

BRADFORD WRITES
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To Pay or Not to Pay College Athletes

By Anonymous

In 2019, the total revenue reported from all NCAA athletics departments was \$18.9 billion (NCAA). Athletes across the nation are responsible for generating the bulk of this money for their schools, and they put in so much time. It only makes sense that they should be paid, right? Not so fast. There are definitely many arguments for colleges to pay their athletes. College athletes bring in tons of revenue for schools, and the time student-athletes have to put into sports cannot go unnoticed. However, there are too many problems that paying them would cause for colleges. Tight money issues, distractions from academic focus, and unequal pay among sports are a few of the many potential complications. An analysis of multiple sources and points of view will present a case for why there is a never-ending gateway of negative outcomes that would result from colleges paying their student-athletes.

There's a process to how college sports work. The athletes are the engine that makes a sport go. Without the athletes, there is no football, basketball, etc. As they improve and perform at a high level, they are rewarded. The better the athlete, the bigger the scholarship, along with the more opportunities to receive. Just like a high-ranking job in a business, the higher the job the more someone is paid. With that comes added bonuses. The difference between a college athlete and an employee of a business, however, is that a sports team is not a business in college. College athletes get their own benefits from sports, but a salary is not and should not be one of them.

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According to an article from theconversation.com, the author argues that players are prevented from earning any kind of compensation from colleges making money off of them. Jasmine Harris, the author, notes that the value of most athletes' image and likeness only lasts for a few years during college. She claims that the revenue being made from players is not used correctly, as it goes towards funding other than being allocated back to the students. It goes towards coaches' salaries, school facilities, dorms, etc. (Harris). However, going back to the business analogy, athletes are the money-makers. What this argument fails to consider is that the money generated by them is ultimately used directly for their benefit in multiple ways. Even if some of the revenue is used for coaches' salaries, that right there is a benefit to the players for someone to lead them to success. Additionally, as athletes generate revenue, it is used to erase their college tuition. Revenue not only provides them scholarships, but it also provides exclusive athletic facilities, food, transportation, and free health insurance.

Another argument made in favor of paying college athletes by Michigan State law professors Robert and Amy McCormick is that athletes, specifically playing football or basketball at Division 1 schools, "are laboring under very strict and arduous conditions, so they really are laborers in terms of the physical demands on them while they're also trying to go to school and being required to go to school." They argue that sports put a lot of weight on students' backs, and they work so much that they should be considered employees (cmaadmin).

There is no doubt that athletes put significant time into sports, and sports are demanding. However, sports are a privilege. When speaking about student-athletes, "student" always comes first. Playing a sport is a requirement for no one at any college. It is a privilege and an opportunity for students to continue to play sports while getting an education. Being paid to play

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as a job is not how college sports work, and it never should be. Additionally, if athletes want to be paid to play, that is what professional sports are for. People with this aspiration go to college to prepare for a professional job in a sport. Why is this different from going to college to prepare for a full-time job? Students are not paid to go to college to prepare for their future jobs, and if college athletes have intentions of playing professionally, college is the middle point with development, not a salary.

Furthermore, those who argue that student-athletes should be paid because they have to juggle both school and sports lead right back to the privilege point. Playing sports in college is a privilege. It is a voluntary opportunity. If students are unable to handle the demands of both school and sports, it is totally in their control to stop playing. Former Duke athlete Tommy Amaker, from the same article calling for student-athletes to be considered employees, said “I never felt like I was an employee of Duke University,” as he got to have his tuition paid for while living out his dream of playing collegiate basketball. Former Boston College quarterback Willie Hicks Jr. also said he felt “blessed” to have been able to attend college without paying for his tuition, room, and books. Again, playing sports in college is a privilege and a requirement for no one. Donald Remy, the NCAA’s general counsel and vice president for legal affairs, puts it perfectly saying, “athletes attend college as a privilege and are provided the unique opportunity to earn a degree and at the same time compete in intercollegiate athletics. That opportunity is incongruent with the notion of being an employee” (cmaadmin).

One additional thing that many advocates for paying college athletes don’t note is the inclusion of all sports, both male and female. When paying college athletes is discussed, many people such as the McCormicks only speak of major money-makers, such as Division 1 football

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and basketball. However, this causes an issue for other sports. While men's football and basketball generate the majority of the money, it can be argued that other male and female sports deserve to be compensated as well. This is not to mention Division 2 and 3 sports, which also practice at a very high rate. Although they may work just as hard, they don't generate near as much revenue. So, how are these athletes going to be paid equally if they don't generate a fraction of the money that major Division 1 men's sports do? Well, they simply aren't because the money just isn't there. They wouldn't be paid near as much, and then new controversies would boil over unequal pay between different sports and males and females. There isn't enough money to pay everyone, and there's definitely not enough to pay them equally.

