

TOP STORY: Some allied groups called for an NFL boycott

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Some allied groups were quick to call for an NFL boycott following Trump's remarks about the protesters.

The president's attack on athletes turned the anthems — usually sung during commercials — into must-watch television shown live by the networks and streamed on devices.

In addition to the protests, some players and coaches locked arms in a show of unity, which Trump said was a display of "solidarity" of which he approved. But he pushed back against the suggestion that his critique could inflame racial tensions, arguing: "This has nothing to do with race. This has to do with respect for our country."

But critics of the president said Trump's comments had a lot to do with race.

"It just amazes me with everything else going on in this world, especially involving the U.S., that's what you're concerned about, my man? You're the leader of the free world and this is what you're talking about?" Miami Dolphins safety Michael Thomas said. "So, as a man, as a father, as an African-American man, as somebody in the NFL and one of those 'sons of bitches,' yeah, I took it personally."

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said Trump's comments were "divisive" and showed an "unfortunate lack of respect."

A handful of white players didn't stand, but the vast majority of those actively protesting were black.

"We felt like President Trump's speech was an assault on our most cherished right, freedom of speech," said Denver



In this Dec. 10 file photo, San Francisco 49ers' Eli Harold (57), Eric Reid (35) and Marquise Goodwin (11) kneel during the national anthem before an NFL football game against the Houston Texans, in Houston. President Donald Trump's feud with the NFL about players kneeling during the national anthem is the runaway winner for the top sports story of 2017 in balloting by AP members and editors.

Broncos star Von Miller, who normally steers clear of politics and social issues.

Trump supporters argued the president was not targeting African-Americans but instead was simply expressing patriotism.

"Me taking a knee doesn't change the fact that I support our military, I'm a patriot and I love my country," Buffalo Bills linebacker Lorenzo Alexander said. "But I also recognize there are some social injustices in this country and today I wanted to take a knee in support of my brothers who have been doing it."

Although the protests returned to pre-Trump criticism levels as the season wound down, the president's feud with the NFL sparked a firestorm that reached across financial and cultural landscapes, further splitting a nation already divided over politics and

social issues.

Kaepernick sued the league, alleging team owners conspired to keep him out in response to his activism. Hall of Fame Cowboys owner Jerry Jones suggested he'd fire any player who knelt even though none of his had done so.

Papa John's Pizza founder John Schnatter criticized Goodell over his refusal to force players to stand and blamed the protests for a slowing sales growth at one of the league's biggest sponsors and advertisers. The company apologized for his comments following praise from white supremacists and said recently that Schnatter is stepping down as CEO in 2018.

The NFL, already dealing with a dip in TV ratings, the ongoing concussion issue and a rash of star players getting hurt, recently proposed contributing tens of millions of dollars to

projects focused on criminal justice reform, law enforcement and community relations and education.

"I give kudos to the NFL for wanting to step up and help us with regard to systemic oppression," 49ers safety Eric Reid said. "I question their intent behind it. I personally think they just want the protests to end because it's hurting their bottom line."

The movement and the arguments over it show no sign of abating in the new year.

"I'm not really sure where the movement heads after this, but I know we made some progress by getting some funding for some inner-city programs and things that we care about, different social programs and things like that," Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall said. "So, I think we made some headway."



In this Nov. 1, 2017, file photo, the Houston Astros celebrate after Game 7 of baseball's World Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers in Los Angeles. The Astros winning their first World Series was one of the biggest sports stories in 2017 for the AP.

Associated Press Top 10 Stories for 2017

- Here is a list of the biggest sports stories in 2017:
1. NFL players who knelt during the national anthem said they were exercising their free-speech rights and trying to bring attention to social injustices. Critics, including the president, said they were disrespecting the flag, the country and the military. Kaepernick sued the league when no team signed him.
 2. College basketball comes under the microscope after a federal investigation reveals corruption involving recruiting practices.
 3. Houston Astros win their first World Series, beating the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 7 to lift the spirits of a city devastated by Hurricane Harvey.
 4. In a season that included his four-game suspension for "Deflategate," Tom Brady engineers a record-breaking comeback as the Patriots defeat the Falcons in first-ever Super Bowl overtime.
 5. The president of USA Gymnastics resigns amid a sexual abuse scandal that includes revelations by some of the sport's biggest stars that they were victims.
 6. Russia is banned from the Winter Olympics for a massive doping scheme at the 2014 Sochi Games.
 7. Clemson mounts a last-second comeback to beat Alabama for college football's national title.
 8. The United States fails to qualify for soccer's World Cup for the first time since 1986. Four-time champion Italy also fails to qualify.
 9. New acquisition Kevin Durant leads the Golden State Warriors to the NBA championship over the defending champion Cleveland Cavaliers.
 10. MMA star Conor McGregor steps into the boxing ring to face undefeated champ Floyd Mayweather Jr.

SEAHAWKS: Avoided a third straight loss in December for first time since 2010

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Cliff Avril, forced three turnovers. Each led to one of the touchdowns, highlighted by Coleman's 30-yard return to put Seattle in front for good in the third quarter.

Seattle (9-6) was eliminated in the NFC West race because the Los Angeles Rams beat Jacksonville 27-23 a week after a 42-7 blowout of the Seahawks. But Seattle still has a shot at the postseason with a win at home against Arizona and an Atlanta loss to Carolina next Sunday.

"Adversity to me is all the same," said receiver Doug Baldwin, who had one of the touchdown catches on a 6-yarder for the final margin. "It's another mountain that you have to climb. So a lot of the guys in this room look toward things we've had to overcome as motivation that we can win with the struggles we're facing now."

