



Perspective

Authenticity, Selflessness, Courage, and Team

by Kathlyn Fletcher, MD MA, Lily Littrell and Luke Littrell

On August 26, the Milwaukee Bucks were scheduled to play the fifth game in their best-of-seven playoff series against the Orlando Magic. But then they didn't. The team did not take the floor, ready to forfeit an important playoff game. Eventually, we learned that the team had come to the painful decision that they could not play basketball in the wake of another shooting of a black man, this time close to home.

Jacob Blake, a black man from Kenosha, WI, was shot in the back by a police officer seven times on Sunday, August 23, 2020. The circumstances surrounding the shooting are still emerging, but what is clear is that we are once again facing an extreme, violent, life-changing action by law enforcement against a black man. Kenosha, Wisconsin, and the country were reeling. It all felt devastatingly familiar. And then the Bucks stepped in. Or rather, stepped away, firmly, quietly sending the most powerful of messages.

Next, the other NBA teams scheduled to play on that night joined the Bucks in declining to play. Some major league baseball teams, including the Brewers, followed suit as did the WNBA and major league soccer. The message was clear: The status quo is no longer acceptable. The violence and injustice must stop. I wondered, though, how the players would move forward. I asked my 10-year-old son, Luke, what he thought about it. He did not like it that the Bucks had refused to play because he thought that nothing would come as a result. He was glad that the Magic did not accept the forfeit, though. Then the players did something remarkable.

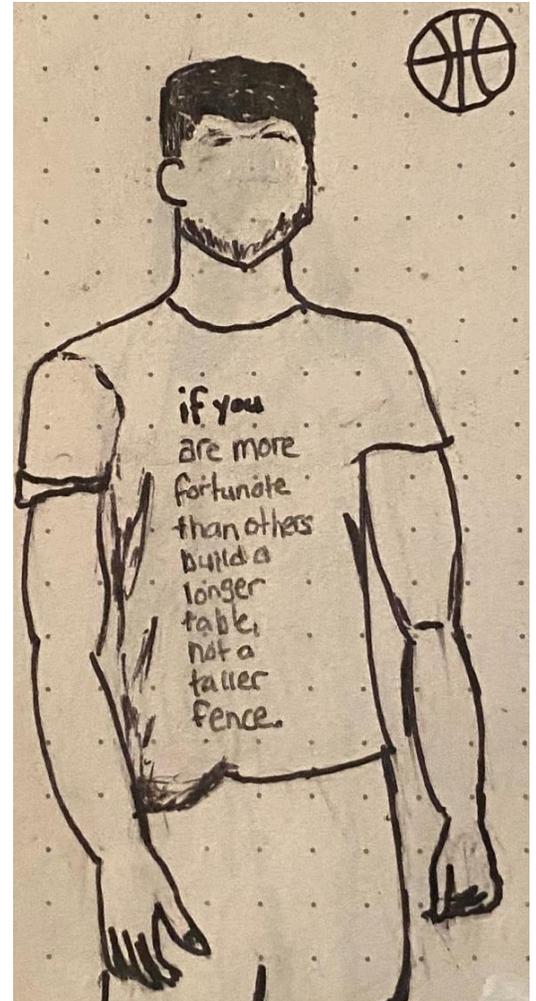
Chris Paul, president of the NBA Players Association and LeBron James reached out to former President Barack Obama for advice. They wanted to make this decision to stop the playoffs matter. Apparently, Obama [told](#) them to decide what they wanted, ask for it and then play basketball. The players' act of resistance resulted in more polling places for the upcoming election, and the formation of an NBA committee to work on racial injustice [issues](#).

The willingness to forfeit a playoff game to call attention to the moment was a brave act of selflessness on the part of the Bucks. There was a lot at risk. In retrospect, I am not surprised. They have been living this message since the playoffs began. The entire NBA has worn jerseys

with racial equity mottos and warm up “Black Lives Matter” shirts for months. Individual players have done more. Several Bucks players led a BLM protest in Milwaukee before reporting to the bubble this summer. And Kyle Korver’s t-shirt selection (often courtesy of the [Happy Givers](#)) has created quite the stir, at least in my house. My daughter, Lily, can’t wait to see what the next one will say (see her drawing). The most recent bore the words “When we’re not hungry for justice, it’s usually because we’re too full of privilege.” What has specifically resonated with Lily is that these acts don’t call attention to the individual players, they call attention to the movement. She is drawn to them because they seem authentic and selfless.

This is an important moment, and everyday people might also wonder, as Luke did, what protests will accomplish. While few of us alone have a voice strong enough to demand that our workplace become a polling place, we must find our equivalent of not accepting the status quo any longer. We must do it in an authentic and selfless manner.

Last week, the Bucks taught us about the courage required in taking a stand when it is hard and something is at risk. They also taught us about the power of the team. One player refusing to play would have been a much different statement than the whole team refusing. We also learned that our enemies are sometimes on our side. The Magic had everything to gain in that moment; they could have been down 3–2 instead of 3–1 in the series. But they stood together with the Bucks by declining the forfeit, and the whole league followed. The Bucks have shown us the path forward: Authenticity, selflessness, courage and team.



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