

Should College Athletes Be Paid?

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's college basketball tournament is known as March Madness. That's because the annual playoffs, which more than 20 million people watch on TV, is one of the most popular sporting events in the country.

But March Madness is also big business. TV networks pay the NCAA hundreds of millions of dollars per year for the rights to air the games, and advertisers can pay up to \$1.5 million for a 30-second TV ad that runs during the tournament.

Considering how much money the players generate for the NCAA and their schools, should college athletes be paid? Here, two experts weigh in.

\$600 million

Approximate amount ESPN is paying annually to broadcast college football playoffs.

SOURCE: FORBES

75

Number of college football head coaches who earn more than \$1 million annually.

SOURCE: BILLION-DOLLAR BALL, BY GILBERT GAUL

YES The college sports establishment likes to call the athletes who play varsity sports at universities "student athletes."

A far more accurate term would be "athlete students." Putting the word "athlete" first would at least let everybody know what the priorities are.

This is especially true for football and men's basketball players. Why? Because unlike every other student who has been accepted into the universities they play for, the football and basketball players are there to generate revenue for the school. Without that athletic ability, many of them wouldn't have been admitted.

My belief that football and men's basketball players should be paid is based almost entirely on economics. College football and basketball are multibillion-dollar businesses. They have billion-dollar TV deals and corporate team sponsors. The coaches for these teams earn millions. Even the assistant coaches make hundreds of thousands. Schools have money for fancy

training facilities, charter jets to away games, and state-of-the-art arenas. Yet the labor force—and that's what the players are—gets nothing. Name another industry where labor gets nothing. You can't.

The NCAA and the college sports establishment argue that the players are "students first" and that amateurism is the essence of college sports. Yet players have to choose classes that don't interfere with practice. Indeed, they often don't really get much of an education because the team comes first, they put in 50 hours a week on their sport,

and their coach is effectively their boss, with the ability to cut them from the team, just like a pro coach.

The truth is that fans wouldn't care if players were paid. But the college sports establishment uses the self-serving argument about amateurism because, frankly, it has helped them get very rich. •

Men's basketball and football players are there to make money for the school.

—JOE NOCERA

Author, *Indentured: The Inside Story of the Rebellion Against the NCAA*



\$10.8 billion

Amount CBS and Turner Sports is paying the NCAA for the rights to broadcast the March Madness tournament for a 14-year period ending in 2024.

SOURCE: NCAA

Kris Jenkins, forward for the Villanova Wildcats, the 2016 NCAA champions

Baker Mayfield, quarterback for the Oklahoma Sooners

\$24.2 million

Profits made in 2014 by the men's basketball team at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky. The Louisville Cardinals were NCAA basketball's top-earning team that year.

SOURCE: ESPN ANALYSIS OF U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION EQUITY IN ATHLETICS DATA

NO College athletics provide hundreds of thousands of student athletes the opportunity to play the sports they love while getting the education and skills they need to succeed after college. Paying students to play would turn them into employees, shifting their focus away from academics. After all, of the more than 480,000 NCAA student athletes, fewer than 2 percent go on to play professional sports.

Among NCAA student athletes, 15 percent say they wouldn't even be in college without their sport. That experience is made possible by the \$2.7 billion in athletic scholarships awarded each year by NCAA schools. Unlike many of their peers, scholarship student athletes don't leave school burdened by a mountain of student loan debt.

Recently, the Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Big Ten, Southeastern, and Pac-12 conferences redefined athletic scholarships to cover the full cost of college, including living expenses that fall outside the traditional tuition, such as transportation, books, fees, and room and board. Also, those schools can no longer revoke a scholarship solely for athletics

Paying students to play would shift their focus away from academics.

reasons, and many other conferences have followed suit.

Many people wrongly believe that the NCAA and its members earn millions of dollars in profit annually. In fact, athletic departments that take in more money than they spend are a distinct minority, and the NCAA distributes

90 percent of its revenue back to member campuses and conferences. That money funds programs supporting the academic needs and well-being of student athletes.

