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Should College Athletes be compensated for Their Talents?

Why college athletes should not be compensated, and why I disagree with the recent NCAA law change.

A recent debate has been sparked in the college athletics world on whether or not college athletes should be paid for their talent. Personally, I do not agree with college athletes getting paid to play, because I believe they are already somewhat compensated. A new law across the NCAA that takes effect in 2023 will allow athletes to get paid, which sparked even more debate on this topic.

I believe college athletes should not be compensated, because most college athletes are getting scholarships to further their education at the universities that offer them this opportunity. These scholarships are enough payment. In reality, fewer than 2 percent of college athletes make it to the professional level. This is a statistic that helps me justify why scholarships are a good form of payment for people with such talent, that isn't necessarily of monetary value. Athletic scholarships help young men and women all across the nation improve themselves, and get an education. With an education that may have been fully, or partially paid for through athletic scholarships, the other 98 percent of athletes can find a job after college. A college degree is priceless in today's world. Almost any desirable job requires a degree.

The Fair Pay to Play Act is a law that is awaiting the decision of California Governor, Gavin Newsom. This law would allow college athletes in the state of California to sign agents, and endorsement deals during their college career. The athletes could receive monetary compensation through these deals by popular athletic brands like Nike or Adidas using their name, image, or likeness. This bill would also stop the NCAA (National College Athletic Association) from forbidding athletes to take that money. This decision will affect schools at every level of competition: over 110 JUCO, 18 NAIA, 12 NCAA Division-III, 22 NCAA Division-II, and 25 NCAA Division-I. The Act is the first of its kind, although the idea has been tossed around for eons. Even though it is the first state to propose a law of this sort, nine other states are now considering proposing bills that are similar. The NCAA strongly opposed this law in the beginning, suggesting that athletic powerhouses like Stanford, USC, and UCLA would no longer be able to compete for NCAA tournaments. The NCAA's stance in the beginning was based off the idea that if this bill passes, it would give schools that already have a large appeal due to their success an unfair advantage in the recruiting field. Thus "stacking" or "overpowering" the teams that these schools would field for competitions like conference and national championships. Any highly touted high school athlete would be out of their mind to not choose to go to a school that offers the same great things that other powerhouses do, but adding the factor of stipends.

However, the NCAA's opinions changed. As of October 29th, 2019 the NCAA released a statement saying that they are working on modifications to the system to wear athletes could receive "stipends" for endorsements. A league official stated that this is in the best interest of student-athletes all across the country. Also stating that it is a league that can flex with its rules to ensure fair opportunities for all student-athletes.

Are there any cases of programs violating the NCAA recruiting rules before their change of heart? The short and simple answer would be: several. According to the NCAA's website there have been nearly 1,300 major infractions of just recruitment violations. The majority of which, involve highly sought after high school seniors receiving money, cars, dinners, and even prostitutes from schools trying to persuade them to pursue their academic and athletic dreams at a university level. The point being, things similar to what this bill is proposing do happen. This is unethical, immoral, and extremely wrong. Most kids are making these decisions at 17 or 18 years old, which to a certain point is unfair. Even more unfair is throwing out dollar signs, and expecting these kids to make the best decision for their future.

The most recent, and one of the largest NCAA scandals involved the athletic brand Adidas, and nearly 10 top tier Division I Men's Basketball programs. The former Adidas executive, James Gatto, business spokesman Christian Dawkins, and consultant Merl Code were convicted in October of 2018 for conspiracy to commit fraud, and bribery. They reportedly funneled money to families of athletes to persuade them to continue their careers at Adidas sponsored schools. Most university schools are sponsored to wear a certain brand of uniform in competition to not only promote the brand, but provide the school equipment at a cut-rate price, which is completely legal. However, bribing teenagers to go to a certain school to help the brand's image is not. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were poured into these athletes to help the brand's image. With better athletes comes more media attention, better teams, and more television time. This proves that in hindsight the discussion of athlete endorsements should not be on the table. In the end, business is business, and the brand will do whatever is necessary to protect themselves. Including taking "promised" money from teenagers without a second thought.

Athletes choose to play a sport in college. It isn't a necessity. Getting into the real, working world is a necessity. Most athletes can choose to take the route to try their talents at the professional level, but the 98 percent of athletes that do not make the cut essentially get the same end result with their education: a paycheck.

To conclude, in no way do I agree that college athletes should get paid for their talents. I do think that these athletes deserve an education, and I agree that college sports are a great enhancer of making it to be a professional. In all truthfulness, 98 percent of college athletes do not get this opportunity. Quite honestly, the athletes have the same end goal which is having a career. I believe that these careers should be obtained through a degree, or professional sports, and that scholarships already offer a lot of opportunities for athletes to pursue their goals. Also, businesses will do what is best for their business, and cold-hearted business decisions should not be another weight on a developing teenager's life. There would never be a good and informed decision on where they should start their future, most athletes would just see dollar signs. Finally, college athletes at all levels are playing because they love the game. They realize that college athletics is a personal choice, and is not a necessity. The end result of a career is what matters.