

# *Show Me the Money*

## Critical Response by Sarah Gullickson, English 101

According to college journalist Brennan Robbins, “One bizarre feature of American life is that perhaps our most highly publicized labor disputes are between rich athletes and super-rich sports team owners. Rarely do the plights of the athletes or owners inspire much sympathy.” While no one can doubt that professional athletes make enough money, the compensation of college athletes remains up for debate. When it comes to the topic of paying college athletes, many believe that athletes should receive more than just the scholarships presented to them. The NCAA has taken the opposite stance and feels this practice will ruin college sports and have a negative impact on the fan base. Colleges with bigger bank accounts would have an unfair advantage and would have the ability to buy a winning season similar to the approach the 2011 Miami Heat NBA team took. After weighing the different arguments, I assert that student athletes receive enough money through scholarships and need to spend their time in college growing and getting better for the next level, the level that pays.

According to the website, *Dictionary.com*, a job is “anything a person is expected or obliged to do; duty; responsibility” (“Job”). Athletes in college are expected and obliged to go to practice every day, lift weights, attend all games, and to keep their grades up. Based on the definition cited above, this commitment could be considered a “job.” Granted, they are making a huge commitment in terms of time and energy, but there are several factors to take into consideration. College athletes are recruited for their athletic ability and are given an opportunity to participate in the sports that they enjoy while they are attending college. Many athletes are able to achieve their degrees at a greatly reduced cost compared to their non-athlete counterparts. The commitment to participate in sports at the collegiate level does not justify that athletes should be paid in return.

On the other hand, numerous student athletes do believe that they should be paid for their performance. After all, they are subjected to a rigorous schedule of practices, conditioning, travel, games, etc. College athletes claim that getting paid in return for all they do for the university is justified. Lineman Stephon Heyer, athletics director Debbie Yow and coach Gary Williams, who are former college athletes, support the idea of receiving pay for their talents. For justification of athlete salaries, they point to the grueling schedule the athletes are forced to keep up with, as well as the physical toll on the body (Offutt). Heyer mentions he never had money to buy a pizza with the guys or for clothes, since athletes are not allowed to have a job and wouldn’t have time for one even if it were not regulated (Offutt). On top of tuition and books, athletes need money for other amenities such as food, clothes, and anything that will help them enjoy the college experience. The subject and debates must have the support of the athletes and former collegiate athletes as well to validate the case.

Robert Lipsyte shares a stance with the athletes. Lipsyte himself says, “Everybody gets rich off the NCAA Tourney—the colleges, the conferences, the networks, the announcers and analysts, the coaches, the fans who win their office pools-everybody, that is, but the stars of the show: the players themselves” (Shanoff). Lipsyte argues with Shanoff in a Writers Bloc debate, stating that a lot of these athletes are cheated out of a good chance at education. His point is that athletes in “revenue-producing sports” should have the ability to choose attending school as a regular student or taking an altered athletic track where they would be paid a living wage, possibly taking basic courses along the way. Lipsyte further argues that paying college athletes would end all the lying and cheating that in the end depraves these college sports (Shanoff). Steve Spurrier, the football coach at the University of South Carolina, believes that players should be paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 per season (Cohen). Many student athletes, coaches, and fans also support this notion that athletes should be paid for their hard work and skill. While I agree with compensating college athletes in the form of scholarships and payment for room and board, I do not support additional funding in the form of payment. College is a time for athletes to learn and to get better prepared to pursue their career of choice after school. For some, this career will be pursuing sports on a professional level, but for the majority, it will not. In addition to payment of their college tuition, athletes are given the opportunity to network with many people and to form bonds that will last a lifetime. Some of those connections may help them as they pursue careers in the future.

Like myself, not all former collegiate athletes support the argument for compensation. According to Casey Harman, a Clemson baseball alumni and current Chicago Cub player, “College is all about teamwork and if you got paid it would turn really individualized. The best thing about college is the family you develop with your teammates, and if you were getting paid you wouldn’t have that” (Harman). During the interview with Harman he also stated, “The money the schools make goes to upgrading facilities and getting equipment and all that. If students got paid they wouldn’t be concerned with schoolwork at all and probably wouldn’t do well or even worry about it since they’re getting paid.” Through Harman’s words, we see that he believes college is where they find out if they have what it takes to participate in sports at the professional level where they would be paid for what they do. In other words, it is a stepping-stone to moving on to the world of professional sports. Casey may feel this way about the topic because he is now getting paid for playing baseball; however, he makes some very good points. For example, he stresses the importance of the bonds formed with other athletes and how this would be a very different dynamic if the athletes were getting paid and competing with one another on a monetary level. If students were to get paid extra for playing sports, they would not worry about their school work or about completing the work necessary to get their degree. Other friends and relatives of mine who played baseball at the collegiate and professional level have confirmed this theory.

