
Why Student Athletes Should be Rewarded for Their Work

Every single day hundreds of thousands of NCAA Division I athletes, like myself, wake up early in the morning, usually before dawn. We have to attend our morning lift and conditioning; with barely enough strength to walk, we drag ourselves to a full day of classes with our only break coming from our afternoon practice. With the last bit of energy we have, we get through our two hour practice and still attend our last classes of the day, followed by long hours of homework. Before we know it, the sun is setting and the mental preparation for getting ready to do the same thing tomorrow starts. Imagine partaking in these same activities almost every day of the week with games during the weekend. There is no time to socialize, there is no time to get a part time job to help pay for school, and there is no time to have a moment to ourselves. NCAA athletes should receive compensation in form of a salary for all the hard work they put in, all the time they give up, and all the positive reputation and revenue that they bring to the school.

For schools that participate in NCAA Division I sports, the television and media dollars have skyrocketed to a point that no one thought it would reach. In 2013 the median revenue for football was \$61.9 for each one of the 126 schools that had a team (Sanderson). If you include the other Division I sports that would add on millions of more dollars to the schools total sports revenues. Professor McKenzie and Professor Sullivan who are both highly renowned as economics professors argue flaws within NCAA athletics:

“Economists have leveled three major charges against the NCAA. First, the NCAA operates as an employer cartel that suppresses athletes' wages. Second, it creates market inefficiencies that transfer income from athletes to coaches and colleges. Third, the NCAA breeds hypocrisy which results in cheating on rules.”

They are saying that the best option to correct the NCAA cartels would be to implement antitrust enforcement to correct NCAA market power and pay college athletes what they deserve (McKenzie). This doesn't even account for the reputation that they bring to the school that influence students to attend that university. These athletes do so much for their school and are shown no compensation for what they do.

Since the birth of college sports, athletes have been the main contributing factor that satisfies millions of peoples urges and need to watch the games they love. To have the opportunity to air these sports to the viewer's T.V. networks such as CBS have paid \$17 billion to the NCAA and the schools (Sanderson). As stated before the large conferences have a median sports revenue close to \$100 million in 2013 (Sanderson). This comes from selling merchandise that is centered on the athletes, selling game tickets to watch the athletes, and selling air-time so people who cannot attend the game can still watch. The schools are raking in money while most of these athletes do not even receive their cost of tuition covered (McKenzie). While the amount of money the NCAA and the Division I schools increase, the amount the athletes scholarships have decreased by around 40 in the last decade: “In an effort to control costs, over recent decades the NCAA has progressively reduced the number of grants-in-aid that big-time football teams can offer” (Sanderson). It is unbelievable that the NCAA has been limiting scholarships for these huge schools. These sports players dream is to come out of college debt free but with things going as they are, that is even becoming to unrealistic.

These revenue statistics do not even account for the larger number of students who want to attend schools with good sports teams. Students are no longer solely worried about how academically prestigious their school is, they are now looking for a full college experience that includes lots of fun. Schools with good sports teams makes the school very appealing for potential future students. How cool would it be to attend a school with their basketball team making it to the final four? These students are looking to go to the school where they can have a great time by going to a game, and then celebrating afterwards, leaving the students with many great memories. Having more kids want to attend the university makes that school more prestigious. This allows for them to make the application process more selective and obtain better students. It also enables them to raise the cost of tuition if they chose (McKenzie). Having a good college sports team increases the school's revenue by millions of dollars, but not a penny of that will go directly to the people making it all possible. What's even worse is that these athletes do not have any extra time on their hands to get a job to help pay for their tuition.

College athletes can spend anywhere from 20-30 hours a week ranging from practice to competitions. Even in their offseason that number only drops to 15 hours. Even towards the lower end of the spectrum that means that the typical athlete will be spending over 1000 hours a year doing their sport. By simply replacing the sport with a part-time job that athlete could be making between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year. With these numbers being so large, it is easy to see why the best solution to these athletes not getting compensation would be making them an employee of the school, paying them a basic salary. The salary should start off as minimum wage and increase each consecutive semester that the athlete has participated on the team. This would be the first step to reimbursing the athletes for all the time they put into their school. It makes no sense to why these athletes should have any less of a chance than the average student to make extra money. To start off it is not easy going to college with a full course load, then throw on the extra time they put in for practice. By the end of their 4-5 years of college all these athletes will have on their resume is that they played a sport in college. If you examine a non-athlete's resume you will see all the extra jobs, extracurricular, and internships that they were able to accomplish with their free time. These future employers are looking for students that were actively involved during college, so being just an athlete doesn't always cut it. Employers may be inclined to choose the non-athlete with all their extracurricular activities over the athlete. It is shocking to see why anyone would chose to play a college sports; it seems that it only puts them at a disadvantage later in life. Paying the athletes with a salary is not the only way to compensate the hard work these athletes put in.

