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**Football Fans Favor Standing**

**NEW YORK, NY October 16, 2017** – As football stadiums have become arenas for political debate regarding whether players should stand during the National anthem, Brand Keys ([brandkeys.com](http://brandkeys.com)), the New York-based brand and customer loyalty and engagement research consultancy, polled 1,206 fans in 9 NFL markets to see which way the call was being made.

“Being a fan and loyal to a particular sports team is almost entirely driven by emotion,” noted Robert Passikoff, Brand Keys founder and president. “And patriotism is one of the most powerful emotions one can invoke.” The dispute seems to be taking its toll on how fans view the NFL brand.

**Standing vs. Kneeling**

Fans were asked whether they regarded the NFL more favorably, less favorably, or about the same regarding players kneeling during the National anthem, the survey found the following results:

- More favorably: 29%
- Less Favorably: 50%
- About the same: 21%

“That’s an extraordinarily high ‘negative’ for respondents who have been screened as self-declared fans of the sport,” said Passikoff. “Even more so for a brand that has consistently shown up in the top-50 of our annual *Most Patriotic Brands* survey.”

**It’s Not Entirely Political**

“I don’t suppose you can take all the politics out of a situation like this,” said Passikoff. “But even when you examine the data by fans’ political affiliations, the negative effects outweigh anything positive about the situation.”

<b>Feelings Toward NFL</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Independents</b>
More favorably:	15%	40%	30%
Less Favorably:	68%	48%	49%
About the same:	17%	12%	21%

“While our most recent Presidential election, its aftermath, and President Trump’s tweets have raised levels of political debate, it has also raised more contentious issues and divided consumers from their brands,” said Passikoff, “Something the National Football League needs to handle very carefully.”

The President and his supporters seem to feel that the player protests are unpatriotic and disrespectful to both the flag *and* the game, while those who defend the players say the players are exercising their right to free speech. The measured effects to the NFL brand would seem to support the former position.

### **The Game’s the Thing**

Some research drill-down revealed the basis for the propensity of negative feelings toward the brand when players kneel and don’t stand for the anthem. “Nearly all (89%) the respondents who felt negatively disposed toward the NFL did so because they did not feel the football field was the forum for players to raise social issues,” noted Passikoff. “The majority of respondents (93%) felt the players had every right to freedom of speech and their own opinions. They just didn’t think the football field was the right forum for it.”

Politics has made itself more emotionally felt this year than ever, particularly when it comes to how consumers look at brands through a patriotic lens. One thing marketers need to learn about 21<sup>st</sup> century brands is that the ones that *can* maintain a meaningful emotional connection with consumers *always* have a strategic advantage over competitors when it comes to the battle for the hearts, minds, and loyalty of consumers.

### **Methodology**

The survey was conducted October 1<sup>st</sup> through October 12<sup>th</sup> 2017. One thousand, two hundred six (1,206) self-declared football fans in 9 NFL markets (Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Washington) participated in the survey.