

## Should College Athletes Be Paid?

For nearly a century, the debate of whether college athletes should receive cash compensation for their services to universities has raged on. Both sides have presented their cases and made their arguments, but the National Collegiate Athletics Association, or NCAA for short, has continuously prevented monetary benefits to be given or received. Those advocating for the payment of college athletes bring up the hard work the athletes put in and the financial benefits to the universities they provide. However those against it believe the scholarships college athletes receive is compensation enough. Both sides of the college athletes being paid debate have logical arguments, and can cite many statistics and reasons for their beliefs.

To discuss why college athletes should be paid, the whole history and why things are they way they are must be divulged. The NCAA was founded in December of 1905 with the intention of establishing a set of consistent rules creating an equal playing field for all sports teams across the country. Nineteen players died in 1905 playing football alone, so colleges were forced to either install new, nationwide rules or abolish the game entirely. After the rules were put into place, the primary focus became the fairness of college athletics nationally. At that point, the colleges and the NCAA decided that because of the limited profitability of the sports teams at that time, it would tip the balance of power even further if the bigger schools were able to pay their athletes. According to Ronald A. Smith, the only schools in the nation that would have had enough funds to provide scholarships and pay their football players would be Harvard, Yale and Princeton (Smith 45).

In the 1950s, after having her husband killed during a game, the widow of Ray Dennison filed a lawsuit against the NCAA. Her claim was that her late husband was not merely a student

but an employee of Fort Lewis A&M University, and his fatality was work-related. Her hope was to receive benefits as any other employee at the university would if they were killed while doing their job. However, in a courtroom, the term “student-athlete” was created. The NCAA declared that Dennison was a student first and an athlete second. According to Walter Byers, the Executive Director of the NCAA from 1951-1988, the court sided with them saying that the school was “not in the football business” and that they “received no benefit from Dennison being there” and could therefore not be responsible for his work-related injury compensation. (Byers 70). These quotation can be found in his book entitled, “Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Exploiting College Athletes,” the book Byers wrote in 1995 defacing the NCAA’s current treatment of their athletes and discussing the unfairness of the system he helped create.

Finally in 2014, at Northwestern University, the facts are finally starting to be acknowledged. The university’s football team is taking their case to court and seeking to form a union to ensure their constitutional rights. In an interview with ESPN, Kain Colter, former quarterback at Northwestern, discussed nine months of 40-50 hour workweeks and his biggest priorities if the labor union does successfully pass. His first priority is either the colleges or the NCAA itself covering current players and former players injuries sustained through playing college football. (Colter) According to a study by WebMD, the average amount of concussions per college football team annually is 41. (Nierenberg) Considering teams only have 85 scholarship athletes on their roster, that is a staggeringly high number, especially considering the long-term repercussions of concussions.

Peter Sung Ohr, the regional judge who was presiding over the case, agreed with the Northwestern football team’s arguments and reasoning, and granted full permission for them to

unionize on account of the fact they met all requirements to be university employees. (Northwestern University v. College Athletes Players Association 23) If the ruling holds up after the appeal, the football team will be considered employees of the university and will be allowed to unionize. The players will then be entitled to negotiate their contract and compensation as they would if they were in every other industry in the United States. The NCAA is doing everything they can to prevent this because they fear for the precedent it would set.

To put it simply, the NCAA is a corrupt organization overflowing with greed and glutony. According to their own website, NCAA revenues for 2013 totaled 10.6 billion dollars. It just signed a 5.7 billion dollar deal selling the media rights to the new college football BCS playoffs and an 11 billion dollar deal selling the media rights to the NCAA basketball tournament. (“Finances”) The NCAA’s financial growth annually is greater than that of both McDonalds and Chevron. (“Schooled: The Price of College Sports”)

While the NCAA is making billions and billions of dollars off the 40-50 work weeks of the athletes, players are struggling to feed themselves. NCAA rules prevent division one athletes from getting a job while they are on athletic scholarship. This means players from poor backgrounds who have had to work their entire life to help feed their families can no longer do so. This puts a huge strain on the families, but also means players have no spending money for things the rest of the United States would call basic needs. Shabazz Napier, star senior point guard for Connecticut University, said, “We are definitely blessed to get a scholarship to our universities, but at the end of the day, that doesn't cover everything. We do have hungry nights that we don't have enough money to get food and sometimes money is needed.” (Singler) These foot-

ball and basketball players make their respective universities tens of millions of dollars, but do not have the money to properly feed themselves.

The NCAA is able to get away with it all for two big reasons. The first of these reasons is their manufactured term student-athlete. This allows the NCAA to say athletes were brought to the universities primarily for an education, however they just so happen to be playing sports as well. The notion that college athletes are primarily focused on school and not on athletics is a ridiculous one. According to Ryan Franklin, former UCLA running back, the season consisted of waking up at 5:30, working out from 6-9, showering, going to class from 10-1, meetings from 2-3:15, practice from 4-6 and then the same thing the next day. (“Schooled: The Price of College Sports”) The priority is without a doubt athletics for these athletes, not academics. The NCAA says that they are students first and athletes second, but if this is the case, why is the basketball tournament being expanded every year to generate more revenue? Teams that make deep runs in the tournament miss a full month of school. That seems more like the players are athlete-students than student-athletes.