The NCAA is a cartel which exploits the athletes and doesn't pay them any extra money for blood, sweat, and tears they put into the school. Richard McKenzie, an economics professor at Clemson University explains:

"The argument that the NCAA is a working cartel that suppresses athletes' wages (including fringe benefits) is grounded in the conventional microeconomic theory that labor-market competition among independent employers dissipates quasi rents that would otherwise go to employers."

McKenzie is explaining that the NCAA is able to band together with the schools and with their combined power they don't have to pay the athletes. An NCAA cartel should not exist, it is shown that a free market produces the most profitable outcome for both parties. A free market is a common practice in economics which allows everyone equal opportunity at a product (McKenzie). In this case the athletes would be the product and the schools would be the

consumers. In the free market, which is always found to be the only way to reach an equilibrium, the schools would have to bid for the athletes and pay them based on performance (McKenzie). Every year the athletes would be paid based on their worth to the school so the school surplus and the athlete surplus would be equal. Each athlete would be paid differently based on how they performed in previous games; so the teams MVP would make significantly more money than someone who only sits on the bench. The only problem with this is that an athlete could get dropped from the school if they didn't live up to what the school was paying them. In this case if an athlete would get injured or have bad games they may be dropped from the school and have to transfer. To avoid problems like this the NCAA Division I schools would have to sign a contract with their athlete that protected the athlete's money in case of injuries. The contract would be very hard to implement because the risk seems much higher for the school, making the school not want to have anything to do with the contract.

Professor Sanderson argues his best way to pay college athletes would be a point system to pay the athlete based on how many points they have. Most economists do not argue whether or not college athletes should get paid, they argue how they should get paid. Allen Sanderson who is an economist at the University of Chicago argues about a skill unit system to determine how much to pay the player. Professor Sanderson describes his skill unit system,

“More skill units can be extracted from existing players through extra training. Players ask for increasingly larger compensation per additional skill unit provided because of diminishing marginal returns to training and because the marginal value of leisure time increases as it becomes scarcer. At higher compensation rates, additional skill units also can be secured from players newly attracted to the market.”

He is basically saying that by rewarding athletes a skill unit point for all of their positive traits, such as scoring a touchdown or making multiple three point shots, the NCAA can implement a system that will perfectly pay each athlete based on their skill level. There are some very good points that professor Sanderson makes but there are some flaws. Sanderson's points are solely based on how the athlete does that year so there is not a lot of security in the job. There are so many complications with the other ways of paying athletes for all the good things they do for the school. Paying the athletes just a base salary that would be equivalent to minimum wage would be the best solution. The athletes would make extra money as if they had a part time job and the school wouldn't be taking a huge hit because most of that money would be going back to pay tuition.

Some of these athletes come from very poor backgrounds and are unable to pay for any extra supplies. Many of these athletes play a sport in hopes of getting recruited to a college to get a better life for themselves and help their families. Some of these athletes come from poor areas and their family is not able to send them to college because of the financial burden. Dominic Sylvester, who is an offensive lineman on full scholarship for University of Alabama at Birmingham, describes the struggle that he faces financially:

“They are wingtips, size 15, and he wears them to church, comes back to his dorm room and takes them off right away to preserve them...I don't have a lot of extra money to buy new ones. I've burned the rubber out. They don't have holes in them, but they are getting there” (Glier).

Sylvester's parents are poor and with no extra money from the school he is unable to purchase the most basic human necessities. This story hold true for many NCAA Division I athletes. Chris

Conley, a wide receiver at the University of Georgia, is unable to get a job and pay basic human necessities because of all the commitment he puts into his sport: "You end up doing all those things, and you get back to your room at such a late time, you need to study. There is no time for a job" (Glier). These kids train their whole lives to get a college scholarship so that they can make something out of their lives. The kids that finally end up making it and receive part scholarship will have to take out loans to make up the rest of the tuition (Sanderson). With no extra money they cannot afford to buy all the food they need to replenish their body after a hard day of training. If they rip their sneakers, they will have to wait a significant amount of time before they can scrape together enough money to buy an old pair of shoes. This is a true story for some of these athletes, and with the help of a salary paid from the school it will significantly improve their lives. They will no longer live in fear of how they are going to afford new cloths or their next meal. This money will give them the comfort that they deserve for working so hard to represent their school. Even though there are all these reasons to why athletes should get paid there are still some who argue against it.

