

ANALYSIS



AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File

Miami Dolphins wide receiver Kenny Stills (10), free safety Michael Thomas (31) and defensive back Chris Culliver (29) kneel during the National Anthem before the first half of an NFL football game.

Few good options on anthem protests for NFL owners

By JIMMY GOLEN
AP Sports Writer

The controversy over NFL players protesting during the national anthem isn't going away, despite — or perhaps because of — team owners' efforts to stop players from using the forum to speak out on political causes.

The league's attempt to turn responsibility for disciplining protesters over to individual teams backfired on Thursday when the Miami Dolphins tried to categorize raising a fist or kneeling during the anthem as "conduct detrimental to the club." That gave them the right to punish a player with a fine or up to a four-game suspension — one game more than Buccaneers quarterback Jameis Winston got when he was accused of groping an Uber driver.

Hours after The Associated Press reported on Miami's rules, the NFL and the players union issued a joint statement saying they were putting any anthem conduct policy on hold to see if they could come up with a compromise. But the owners aren't left with many good options to diffuse the controversy, especially with President Donald Trump eager to fan the flames.

Here's a look at some of them:

LEAVE IT TO THE TEAMS

The Plan: The league's solution, which the NFL Players Association challenged, was to allow each team to determine whether to punish its own players for protesting during the anthem. The policy adopted in May by team owners subjected clubs to fines and required players to stand if they are on the field during "The Star-Spangled Banner," though it allowed players to stay in the locker room if they wished.

This would have given hard-line owners in conservative regions a chance to clamp down while allowing teams in more liberal areas to let their players have their say.

As it turned out, all it did was punt the ball down the road.

STOP PLAYING THE ANTHEM BEFORE GAMES

The Winners: None. With players punished in some cities and protesting freely in others, there would always be plenty to complain about for those inclined to do so. And everyone seems inclined to do so these days.

GO BACK TO THE OLD WAY

The Losers: NFL owners. Any punishment is destined to divide the locker room and the fandom; should a team actually suspend a significant contributor, it would only be hurting itself. And the guarantee of unequal treatment between and within teams would surely keep the issue in the news for yet another season.

The Plan: Ask players to stand at attention during the national anthem, and hope that they do.

The Winners: Players, who would retain the ability to call attention to causes they believe in, namely racial inequality and police brutality. And President Trump, who gets applause any time he attacks the protesting players as he stumps for Republicans in the November midterm elections.

The Losers: NFL owners, or at least those like Houston's Bob McNair who have chafed at the notion of the "inmates running the prison." They lose control and remain a subject of Trump's ridicule.

KEEP PLAYERS IN THE LOCKER ROOM DURING THE ANTHEM

The Plan: Players can't protest during the anthem if they aren't on the field during the anthem. Or so the theory goes. But the demonstrations were never about the anthem itself; it started as a way for 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick to protest racial inequality and expanded into a league-wide us-vs.-them after Trump's holier-than-one rally. "Get that son of a bitch off the field."

The Winners: Fans who were triggered by the sight of players kneeling during the song. And players, who could surely find another forum for their protests.

The Losers: NFL owners. The president has already said this isn't patriotic enough for him, so there's little hope of him easing up on his criticism. And it would cost them the connection to the flag and country they have worked hard to cultivate.

COMPROMISE

The Plan: Other sports worked with their players so that they didn't have to protest to be heard. Maybe the owners make a donation to the players' pet projects, play a video on the scoreboard, or otherwise give them a forum for their concerns.

The Winners: Players. It's not about the protest, it's about the cause.

The Losers: NFL owners. Even if they could stomach the loss of control, the political intrusion on the sport is bound to alienate some fans.

JOIN ALMOST EVERY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD AND SKIP THE FORCED DISPLAY OF PATRIOTISM THAT DEMANDS PLAYERS STAND AT ATTENTION WHILE FANS CHECK THEIR PHONES, FINISH THEIR HOT DOGS OR TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE BATHROOM. IF TEAMS WANT TO HONOR THE MILITARY OR LOCAL FIRST-RESPONDERS, LET THEM DO SO FREE FROM MARKETING DEALS.

The Winners: Fans who don't consider the anthem an integral part of the sports experience, giving them another 90 seconds in to spend in game day traffic without missing anything.

The Losers: NFL owners. Concessionaires. And a whole generation of American Idol also-rans.

Johnson and Kisner, housemates and British Open leaders, 6-under

By DOUG FERGUSON
AP Golf Writer

CARNOUSTIE, Scotland (AP) — A light rain in the morning that gave way to soft sunlight in the afternoon took some of the sting out of Carnoustie.

Just not all of it. Kevin Kisner found that out with one swing that erased his two-shot lead Friday in the British Open and left him tied with housemate Zach Johnson. He hit an 8-iron that only needed to go 150 yards to clear the Barry Burn in front of the 18th green. Instead, it floated out of the yellow grass to the right, bounced off the base of the rock wall that frames the winding stream and led to a double bogey.

Disappointed but not down, Kisner removed his cap behind the green and scratched his head as if he wondered what hit him.

"They call it 'Car-nasty' for a reason," he said after signing for his 1-under 70. "Even when you think you've got it, it will jump up and bite you."