The second way the NCAA wiggles out of having to pay athletes is because of their clever labeling of them as amateurs. As Allen Sack puts it, “The myth that scholarship athletes are amateurs engaging in sports as a healthy diversion from their schoolwork is the lynchpin of corporate college sports.” (Sack 147) By declaring everyone amateurs and not professionals, the NCAA rules that no payment can take place. But as Taylor Branch points out, it is a twisted, nefarious scheme. “No legal definition of amateur exists, and any attempt to create one in enforceable law would expose its repulsive and unconstitutional nature—a bill of attainder, stripping from college athletes the rights of American citizenship.” (Branch 107)

The NCAA generates billions upon billions of dollars every year off the labor of the players. The current system was created when the biggest issue faced by college athletics was avoiding player deaths. It has gotten to the point where even the labor court system recognizes it is time for reform. These players risk their health and well-being to profit their schools, and are not even guaranteed medical care while they are doing it. The notion that college athletes focus is on being students more than it is on athletes is preposterous. It is time for the ten billion dollar industry to provide for those they feed off of who do not have enough to feed themselves. It is time for college athletes to be paid for their services.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are many people who feel the current system is perfectly fine. The arguments for why the current system is working and satisfactory are that athletes choose to play college sports with the full knowledge of the consequences, athletes are given opportunities they would not have otherwise, continuous profitability may not be possible if student-athletes were to be paid and most importantly, the athletes are already being paid in the form of scholarships.

If a high schooler is an excellent athlete, he is not forced to go to college if his goal is to be a professional. The only sports where there is a mandatory age requirements before being allowed to turn professional are basketball and football. Basketball requires its players to be one year removed from high school. There are four players who elected to turn professional immediately after high school but instead of going to the NBA, they went and played professionally in Europe. Once they met the requirements of the NBA, they came back to the United States to play professionally here. Although it is unconventional for American-born NBA players to not have played college basketball, it is possible and therefore is the player's option. With that being said,

the athlete knew in advance the consequences of his or her decision and must deal with them. The NFL does require three years separation from high school and entering the league, however college is not mandatory in that time frame. Once again, though not typical, avoiding college is possible for athletes and therefore it will then be their decision and their consequences either way.

Another big reason college athletes should not be further compensated is because of the opportunities college athletics gives them outside of their normal realm of possibility. According to Charles T. Clotfeller, just under 40% of division one athletes at public universities have fathers that did not attend college themselves. (Clotfeller 242) These are typically the people who come from poor backgrounds who would not have the opportunity to go to college otherwise if it was not for the scholarship they received. In addition to scholastic opportunities unavailable otherwise, having world class fitness training and coaching year round is definitely something exclusive. Top notch training and coaching can cost thousands and thousands of dollars, but instead of having to pay for it outside of the realm of college sports, athletes are paid with a scholarship and get the benefits for free. The combination of athletic training and scholastic opportunity cannot be paralleled elsewhere. As a result, further compensation is not necessary considering the already present exclusive privileges.

Although the NCAA is profoundly profitable as a whole, the statistics can sometimes be misleading. An article in USA Today discusses that only 23 of 228 division one colleges have sports programs that are profitable. (Berkowitz et al.) Though the NCAA itself remains extremely successful financially, individual colleges rarely do. Almost every school among the 228 division one colleges generates profit among their basketball and football teams, however the NCAA

requires a minimum of 14 sports be played for membership, half of which must be women's as a result of Title IX. After factoring in the other 12 sports teams, college's athletic programs go from tens of millions of dollars in the positive to the same amount in the negative. Between coaches, travel, equipment, scholarships and other costs, non-revenue generating sports eat up all the revenue from the football and basketball teams. If college athletes were to be paid, this would only increase the amount of debt many colleges were already in, potentially resulting in the disbandment of athletic programs entirely around the country.

The biggest reason that college athletes do not need to be paid is because they already are. According to the NCAA's website, a men's basketball scholarship can be worth \$120,000 when "factoring in goods, services and future earnings." Also, it states that 82% of student-athletes graduate and earn degrees, a figure much higher than non athletes. ("The Value of College Sports") Instead of having a limited chance of a successful future, student-athletes are permitted to attend school for free and to better themselves in all facets of life including getting an education, learning vital leadership skills and teamwork, and getting world-class physical training throughout the process. Student-athletes are already receiving incredible compensation for their service. They do not need to be paid because they already are being generously compensated.

For over a century, college sports have been one of the staples of American culture. The debate on whether or not college athletes should be paid more than their current scholarships and just how much if so will rage on forever. Those who are for college athletes being paid think that because of the massive amounts of revenue athletes bring in, they should be receiving further compensation than they currently get. Those who are against it think that the opportunity for a free education is more than satisfactory. One thing that is known is that both sides will remain adamant because both sides have the foundation for their beliefs in solid facts and sound reasoning. So the debate will continue... Should college athletes be paid further than their current scholarships?



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