People argue that when paying an athlete it would separate them from the student culture and put them above other students (Cooper). They would not be put above the rest of the students because to them it is just a job, they are getting paid to do their job. It is the same as the other students who are working to make extra money. Another argument is that the student-athletes get scholarship money every year and that is why they play their sport (Cooper). It is true that some of these athletes do receive scholarships but most of these athletes do not get enough money to even cover a meal plan, let alone tuition. In a recent NCAA approved statistics, only 2% of athletes coming out of high school will receive any scholarship money. Of those who do receive scholarship money, they only average about \$11,000 a year (NCSA). Most of these athletes are going to come out of college still in debt and have had a much more difficult road for the same outcomes. To try and save money these athletes are conserving money any way they can, either by limiting their food spending or clothes that they buy (Cooper). Shabazz Napier, who is a point guard from the University of Connecticut, tells his story about going to bed some nights on an empty stomach: "Sometimes, there's hungry nights where I'm not able to eat, but I still gotta play up to my capabilities" (Sherman). Even after putting in the thousands of hours in their sport the athletes will end up in the same spot as the average college student. This is why the only fair way to even playing field would be paying these athletes a base salary to cover the cost of food and clothing during their college experience.

People who argue against paying NCAA Division I athletes say that paying athletes will give them a sense of entitlement that will make them not listen to their coaches and teachers. If college athletes start getting paid they will think more highly of themselves and act like they run the school (Cooper). This is the opposite of what will happen if college athletes start receiving a salary for participating in sports. Paying the college athletes will give them more of an incentive to try harder in and out of practice. They will try harder to get good grades and do well on the team so that they will continue to receive this extra money. Money has always been an incentive for people; if college athletes were to receive money they would play their heart out every day to insure that they keep receiving money (Sanderson).

The final argument about not giving these college athletes money for all the hard work that they put in is that some of the sports simply do not deserve to be paid (Sanderson). Only the more popular sports at the larger schools are bringing in all the money while other smaller sports are depleting those revenues because no one comes to watch sports like golf and volleyball. It is true that the smaller and less well known sports, such as golf and volleyball, do not make the

money to cover the costs of what the school spends on funding that sport and to pay the athletes (McKenzie). These sports still bring the invaluable reputation to the school and the athletes still work just as hard as the big time schools.

Many of the Division I athletes are not known by your average American. These athletes are sacrificing all of their free time to train just like the popular big named athletes. These athletes had to penny pinch their way through college and will usually come out of college in debt. If the NCAA started to pay the athletes a salary, the salary that they receive would most likely end up going back to the school anyway through them paying off their tuition or for a meal plan. In reality by paying these athletes the school would not even be paying out of pocket, the school would just be giving them a discount on tuition or a meal plan. Giving them a salary is a better idea then paying them based on player performance because it gives them more security. If the players were paid off of performance the school would be able to cut them if they had a bad year. Most of these young men and women do not receive a lot of scholarship money so by paying them a salary it would give them a sense of relief and free them of some financial burden.

College athletes deserve to be paid a salary for all the positive things that they bring to the school including reputation and revenue. These schools have signed contracts worth billions of dollars just to stream the games on national television. The schools have brought in hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of revenue from merchandise and selling game tickets. These athletes have made the school a ridiculous amount of money and made the school look so much more appealing to future students; sadly these athletes will not see a penny of that money. If the NCAA did pay them a base salary for all their hard work, the athletes could no longer worry about affording a new pair of shoes or a meal to hold them over for night. The money would be put back towards the school to pay for tuition and books. Paying the athletes this salary would be a small gratitude from the school to show appreciation for all the hard work that they put in during their numerous years. Giving them extra money will not give them any entitlement or put them above the student body, in fact it would humble the athletes knowing that all their hard work finally paid off. These are just ordinary people who are employed by the school to produce a product that a consumer will buy. We live in America where people are paid for working and college athletes should not be an exception to this.