011 Women's World Cup in Germany. Look it up, it was amazing.

01:13:06 Well, Megan Rapinoe, if she makes the team, she may kneel. There may be something going on there, or they may ask her not to, but whatever. She'll certainly say in her interviews. We may see, as the election's ramping up at the same time as the 2020 Olympics-- it's going to be, you know, dovetailing-- we may see more athletes, in fact, I guarantee you we will see more athletes speaking out against the president of the United States. There's just no way around that. We saw that at the Winter Olympics. The Summer Olympics are much bigger than the Winter

Olympics. I do think, though, we can't put the genie back in the bottle in terms of the, of the patriotic outbursts at sporting events. And I think that's here to stay, I agree with you, for quite some time.

01:13:44 But I do think a lot of what we'll see from athletes, protest, or concerns, or quotes, just, or comment a lot of it will be linked to Trump and the election in 2020. Because we have seen a rise, if we were charting this, and we're not necessarily, but if we're... Spikes of it-- you know, the 1960s, and then we got Tiger and Jordan, and then I mean, we are spiking way up. Look at the NBA, look at Popovich. Look at Steve Kerr. On and on it goes.

01:14:12 And I think it is completely tied in, parallel with, with the president now and what will happen with his future, which, in many ways is the, the sports community will, will follow and will go along and take that lead, whichever way it may take those athletes. So I wish we had a better crystal ball to look at. But I... it's a fascinating conversation. I promise, for myself-- I know for Howard, too-- we're on it. We are going to stay on top of it, for sure.

01:14:39 Clifford Chanin: Let me, I know Christine has a train to catch, so we're going to call it there. I mean, when we started thinking about the sports exhibition that we have downstairs, "Comeback Season," you know, people asked us, "Well, sports, what does that have to do with anything?" And I think this evening's panel proved it has to do with everything. I do want to ask those of you who are interested, and I suggest that you be interested, Howard will be outside.

01:15:00 He can sign a book for you. We have some available to buy. "The Heritage: Black Athletes, a Divided America, and the Politics of Patriotism." Thank you for coming. But please join me in thanking Howard Bryant and Christine Brennan.

(applause)