

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Columbia Public Schools  
1818 West Worley Street  
Columbia, MO 65203

Dear CPS,

I want to take a moment to discuss and apologize for my social media post regarding the NFL players kneeling during the national anthem.

As I said in the post, I am a proud US Army Veteran. I served my country with honor because I wanted to. During my service, I spent some time stationed at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington D.C. I saw soldiers return with missing limbs, others with napalm burns covering 90% of their body. I saw families torn apart. I saw friends lost.

I also witnessed the hate of some for American soldiers. I remember walking through the airport in my uniform while complete strangers yelled expletives at me. As a 19-year-old from Prairie Home, Mo., I wondered why some people could be so cruel. The Vietnam War was a tumultuous time.

To this day, I remember those images, those feelings, so, the national anthem means a great deal to me. To me, it means hope, honor, freedom and pride. But it also means lives cut short, pain and suffering.

We are witnessing another tumultuous time in our Country's history. People are experiencing strong feelings on many different topics, myself included.

I let those strong feelings get the best of me in my post. While I will always stand for the anthem and believe every American should, I sincerely apologize for the inappropriate way I chose to share that. My words hurt and I understand that. My use of profanity was a raw emotion I was feeling at the time and I understand using those words was wrong. After speaking with many family and friends, it brought back those memories of a kid being screamed at in an airport. It didn't feel good. I did to those football players, what strangers did to me, and I am sorry.

As a father to a former college football player, I understand the risk these men take each time they take the field and me wishing ill will on them was uncalled for. I know that now and I will do better.

Regarding the calls to change the name of the Rock Bridge Football Field- when I donated to the school, it was never about naming anything after myself or my family. It was because I love Rock Bridge and the entire Columbia Public School district. It was for the students to continue to thrive and have the best high school experience possible.

I have had many family members walk those halls, learn in those classrooms and take part in games on the field. That brings me great pride and joy. As much pride and joy as serving in the US Army did.

That's why, after some thoughtful discussions with my family, I would like to ask the school board to take my name off the field and rename it Veterans Memorial Field. Since it opened its doors in 1973, so

many Rock Bridge alumni have gone on to serve our great country, it's only fitting we honor them in this way.

When future Bruin athletes take to that field, I want them to be proud of the students who came before them. I want them to remember the past and I want them to help make the future better.

I know I can't take back my words that caused pain and discomfort, but I can learn from them. I can continue to stand for our national anthem and I can continue to support our men and women in uniform. But I can also strive to understand the thoughts and actions of those I don't agree with in a civil manner.

Wayne Sells