

POLITICAL SPORTS

by

Ashley Rae



Photo: turbulenceahead.com

Politics and sports. Are we supposed to pretend that these two seemingly very different things don't go together like peanut butter and jelly; flip and flop; gin and juice?

Well I call foul—whistle blown...where's my yellow flag?

Sports and politics have been walking along together hand in hand, watching the sun set over the water since "[your dad was a lad](#)." Or maybe even grandma...or greats?



Photo: NY Daily News

The collaboration between sports and politics has been thrust back into the spotlight this week ([Colin](#), can you hear me?) by a recent tweet from ESPN host [Jemele Hill](#), who called President Trump a “white supremacist” and a “bigot.” The White House has since demanded Hill be fired, while others called her a “racist.” ESPN ultimately released an [apology](#).

[Support](#) for Hill continues to roll in, and many scoffed at the president's demands, with CNN anchor [Don Lemmon](#) even suggesting "ESPN should apologize to Trump, *after* Trump apologizes to Obama."

But, again, the question still stands: Why do so many think politics and sports *don't* go together? Well, *mon frère*, while I may not be able to answer that specific question, I can provide you with a few examples through the years of when sports and politics were the best of friends (or the worst of frenemies?).

The 1930s



Photo: olympic.org

1936 – [Jesse Owens](#). Can you imagine telling Jesse Owens that he should have just "stuck to sports," and not played a part in destroying Adolph Hitler's ideological claims of a Germanic racial pureness and supremacy? Pfft. Owens completely owned the [1936 Summer](#)

[Olympic](#) games as he went on to win four gold medals in the face of staunch racism and anti-Semitism that plagued these games.

1938 – [Joe Louis](#). His rematch against German fighter Max Schmeling (another of Hitler's attempts at an all-superior race) proved to be all the hype it was perceived to be: Two years earlier, Schmeling knocked out Louis in the 12th round of their first match. This [bout](#), however, only lasted 124 seconds, and culminated with Louis obliterating Schmeling with a first-round knockout. After this fight, "Louis provided some assurance that America's best could beat the best that Germany had to offer."



Photo: <https://www.cmgww.com>

The 1940s



Photo: mentalfloss.com

1947 – [Jackie Robinson](#). He broke that little thing called the “[color barrier](#)” when he made his Major League debut. Robinson faced a constant stream of racial slurs and threats as he stepped onto the Brooklyn diamond as a Dodger (they hadn’t yet moved to Los Angeles). Despite the adversity thrown his way such as his own

teammates signing a petition to keep him from joining the team, and opposing players tossing black cats on the playing field in his path, Robinson went on to win Rookie of the Year, Most Valuable Player in 1949, and helped lead the Dodgers to six World Series.

The 1960s

1967 – [Muhammad Ali](#) (aka Cassius Clay). As the United States waged war in Vietnam, Ali was defiant in his [refusal](#) to be drafted, saying "And shoot them for what? They never called me n****r, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no



Photo: theguardian.com

dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. ... Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail.” At the height of his career, he was convicted of draft evasion, sentenced to five years in prison, and fined \$10,000. And that's not all, folks: Not only was he banned from boxing for three years, he was also stripped of his heavyweight title, and New York state suspended his boxing license.

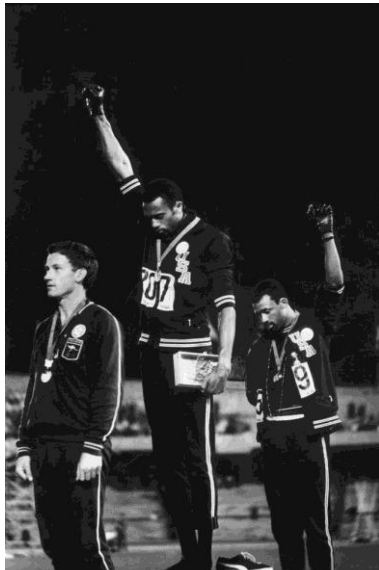


Photo: iime.com

1968 – [Tommie Smith and John Carlos](#) (Carlos). Probably one of the most iconic [images](#) in the history of the Olympic games, as the Star-Spangled Banner played, Carlos and Smith—two very strong supporters of the [Black Freedom](#) movement—stood on the podium (Smith with the gold medal, Carlos the bronze) wearing [Olympic Project for Human Rights](#) pins ([Peter Norman](#), Australian silver medalist wore one, too), with raised black-gloved fists in the air, and bare feet, symbolizing the poverty black Americans were plagued with.

The 1970s

1972 – [Munich Terrorist Attacks](#).

The [battle](#) that has raged on for millennia between the Palestinians and Israelis spilled over to sports during the 1972 Summer Olympics (noticing a trend here?), where Palestinian armed members of the terrorist group [Black September](#) stormed the Israeli Olympic Team’s quarters in the Olympic Village, gaining access by posing as athletes and using stolen keys. Israeli hostages were taken as Black September demanded the release of more than 200 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. By the end of the standoff, eleven Israeli athletes and one West German policeman were killed, along with five of the Black September terrorists.

The victims of Munich



Photo: pinterest.com



Photo: notablebiographies.com

1973 – [Billie Jean King](#). While best known for the “[Battle of the Sexes](#)” (I mean, who hasn’t heard of it?), in which she beat the former No. 1 ranked player and self-proclaimed male chauvinist, King has long been an advocate for women’s rights, helping to increase prize money for the women’s tennis circuit, while also helping to create the first women’s players union. During the 1980s, King became one of the first prominent American athletes to

openly admit to having a same-sex relationship, inspiring much of her later work in the gay rights movement.

Though it will always be up for debate, this list is evidence that politics and sports have a storied [past](#). Whether used to advance human, race, and gender relations within nations, or to terrorize those that are different, there may be no more perfect platform for politics than sports.

Agree? Disagree? Think another political sports event should have been added? Let me know your thoughts in the comments!