Things to consider after the Seahawks avoided a third straight December loss for the first time since 2010 — another time they bounced back because they made the playoffs at 7-9 and won a wild-card game at home:

ELLIOTT'S QUIET



Dallas Cowboys cornerback Jourdan Lewis (27) and Jeff Heath, right, are unable to stop Seattle Seahawks tight end Jimmy Graham (88) from catching a pass in the end zone for a touchdown in the first half of Sunday's game in Arlington, Texas.

RETURN: The Cowboys (8-7) didn't look much better offensively with last year's NFL rushing leader back after the ban over domestic violence allegations. If they are to contend in 2018

after missing the playoffs following a 13-3 season in the debuts of Prescott and Elliott, the passing game will have to get back on track.

Prescott had four inter-



Dallas Cowboys' Dak Prescott (4) follows behind watching as Seattle Seahawks' Justin Coleman (28) returns a Prescott interception for a touchdown in the second half of Sunday's game in Arlington, Texas.

ceptions last year while setting a rookie record for passer rating. He has four pick-sixes this season and 13 interceptions overall, the most for a Dallas quarterback since Tony Romo matched his career high with 19 in 2012. Elliott's 97 yards on 24 carries didn't make much difference.

"This year was tough," Prescott said. "We know we are not making the postseason, but hopefully it will motivate us."

LOOKING AHEAD:

Seattle safety Earl Thomas, going into the last year of his contract and a candidate for salary cap savings if he is cut, visited receiver Dez Bryant in the Cowboys locker room after the game and told Dallas coach Jason Garrett, "If they kick me to the curb, come get me."

"When I say 'Come get me,' I don't mean now," said Thomas, who has made offseason appearances with Bryant. "But when Seattle kicks me to the curb, please, the Cowboys come get me."

That's the only place I'd rather be."

SPEAKING OF CONTRACTS: Bryant has two years left on the \$70 million, five-year deal he signed after his All-Pro season in 2014. He's a game away from going all 16 without a 100-yard game for the first time in his career. He's been prone to drops and had another sideline tantrum before a fumble that turned the game in Seattle's favor.

"We have a lot of respect for all the good things that Dez brings," owner and general manager Jerry Jones said. "He's come a long way and made some serious positive contributions to the team. I wouldn't today get into any prognosis or evaluation or prediction about what we're doing with a player."

SPEAKING OF RESILIENT: Seattle linebacker Bobby Wagner played through a lingering hamstring injury for the second straight week, and Carroll said Wright was sick all weekend. There figures to be little question about whether Wagner plays against the Cardinals. "Those guys played like crazy to hold these guys down," Carroll said.

WARRIORS: Will go for season sweep of Cavs in Cleveland on January 15

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last June captured a second championship in three years against James and the Cavaliers.

"I forgot all about it," Cavs coach Tyrone Lue said with a chuckle.

The teams will see each other again soon, playing Jan. 15 in Cleveland.

KD requested James for his defensive assignment, to which he explained simply, "I just like guarding my position."

The Cavs, having won six of seven and playing for the first time since Thursday, had their run of scoring at least 100 points end at 26 games.

The Warriors were at nearly full strength again aside from Curry, who could return this week once he goes through some scrimmages at practice.

Center Zaza Pachulia was

available but didn't play after sitting out seven consecutive games, while Shaun Livingston came back after missing four games with a sore right knee.

Bell — who addressed the sellout crowd at midcourt moments before tipoff — started at center and had eight points and six rebounds.

SHOOTING WOES

The Cavs' 31.8-percent shooting was the lowest by a Warriors opponent in nearly four years, since Charlotte shot 31.2 percent from the field on Feb. 4, 2014.

"We just didn't make shots," Lue said.

A REAL RIVALRY

Sure, this one felt a little strange without Curry or Kyrie Irving, now in Boston. "Golden State-Cavaliers, that's a big game, no matter who's playing, who's out," Lue said.

"It will be weird, without Steph, without Ky, especially



Cleveland's LeBron James (23) drives to the basket past Golden State guard Patrick McCaw during Monday's game in Oakland, Calif.

AP Photo/Tony Avelar

the battles we've had over the last three years. So both teams look different."

Warriors coach Steve Kerr knows just the uniforms

are enough to get everybody going — and this marked the third straight Christmas matchup between the franchises, alternating home

floors based on who won the title.

"It's always great to play the Cavs, they're an awesome team," Kerr said. "LeBron is so amazing and it's so fun to feel the energy in the building when the two teams get together. Neither team will look the same as we will even a month from now because Steph and Isaiah Thomas both should be back, hopefully they'll both be back. ... But it doesn't even matter sometimes, just the two uniforms in the same building gets people going."

TIP-INS

Cavaliers: Lue isn't yet ready to guess when Thomas will return following his right hip injury. "He is progressing very well," Lue said. "The most important thing is that he is getting to practice and playing 5-on-5 and having a chance to experience feeling well after it and not having soreness."

... Cleveland is 19-3 since Nov. 11, including 8-3 on the road.

Warriors: Durant averaged 32 points over his seven previous Christmas Day games. ... Golden State played its fifth consecutive Christmas game and seventh in eight. ... The Warriors were 10 of 37 on 3s after they went a dismal 3 for 27 from 3-point range in losing to the Nuggets. ... Kerr began his pregame session by thanking all of the arena staff and Golden State employees for their service and for working on the holiday. ... Thompson's holiday sneakers might have stood out most: neon green on the left foot, neon pink on the right.

UP NEXT

Cavaliers: Visit Kings on Wednesday as they play the middle contest of a three-game West trip.

Warriors: Host Utah on Wednesday.