Words in This Story

conversation – n. the act of talking in an informal way

fire – v. to dismiss (someone) from a job

rhetoric – n. language that is intended to influence people and that may not be honest or reasonable

condone – v. to forgive or approve (something that is considered wrong) : to allow (something that is considered wrong) to continue

boo – n. a sound that people make to show they do not like or approve of someone or something

bum – n. someone who avoids work

fan – n. someone who actively followed a sport or performing art

distraction – n. something that makes it hard to pat attention

Sports Officials, Players Stand Up to Trump's Criticism

This is What's Trending Today.

People in the United States have been talking about Colin Kaepernick for over a year.

If you have not been following American football, here is his story.

Last year, Kaepernick was a player for the San Francisco 49ers of the National Football League.

Before a game last August, he did not stand for the national anthem, a song called the Star-Spangled Banner. It is usually played or sung before the start of a major sporting event. Most people stand up and look toward the U.S. flag when the national anthem is played.

Before the next game, Kaepernick, did not stand again when the song was performed. Instead he put one knee on the ground and stood up when the music ended.

After the game, he was asked about his decision. Kaepernick, who is African-American, said he was doing it to bring attention to the way minorities are treated in the United States. Especially, he said, police violence against African-Americans.

U.S. police officers shot and killed a number of African-American men in 2016. Many of the shootings were caught on camera.

The current NFL season started three weeks ago. While Kaepernick is not on any team this year, his name is still part of a national conversation. Many football fans spent July and August wanting to know why a player who was still young and physically able to play was not on a team.

Most people decided it was because teams and their owners saw him as a distraction. The questions about kneeling for the national anthem would come as soon as he signed with a team.

Yet other NFL players are now kneeling during the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner.

On Friday, at an event in Alabama, President Donald Trump said he would fire any player who kneeled during the national anthem if he were the team's owner.

Trump went on to say "Some owner's ... going to say, ‘That guy who disrespects our flag, he's fired.' And that owner, they'll be the most popular person for a week in this country."

The president also suggested football fans boycott NFL games.

Those comments concerned a number of players, owners and the head of the NFL. The players used Twitter to answer Trump's comments.

Richard Sherman of the Seattle Seahawks wrote: "The behavior of the President is unacceptable and needs to be addressed. If you do not condemn this divisive rhetoric, you are condoning it!"

And on Sunday, many players knelt during the Star-Spangled Banner. Others linked their arms together and stood. Before one game, the teams left the field before the national anthem and returned later to start play.

A few NFL team owners came on the field and joined their players.

Some fans cheered the players' right to express themselves. Others were not happy.

The Boston Herald published a report on events before the game between the New England Patriots and Houston Texans. The newspaper said that about 15 New England players knelt down while others linked their arms. Some fans booed the players.

Robert Kraft is the Patriots' owner. He supported Trump during the 2016 election campaign. Kraft said he was "disappointed by the tone" of Trump's comments.

Trump reacted Monday morning through Twitter.

He wrote: "The issue of kneeling has nothing to do with race. It is about respect for our Country, Flag and National Anthem. NFL must respect this!"

Over the weekend, the president also exchanged words with members of the Golden State Warriors basketball team. The Warriors won the National Basketball Association championship over the summer. Traditionally, the champion team visits the White House during a trip to Washington, D.C.

As the NBA preseason started last week, some Warriors players, including Steph Curry, said they were not sure whether they would visit with Trump.

A short time later, Trump used Twitter to say "Stephen Curry is hesitating, therefore invitation is withdrawn!"

That tweet led LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers to call the president "U bum," and write "going to the White House was a great honor until you showed up."

And that's What's Trending Today.

I'm Dan Friedell.

Dan Friedell adapted this story for VOA Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

What do you think of the protests by NFL players? We want to know. Write to us in the Comments Section or on 51VOA.COM.