What in the “Bob McNair” did you just say?
Will this bring America to a knee?
By: Tyra Harper

NEWSFLASH! Bob McNair, ownership of an NFL team does not entitle you to unilaterally control and dictate the actions and activities of sovereign, adult men. They are contractually obligated to block, tackle, run, catch, and throw, not mirror the thoughts and sentiments of their employer. Owners own NFL teams; owners own the logos, naming rights, images, merchandise revenue, profits from ticket sales, etc. but not the people. It is time to let people know that no matter where you fall on this issue, Bob McNair’s comments were offensive to players.

Many players protest against a criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates minorities. In America, a minority of the population comprises a number of prisoners inordinate with their overall numbers. His comment comes at a time where players are protesting against social injustice, police brutality, and the disproportionate mass incarceration of people of color (African-Americans in particular) in America. Yet, in an ESPN Magazine story on the meeting between NFL owners and players on resolving NFL protests, McNair said with only other owners in the room, “We can’t have the inmates running the prison.”

It is ironic McNair made these comments using the word inmate. In a league where most players are black, his word choice underscored an unspoken tension. Prison inmates have committed crimes that society deems worthy of a loss of freedom and livelihood. Most protesting players are black and have committed no crimes. What have they done to lose the right of peaceful protest?

His comments were made at a private meeting without players. And, once the comment became public, he chose to apologize to Texans players and went further by releasing a public statement. His statement mentions that he was not referring to players, but to the relationship between owners and league officials.

Are people really buying this nonsense? He meant what he said! Had the comment not become public, his comments would remain unchanged. For that reason, I think that his apology is empty and devoid of remorse. If he truly meant someone other than NFL players, he would have said exactly who he was referring to. He was only sorry his words became public.

After McNair’s comment, some Texans players did not show to or almost left practice. Moreover, the players decided to have their own meeting on what they would do at their game against the Seahawks.
This issue is bigger than Bob McNair. In the same ESPN story, Washington Redskins owner Dan Snyder commented, “See, Jones gets it—96 percent of Americans are for guys standing.”

In the last few weeks, owners like Jerry Jones have showed how they feel about their players protesting during the national anthem by threatening to bench players who continue to do so. It seems that many owners feel since they pay players millions of dollars, they should have full control over them. That is like saying the everyday citizen with a job has no right to express how they feel since their employer gives them a paycheck. Employers pay for work performed. There is no NFL policy that requires standing or prohibits protest.

When did an organization such as the NFL and team owners decide that they have the power to dictate when someone has the right to exercise their constitutional rights?

NFL owners and officials have taken something so important as players using their national platform to protest issues plaguing our country and turned it into another opportunity to tout their power and thick-lined pockets when they are not getting their way.

Many individuals improperly conflate the anthem protest with a disrespect for the military and the flag. This could not be more incorrect. Many players have served or have family who served in the present or the past. Our military fights to uphold and defend freedom. I believe most individuals with that viewpoint are aware of the reasons for the protest and simply do not care. A common refrain of criticism retorts players should choose another place and time to express their opinions. This is said because those who oppose these actions understand that at no other time will people care or pay attention. Protest is designed at its core to be uncomfortable, thought-provoking, and sometimes jarring to the conscience.

NFL protests will continue until owners realize that their comments and actions are what continue to fuel these demonstrations.