More times than not I keep my thoughts on politics and social issues to myself. I am more than willing to discuss any issue in the wide world of sports with anyone at any time. I find it a lot easier and I also compare talking politics and social issues to opening a carnivorous can of worms that will eat you alive, especially in the era of social media where you will most likely get ostracized no matter what. Living in this world is exhausting enough as it is so I found it best to internalize my views.

With all that being said, there is a difference between an issue being blue vs red and one being right vs wrong. Wednesday night I was watching hockey games, as I usually do, all the while I was keeping track of the news of the day. The stories involved the Milwaukee Bucks in addition to many other NBA teams sitting out their playoff games in response to the news out of Kenosha, WI of Jacob Black, an unarmed black man, being shot in the back seven times by a 17 year old. This was in addition to the Detroit Lions cancelling practice the day prior, along with other NFL teams following suit. Alongside that were MLB and MLS teams postponing their respective games out of protest. All the while the NHL action was still ongoing with the Tampa Bay Lightning trouncing the Boston Bruins 7-1, followed by an exciting game between the Dallas Stars and Colorado Avalanche where the Avs won 6-4 and avoided going down 3-0 in the series.

As I was watching the events of the Stars vs Avalanche matchup unfold, I couldn’t help but ask if them playing was the right call. It would have been the players call on whether or not to take the ice and both teams did, interestingly enough Colorado coach Jared Bednar said he personally wasn’t on social media or watching TV but also added “No players had come to me and said, ‘Hey, we’re thinking about not playing’ or anything.” Regardless, it’s a bad look for the league and the players to be this far behind the curve when it comes to issues like this. Especially since all the NHL could drum was a quick statement and an even quicker moment of silence.

The NHL and the game of ice hockey in general is notorious for its lack of diversity. It’s something I’ve thought about a lot, and something I am asked at work from time to time. The easy answers are that it’s not a game like basketball, soccer, football or baseball that you can pretty much play anywhere. At the least you need a frozen body of water, flooded backyard or some kind of roller rink all of which are not always easy to find in some parts of the US. On top of that, unlike those other sports, hockey equipment does not come cheap. For a while I thought those were the only reasons for the game’s lack of diversity, then I learned about the systematic racism embedded deep within the system whether its in pee wee or all the way into major juniors and beyond. This has caused many players whether they are black, native, LGBT, or any other kind of minority to hang up their skates entirely.

On the NHL level they have never exactly been the most progressive league by any stretch of the imagination. Another criticism of the league is that they are always recycling old coaches and GMs which keeps both the on ice game and ideals in the past. There are hardly any black or minority players in the league, let alone coaches and GMs. I seem to recall the uproar from 2013 when the Columbus Blue Jackets hired Jarmo Kekalainen as their GM because he was the first to not be from North America (Finland). Recently several current and former players founded the Hockey Diversity Alliance to combat said systemic racism in the hockey world. Change like this doesn’t come overnight in the NHL, but they seem to be taking baby steps forward after all this time.

On Thursday afternoon the NHL announced they were joining the other sports leagues in postponing games as part of the protest. All around social media I kept seeing a similar comment from some people saying something along the lines of “politics have no place in sports”. Yes, sports are meant to be a distraction from the news and everyday life. With that being said, like any other kind of art or theatre or entertainment, it’s always going to have some kind of association with politics. This association could be seen as a rallying point, for example how FC Barcelona has been used as a focal point for Catalan independence from Spain. Another association would be as a propaganda machine, for which the best example is the Red Army Hockey Team. The Soviets are considered one of hockey’s greatest dynasties and it was a tool used to project their might over the west. Whether you like it or not politics and sports are always intertwined.

After going four months without sports, I think I can handle a short break in support of a cause like this. After George Floyd and Breonna Taylor became victims of police brutality earlier this year I thought we as a society were finally about to have some long overdue discussions. However society, like the NHL, doesn’t change overnight. It’s been four years since Colin Kaepernick originally kneeled to protest police brutality and since then the division in our country has widened and the Black Lives Matter movement has become more vocal, and I stand with them.