

Should college athletes be paid?

COLLEGES HAVE A tradition of giving many student athletes a free education, as well as room and board and professional coaching and training. Supporters of this tradition say that is compensation enough for athletes' contribution to college sports. Critics argue that it's a drop in the bucket, given that college sports is a multibillion-dollar industry, and the players who make it so deserve to be compensated in the form of a paycheck.

What do you think?



Find out more about this topic on the Web:

- www.cincinnati.com (search "Paying college athletes")
- www.theday.com (search "NCAA: It's time to start paying your athletes")
- www.si.com (search "College athletes already have advantages and shouldn't be paid")

YES

from members:

Ben Hutton
Augusta, GA



College athletes generate millions of dollars in revenues for their universities, while sacrificing huge amounts of their waking hours.

Teresa Slater
Laveen, AZ



Universities make millions of dollars from the major sports, but most players' families are struggling.

Carlos Gravador
Memphis, TN



They are getting a scholarship and meals, but that is not enough, compared to the revenue they generate.

NO

from members:

Tania White
Orlando, FL



They are getting a free ride to college ... so they don't need extra money. They can wait until they become pro.

Jason Maioho
Wilbur, WA



Paying collegiate players cash will change the integrity of each sport.

Jill Wanous
Brainerd, MN



College athletes are simply not pros yet.

MEDIA BAKERY

from an expert in the field:



Marc Edelman (www.marcedelman.com) is an associate professor of law at City University of New York and a legal consultant on sports, antitrust, gaming and intellectual property matters.

THE COLLEGE sports industry generates \$11 billion in annual revenues, which are then passed along to NCAA executives, athletic directors and coaches in the form of lucrative salaries. In 2011, NCAA members paid their association president, Mark Emmert, \$1.7 million. Meanwhile, head football coaches at the 44 NCAA Bowl Championship Series schools received on average \$2.1 million.

In contrast, with Division I college football and men's basketball players, the NCAA enforces a principle of amateurism and levies penalties against member colleges that provide student athletes with benefits beyond an NCAA-permitted amount.

Not only do these rules leave an estimated 85 percent of college athletes who are on scholarship below the poverty line, but they seem to violate the Sherman Antitrust Act, which aims to preserve "free and unfettered" competition as the rule of trade. The NCAA is composed of 1,066 independent member schools. When these schools come together to pass rules to limit athlete compensation, their rules can reasonably be construed as an illegal form of wage fixing.

Some NCAA leaders claim that compensating student-athletes would destroy competitive balance in college sports as well as contravene federal anti-discrimination laws, including Title IX. However, neither of these arguments has much merit. Even if the NCAA allows colleges to pay their athletes, individual conferences could still maintain competitive balance via conference-wide revenue sharing and salary caps. Meanwhile, Title IX is primarily about equal academic and athletic opportunities—not depriving star athletes of free-market opportunities.

Ultimately, the argument in favor of allowing colleges to pay their student athletes comes down to three factors: economic efficiency, distributive justice and a reasonable interpretation of U.S. antitrust laws. The argument against paying college athletes devolves into self-interest.

College athletes should be allowed to compete for salaries on the free market, as many other college employees already do. Of course, no individual college should be forced to pay its athletes. By the same token, no individual college should be prevented by the NCAA from doing so, at least so long as it recognizes free economic markets for the recruiting of college coaches, athletic directors and other administrators. [E]

from an expert in the field:



Jeffrey Dorfman is a professor at the University of Georgia (www.uga.edu), where he teaches macroeconomics.

AS THE dollars involved in television contracts for college football and basketball continue to rise, many people wonder why colleges cannot pay their student athletes. The two-part answer is that they already do and that in most cases there is no more money to hand out.

Many student athletes currently receive compensation in the form of free tuition, room, meal plans and some money for books and miscellaneous expenses. Some universities also provide academic counseling, tutoring, life-skills training and even nutritional advice. The combined value of all this easily tops \$100,000 per year in value for most football and basketball players. For athletes in sports where subsequent pro careers are possible, the coaching and exposure provided by a college are potentially worth millions of dollars in enhanced future earnings.

Having established that the athletes are not going uncompensated, let's talk about why changing the system to include direct pay for athletes would be difficult.

Only two or three sports typically make money: football, men's basketball and women's basketball. The remaining sports bring in little

or no revenue while still costing the colleges money. Because of this, more than 90 percent of athletic departments lose money. Thus, in most cases, raising the costs of football and basketball will mean the elimination of other, non-revenue sports. New opportunities for a few will mean the end of free education for thousands of swimmers, softball players, track athletes and others who never appear on television but still are highly dedicated to competing for their schools.

A related question: Will fans still be as passionate about college sports if many of the players are now paid professional athletes? We admire amateur athletes for their purity and tend to complain about highly paid pros. Are students and their fans ready to accept a new status quo?

Student athletes have voluntarily agreed to the deal as it stands now: lots of free stuff in exchange for playing a sport they love. Everyone understands the contract involved. If student athletes do not like the status quo, let them skip college and play pro or non-college amateur sports. The few who feel college athletics is unfair to students should not destroy college sports for the over 400,000 student athletes who are enjoying and benefiting from the current system. [E]

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