

Colin Kaepernick becomes the face of Nike's Just Do It campaign

Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback who sparked controversy by kneeling during the national anthem to protest racial injustice, will be the face of a Nike advertising campaign for the 30th anniversary of its “Just Do It” motto.

Kaepernick was a quarterback in the NFL for six years. He stirred national debate by taking a knee while the anthem was played before games during the 2016 season, to draw attention to police killings of African Americans and other issues.

Kaepernick tweeted a black-and-white photo of himself on Monday featuring the Nike logo and “just do it” slogan as well as a quote: “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.”

Nike has endorsed Kaepernick since 2011 but has not featured him in campaigns since his departure from the NFL.

“We believe Colin is one of the most inspirational athletes of this generation, who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the world forward,” the Nike executive Gino Fisanotti told ESPN. “We wanted to energize its meaning and introduce ‘Just Do It’ to a new generation of athletes.”

The protests during the national anthem, soon embraced by other players, raised the ire of some NFL fans, Republican politicians and President Donald Trump.

Trump said the players disrespected the American flag and the military, and has said he would love to see NFL owners fire such players.

Kaepernick and another former 49ers player, Eric Reid, have not been signed by any of the NFL’s 32 teams since their protests spread. Both have filed collusion grievances against NFL owners.

On Thursday, arbitrator Stephen Burbank denied the league’s request to dismiss the case, which means he found sufficient evidence for the case to continue and perhaps go to trial.

News of Nike’s ad campaign broke just days before the first game of the NFL season on Thursday, when the controversy over pre-game protests could flare anew.

Serena Williams was among those who praised the ad, and earlier lauded Kaepernick and Reid. “I think every athlete, every human, and definitely every African-American should be completely grateful and honored how Colin and Eric are doing so much more for the greater good,” she said at the weekend.

However, it also drew criticism from some quarters, including the former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee. Others on social media posted videos of Nike shoes burning and Nike socks with the “swoosh” symbol cut out.

Kaepernick received an enthusiastic welcome from fans at the US Open’s showcase match between Serena and Venus Williams in New York on Friday night, when he was shown raising his fist on the big screen. “Especially proud to be a part of the Nike family today,” tweeted the former after news of Kaepernick’s deal emerged.

The Guardian sport and agencies, *The Guardian*, 4 September 2018