Paying college athletes would force many schools to make tough choices and field fewer athletic teams. It would

rob many students of the chance not only to compete but also to learn the life skills that participating in sports imparts: time management, resilience, discipline, and teamwork. The NCAA is committed to fairness and helping all student athletes achieve their dreams. While we have made great strides, we recognize we have work to do. Paying students to play is not the way to get there. •

—BOB WILLIAMS

Senior Vice President of Communications, NCAA

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY VANESSA IRENA; THURMAN JAMES/CAL SPORT MEDIA VIA AP IMAGES (FOOTBALL PLAYER); MITCHELL LAYTON/GETTY IMAGES (BASKETBALL PLAYER)

DEBATE PAGES 22-23

Lexile level: 1090L

Should College Athletes Be Paid?

YES: Joe Nocera, Author of *Indentured: The Inside Story of the Rebellion Against the NCAA*

NO: Bob Williams, Senior Vice President of Communications, NCAA



Additional Resources upfrontmagazine.com

Print or project:

- Analyzing Authors' Claims (online and on p. T13)

Vote: Choose a side in the debate and see instant results from across the U.S.

Analyze the Debate

1 Set Focus: Frame the inquiry with an essential question: *What is the role of sports in society?*

2 Read and Discuss: Have students read the debate then answer the following questions:

- ▶ **What is the issue being debated? How does it relate to current events?** (*The issue is whether college athletes should be paid. This issue is timely because the NCAA March Madness basketball tournament is going on this month. The tournament generates millions of dollars for the NCAA and schools competing in the tournament.*)

- ▶ **Evaluate why these two authors might be interested in and qualified to comment on this issue.** (*Nocera has written a book about this issue that is critical of the NCAA. Williams is an NCAA executive.*)

3 Core Skill Practice

Project or distribute **Analyzing Authors' Claims**, and have students use the activity to analyze and evaluate each author's arguments.

- ▶ **Analyze Nocera's view.** (*Nocera argues that although college football and men's basketball are multibillion-dollar businesses, the players who serve as the "labor force" do not benefit. He says that the players are expected to prioritize their sport over their academics and that most are at their colleges largely to generate revenue for the colleges.*)
- ▶ **Analyze Williams's view.** (*Williams argues that paying college athletes would shift their attention away from academics. He says that most college athletes already get full scholarships and argues that few college athletic departments take in more money than they spend. He also fears that paying athletes would force schools to have fewer teams.*)

Extend & Assess

4 Writing Prompt

In an essay, evaluate one debater's arguments. Assess whether the reasoning is valid and whether it's supported with solid evidence. Point out biases or missing information.

5 Classroom Debate

Should college athletes be paid? Have students use the authors' ideas, as well as their own, in a debate.

6 Vote

Once you've explored both sides of this issue, go online to vote in *Upfront's* poll—and see how students across the country voted.

Analyzing Authors' Claims

Read the debate on pages 22-23 about whether college athletes should be paid, then follow the directions below to analyze each author's claims and decide who makes a stronger case.

AUTHOR: Joe Nocera

Author, *Indentured: The Inside Story of the Rebellion Against the NCAA*

AUTHOR: Bob Williams

Senior Vice President of Communications, NCAA

Author's main claim or argument in the debate:

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REASON 1: Name one reason the author gives for his claim.

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List evidence the author gives to support Reason 1.

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REASON 2: Name another reason the author presents.

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List evidence the author gives to support Reason 2.

List evidence the author gives to support Reason 2.

REASON 3: Name a third reason the author presents.

REASON 3: Name a third reason the author presents.

List evidence the author gives to support Reason 3.

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What persuasive devices does the author use?

- Appeals to emotions
- Uses data or scholarly research
- Tells why the other side's argument is weak
- Other: _____

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EVALUATE: Which author do you think makes a more effective case? Do you spot any weaknesses—like a bias or missing information—in either argument? Explain on a separate sheet of paper.

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