Other arguments stating student athletes should not be given compensation are that paid students would no longer be considered amateurs, the act of compensating them could be considered un-sportsman like conduct, and schools that participated could develop bad reputations of buying performances and championships (Kasper). When monetary rewards are given, the athlete is then technically a professional. If athletes were to be paid, it would also add another level of competitive complexity to the relationship between the players on a team and could result in unsportsmanlike conduct among players, thereby hurting the university sport programs overall. In her article, “Top College Athletes Deserve Compensation,” Brennan Robbins writes, “One of the most frequently cited arguments against paying college players is that compensating college players for their services would taint college sports. The argument suggests players should play for the love of the game; money gives the sport a distasteful commercial air.” When athletes accept scholarships, they are provided tuition, books, meals, housing, and sometimes graduate assistantships (Martin). At some colleges and universities, such support may reach a value of \$200,000 over a four-year period (Martin). Student-athletes may also receive special treatment when it comes to academic issues, for example priority scheduling, tutoring assistance, and excused absences (Martin). This is what leads people to think that athletes are already sufficiently compensated and receive ample benefits. Shelby Webb, a softball player at Limestone College told me that she receives free room and board and pays nothing to attend school; the school actually pays her. I agree that student athletes receive excellent treatment in return for their extra commitment to the athletic programs they participate in. This is a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe they do not receive enough.

According to the newest president of the NCAA, Mark Emmert, no athlete will be paid nor receive any other benefits that would cause the athlete to be considered a “professional” as long as the NCAA is under his leadership. “They are student-athletes. They are not our employees, they don’t work for us,” Emmert said. “They are our students, so we don’t pay them” (“Emmert”). Emmert insists that he is dedicated to changing the value of scholarships so that they cover all costs of attending college. He does not believe that infractions such as taking money from a prospective agent or selling sports memorabilia stem from athletes being broke, as is widely the perception (“Emmert”). Basically, the NCAA is saying that athletes should be thankful for the things that they receive and the extra opportunities they are being given, and in exchange they are expected not to break the rules that are set forth by the NCAA. Dan Shanoff made the same points in a conversation he had with Robert Lipsyte. According to Shanoff, “Last time I checked Joe Jumpshot and Teddy Tailback got to attend college FOR FREE.” He continued to explain how not only was the food free but also the room and board which for athletes meant the best dorms and rooms on campus. Shanoff also noted that they got full-time teaching assistants, free books and classes, which they usually got the first and best choice. In making these comments, Shanoff argues along with Emmert that college athletes are already being paid not just through free tuition but “an all-the-way free experience” (Shanoff).

Despite all the perks and benefits given to student athletes there continues to be a widespread issue of abuse by boosters and associates of universities who feel it is necessary to set themselves apart from other schools and athletic programs by giving their star athletes and recruits gifts. The University of Miami was found to be involved in such a

practice. Athletes were found to be receiving special gifts from boosters and other associates with the University. Students were persuaded to come to “The U” with gifts and bribery. This practice had been going on for so long that it became acceptable in the eyes of those involved. Jacory Harris, a Miami quarterback, was given a game suspension and ordered to pay charges that were a little over \$140 for improper meals and nightclub cover charges (Cohen). Ben Cohen argues in his article “The Case for Paying College Athletes” that the “NCAA athletes are held to what is, essentially, the strictest code of amateurism in sports.” Yet student athletes are amateurs; they are not professionals. Professionals get paid to play the game, student athletes receive grants or other such benefits from the school that they are associated with in order to gain the opportunity to earn a degree while playing their sport. Bribes and gifts set a very poor example and are the basis for the NCAA’s argument against compensating athletes. When situations like the one at Miami are exposed, the University’s reputation and athletic programs are tarnished.

Although college sports compensation may seem of concern to only a small group including the athletes, coaches, and the NCAA, it should concern anyone who cares about the future of college sports. “If an athlete doesn’t shoot hoops all summer, he or she won’t be shooting hoops in sold-out arena during the winter” stated Looney in his article “Cash, Check, or Charge.” This idea of “big money” and paying college athletes has ruined the ideal. According to Looney, “The words sting but they are true: Cheating is rampant and can’t be controlled.” This is one of the main reasons not to extend pay to collegiate athletes, yet big schools continue to find a way around the rules. A sociology professor at a college in Connecticut, Allen L. Sack, conducted a survey that revealed approximately one-third of former professional athletes received illegal payments while in college (Looney). Just because this activity has gone on for years without repercussion, should it therefore be overlooked and allowed to continue? If that argument is made, we lose sight of what playing sports in college is really all about and that experience is no longer distinct and meaningful. I agree with Casey Harman in that “college is where you find out if you are good enough or ready to get paid for what you do, it is a stepping stone to going pro.” There is the school of thought that athletes could receive ten percent of the net profit brought in by the sport which would be distributed to the players via a trust fund handled by the university and given to them after they graduate (Looney). Ultimately, what is at stake is that paying college athletes would lead to bigger problems and the true meaning of playing sports would be lost: playing for the love of the sport, not for the money.

Any goal or life achievement takes commitment and requires that positions be taken along the ways that are stepping-stones. Sometimes, these “stepping stones” are in the form of menial jobs for low pay. Sometimes, they are in the form of internships where an individual receives no compensation, yet the experience achieved is invaluable. College athletes should look at the time spent on school teams in this same manner—just like an internship where they are improving their skills, making invaluable contacts, etc. This message needs to be conveyed rather than finding ways to give money and extravagant gifts. In the long run, those gifts will not help the program, or the athlete. The athlete being given gifts or compensation may develop an attitude of entitlement rather than viewing the opportunity as one of good fortune that they should work hard for. Ultimately, those that ignore the NCAA rules are sending the wrong message and harming the very athletes they contend they are helping.

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