An additional reason why paying college athletes is a bad idea in terms of competing programs is that colleges and universities have very different funding. It is known all across the country that small schools just don't have the same capabilities that major Division 1 schools do. With major schools already having lots of power, they would have even more to recruit players. Larger schools would have more money to offer to players than smaller schools. There would be a few dominant conferences in each sport with dominant teams, and small schools would potentially lose their programs because they would not be able to compete with the bigger schools and provide the same contracts to attract players. Because of this, many of these small schools would lose a reliable source of revenue.

With money already being tight for colleges, the notion to pay athletes is a recipe for financial crisis. If schools are going to take away athletic scholarships and replace them with salaries for their student-athletes, they would pay them more money based on the revenue they bring in. However, according to theatlantic.com, colleges and universities collectively owe \$240

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billion already (Marcus). This debt has been rising over the years, and paying athletes would drop funds for schools even more. If this was to happen, then many other students would suffer the hit. If every athlete got paid, tuition for all the non-athletes would go through the roof to avoid additional debt. Again, the money just isn't there.

The subject of salaries and contracts for student-athletes poses a huge web of issues as well. One possibility that hasn't been widely recognized is students who play multiple sports. If students were to play multiple sports, how would they be paid? Would they earn a source of income for each sport, or would they all make the same amount regardless? Additionally, if an athlete was to play two sports and earn two sources of income, then every student-athlete would want to play two sports. Now, this causes them to focus even less on academics, and grades would likely spiral downward.

In addition, contract disputes are an inevitable problem for paying college athletes. Signing bonuses, multi-year deals, and salaries would be a never-ending settlement. Imagine a player not being able to leave college because it's in his contract to stay another year or semester. If people think professional athletes holding out on contracts is a problem, they wouldn't have seen a thing. Students would develop issues with academic progress and eligibility to play. If they were to hold out, they may forfeit earnings, eligibility, and refuse to go to school unless they are paid. The controversy surrounding 18-22-year-olds with contracts and performance would be a game in itself.

To that point, giving contracts to college athletes is a gateway to high school sports as well. People say college athletes put in so much work and generate money for their schools, so they should get paid. Well, if that's the case then high school athletes should be paid too because

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they practice and generate money for their schools. However, tons of high schools across the country depend mainly on their athletic programs as a source of income to keep their schools running. If they now have to pay their athletes, they will have no money left to pay.

This possibility of paying student-athletes not only sends a bad message to high school students, but it also sends an awful message to young kids in elementary and middle school. As soon as they see college athletes getting paid they will be demanding pay at lower levels. As previously mentioned, the problem with college contracts is a very big issue. However, if high school athletes were to also be paid, there is no doubt that they will hold out for money. Students with less maturity will demand payment from their schools, and kids will grow up wanting to play a major sport regardless of talent, skill, or desire.

Finally, the essence of college must be discussed. For the majority of students, college is the last chance for them to competitively play sports. The main purpose of playing a sport in college is for a student to earn a degree while enjoying the privilege of playing the sport they love for a few more years. According to a 2020 NCAA report, fewer than two percent of college athletes will go on to play professional sports (Cliburn). So, for that ninety-eight percent of college athletes who go on to acquire normal jobs, it is vital to maintain academics as the focal point of college. Paying student-athletes not only gives them a false sense of direction for how their income will be made and how much, but it also takes focus away from school and a future in their respective fields of study. School always comes before sports. If they put too much focus into getting paid and not enough into the classroom, their grades could plummet. If bad grades come into the picture, this is a possible end-game for a future in any type of career.

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College sports are an amazing part of school. They bring students together, create long-lasting friendships, build important characteristics, and produce revenue. There are so many great things about college sports, but paying the student-athletes who make them great has too many negative possibilities. As previously stated, college sports are not a step toward professional sports for the ninety-eight percent, but they are a privilege for students to continue to play the sport they love for a few more years. The ultimate goal for almost all student-athletes is to go to college to get a great education and earn important qualifications for a future career. Taking students' focus away from this goal is misleading and negatively impactful for many students' futures in life.

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