Zap & Kap: A Perfect Match

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Zap Sports Drink Company is in the midst of an ethical dilemma. It has the opportunity to gain the endorsement of a well-known, world-class athlete who happens to be embroiled in one of the many highly divisive conflicts to grip the United States in recent years. The athlete in question, Colin Kaepernick, is currently suing the National Football League (NFL) for collusion after his instigation of player protests during the national anthem resulted in him losing field-time and, ultimately, his spot in the league (Belson, 2018). Public responses to his demonstration, which was meant to call attention to police brutality and racial injustice, have varied significantly. While some fans have supported Kaepernick for using his platform to address a critical social issue, others have expressed uproarious objection on the grounds that kneeling during the national anthem is disrespectful to the United States military and its veterans. Lately, sales have been disappointingly low for Zap, and it could benefit significantly from the support of a polarizing figure like Mr. Kaepernick. However, the situation presents challenging ethical issues because of the varied reactions to his protests. Because Zap’s target market consists of young athletes, a demographic that has shown considerable support for Mr. Kaepernick’s actions, and because the company has a duty to its shareholders to facilitate an increase in sales, it should hire Mr. Kaepernick to endorse the product.

Due to the controversial nature endorsing Colin Kaepernick, Zap will need to be prepared to offer justification based on the ethical issues at play. Whether it intends to or not, Zap will be making a political statement by paying Mr. Kaepernick. Businesses usually avoid making political statements because they want a wide variety of people to buy and use their products. Shareholders may take issue with the choice based on either a personal opinion or because they
feel Zap is not making decisions with their best interests in mind and is, therefore, violating its ethical standards. Zap will also have to answer to the apprehensions of its employees and those in the community who have been offended by Mr. Kaepernick. The company must take responsibility for the adverse impacts of this arrangement on its employees and their community.

Conversely, it would be unethical to refuse to work with Mr. Kaepernick because of the response of a minority of consumers to his protests. His peaceful actions are protected by the first amendment to the United States Constitution, so excluding him from a business venture that would benefit both parties involved is inherently unethical. Moreover, there is substantial evidence suggesting that his grievances are far from baseless and that Zap’s sales would increase as a result of the deal (Sinyangwe, 2018). Thus, to refuse to work with Mr. Kaepernick would be improper, and Zap’s sales would remain meager. The decision is a difficult one, and the company’s approach must be mapped scrupulously.

The potential benefits to bringing Mr. Kaepernick on board are sizeable, and the move is not as risky as a superficial assessment might indicate. Nike, which recently made Mr. Kaepernick the face of its 30th-anniversary campaign, saw its online sales increase by 31% in the days after the announcement (Linnane, 2018). Moreover, Zap’s target demographic of young athletes is more likely to support Mr. Kaepernick’s protests than any other cohort by a compelling margin (Modiano, 2016). Young minorities are the most inclined of all groups to support Mr. Kaepernick’s actions. They are also the most likely to consume sports drinks (Sohyun Park, 2012). In other words, the majority of the people that would be offended by the endorsement and avoid supporting the company were not buying Zap products in the first place. Therefore, the company is unlikely to lose many of their current customers and will presumably gain loyalty from young athletes and the minority population. Given that Zap is in San
Francisco, home of Mr. Kaepernick’s former team and one of the most liberal cities in the United States, it is probable that the majority of the stakeholders would support the strategy. These indications will help to assuage the fears of the shareholders, and the endorsement will serve as a driver for unification amongst Kaepernick supporters and Zap consumers in the community.

Following the ethical decision-making model laid out by Badaracco, there would be several winners in this situation. The winners are Mr. Kaepernick, the stakeholders that support him, and Zap and its shareholders. Mr. Kaepernick would receive compensation from Zap for his endorsement. The interests and beliefs of the stakeholders that support Mr. Kaepernick would be propagated and legitimized. Furthermore, the data indicate that Zap’s customer base would remain loyal while its implicit support for the underlying issue would draw even more consumers from the target demographic. The losers here are the people that disagree with Mr. Kaepernick’s choices, although this faction was already unlikely to support Zap. It is probable that Zap will initially experience some ramifications from those select members of the public and possibly its shareholders. Through this agreement between Zap and Mr. Kaepernick, no group’s or individual’s rights are being violated. In actuality, it would be a violation of Mr. Kaepernick’s rights to refuse to do business with him solely as punishment for exercising his first amendment-protected rights. Zap’s public image will become a topic of deliberation, but within its community, the company’s reputation will improve, and it is projected to enjoy increases in both support and sales. The final question, whether this tactic will work in today’s world, is the most difficult to predict. However, several arguments in support of the decision have been considered, leading to the conclusion that hiring Mr. Kaepernick to endorse Zap Sports Drinks would be a successful endeavor.
Despite the controversy that follows Colin Kaepernick today, his endorsement, at a discounted price, would carry tremendous benefits for Zap Sports Drinks. As a small company facing a large and competitive market, Zap is unlikely to have another opportunity as potentially lucrative as this one. The company’s target demographic and the community in which it conducts its business are two of the likeliest groups in the nation to support this decision. Ethical concerns with the deal, namely the worries that Zap would not be acting in the best interests of its shareholders, pale in comparison to the benefits produced by the contrary school of thought. It would be beneficial for Zap to publish its decision-making process as justification for its shareholders and detractors. To deny Mr. Kaepernick this opportunity based on a peaceful protest would violate the ethical foundation upon which the United States was built. Zap has been presented with an economically-responsible avenue to expand its profits substantially, and it is the business’ responsibility to take strides toward the improvement of its fiscal performance by hiring Colin Kaepernick.
Works Cited


