During the February 15, 2018 episode of her self-titled show, The Laura Ingram Files, the FOX news host took it upon herself to chastise NBA stars LeBron James and Kevin Durant. The two professional athletes were discussing the climate facing athletes who want to comment on political matters. Ingram characterized James’ comments as “barely intelligible,” “ungrammatical,” and “ignorant.” She said that it was “unwise for children to seek political advice from someone who gets paid $100 million a year to bounce a ball.” Ingram ended her segment by telling James and Durant to “Shut up and dribble.” That last phrase is a well-worn phrase that has been hurled at black athletes for several decades. What Ingram and her ilk have either forgotten or are simply ignorant from is that black athletes have rarely been afforded the opportunity to shut up and dribble. There is a long history of black athletic activism including the likes of Paul Robeson, Jackie Robinson, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, and Muhammad Ali. There’s a widely held belief that activism came to a screeching halt with Michael Jordan and his oft quoted refrain: “Republicans buy sneakers too.” While there is some truth to that history, particularly where high-profile athletes are concerned, black athletic activism never really ended. This talk discusses the recent history of black athletic activism and talk about what has changed about black athletic activism in today’s environment.

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