It took a chunk out of Dustin Johnson and Justin Thomas, the Nos. 1 and 2 players in the world who won't be around for the weekend. Johnson finished with a double bogey to miss the cut by one. Thomas made three straight double bogeys on the front nine and missed by one.

And it left a wide-open weekend on a course with a history of crazy finishes.

Zach Johnson, whose name already is on the claret jug from his playoff victory at St. Andrews three years ago, played in the morning under an umbrella and finished with a 30-foot birdie putt for a 67.

Johnson and Kisner are staying in a house of seven players — five of them major champions — and



AP Photo/Alastair Grant

Kevin Kisner of the US reacts after putting on the 17th green during the second round of the British Open Golf Championship in Carnoustie, Scotland.

share the lead at 6-under 136.

They played on different ends of a day that started gray and ended with shadows. Scotland's unusually dry summer finally got a reprieve. There wasn't enough rain to turn brown fairways green, though it at least kept shots from rolling endlessly.

They head into a weekend with endless possibilities.

One shot behind were Tommy Fleetwood (65), Pat Perez (68) and Xander Schauffele (66). Perez was tied for the lead until he hit into a bunker on the 18th hole and took bogey. Rory McIlroy, pledging to "go down swinging" to rid himself of a bad Masters memory this year, had another 69 and was part of a large group two shots behind.

Jordan Spieth also is in

the mix in his bid to take the claret jug back home to Texas. Spieth hit 8-iron through a gap in the trees for a birdie-birdie start to the back nine, and he dropped only one shot — not four like he did on Thursday — over the four closing holes at Carnoustie for a 67. He goes into the weekend just three shots back.

"Very happy to be back in the tournament," Spieth said.

Tiger Woods still has work to do after a rugged start, good recovery and then a mix of birdies and bogeys that left him stuck in neutral on a better day for scoring. Woods had another 71 and was six shots behind, with 28 players between him and the lead.

"We've been fortunate with the conditions. It hasn't blown yet," Kisner said. "I think it will blow

this weekend and make it even more difficult. Who knows what's going to happen? We're going to just keep trying to get after it."

Carnoustie was a far different test from the opening round, when sunshine baked the fairways crisp and it was difficult to figure out how far the ball was going when it hit the ground. The steady, light rain made them a little slower and a lot more predictable. The greens held shots a little better. Strategies changed. Slightly softer conditions meant power players who were driving beyond the trouble hit more irons off the tee, and shorter players hit more drivers and fairway metals.

Kisner hit 5-iron off the first tee Thursday. He hit 3-wood Friday.

"Hit the same club as the approach," Kisner said. "That's a pretty dramatic difference in distance."

Kisner is a newcomer to what amounts to an American fraternity house at golf's oldest championship the last three years. Four of them are among the top 11 on the leaderboard going into the weekend with Spieth and Rickie Fowler, who shot 69 and was at 3-under 139.

As for talking shop after work? Nothing is off limits.

"Everybody will tell their horror stories and good stories, and we'll laugh and eat a big old meal and sit around and watching something stupid," Kisner said.

Thomas will have one of the horror stories.

The PGA champion took three to get out of a pot bunker from the fairway on the par-5 sixth hole, making the first of three straight double bogeys. Johnson became the first No. 1 player to miss the cut since Luke Donald in 2011, and it was the second straight that the top two players in the world ranking missed the cut in a major.

SCOREBOARD

Baseball

MLB AMERICAN LEAGUE				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	69	30	.697	—
New York	62	34	.646	5½
Tampa Bay	49	48	.505	19
Toronto	44	52	.458	23½
Baltimore	28	70	.286	40½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	53	43	.552	—
Minnesota	44	51	.463	8½
Detroit	41	58	.414	13½
Chicago	33	63	.344	20
Kansas City	28	68	.292	25
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	65	35	.650	—
Seattle	59	39	.600	5
Oakland	55	43	.561	9
Los Angeles	49	49	.500	15
Texas	41	57	.418	23

MLB NATIONAL LEAGUE				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	54	42	.563	—
Atlanta	53	42	.558	½
Washington	48	49	.495	6½
Miami	42	57	.424	13½
New York	40	55	.421	13½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	56	39	.589	—
Milwaukee	55	44	.556	3
St. Louis	49	47	.510	7½
Pittsburgh	49	49	.500	8½
Cincinnati	43	54	.443	14
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	54	43	.557	—
Arizona	53	45	.541	½
Colorado	52	45	.536	2
San Francisco	51	48	.515	4
San Diego	40	60	.400	15½

Friday's Games						
St. Louis 18, Chicago 5	Atlanta 8, Washington 5	N.Y. Mets 7, N.Y. Yankees 5	Philadelphia 11, San Diego 5	Miami 6, Tampa Bay 5	L.A. Dodgers 6, Milwaukee 4	San Francisco 5, Oakland 1
Pittsburgh 12, Cincinnati 1	Colorado 11, Arizona 10	Saturday's Games	N.Y. Mets (Matsz 4-7) at N.Y. Yankees (Gray 6-7), 10:05 a.m.	Baltimore (Cobb 2-12) at Toronto (Stroman 2-7), 10:07 a.m.	Boston (Johnson 1-2) at Detroit (Fiers 6-6), 3:10 p.m.	Miami (Lopez 1-1) at Tampa Bay (TBD), 3:10 p.m.
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