Why College Athletes should be paid

By Tyson Hartnett. Former professional athlete, writer and entrepreneur

There has been major discussion recently if college athletes should or shouldn’t be paid while they are in school. The first thing opponents say is, "They're already getting a scholarship! That's more than anybody else! Don't be greedy!"

Fine, let’s not be greedy and look at how much a scholarship is actually worth. On average, a full Division 1 scholarship is $25,000 per year.

"That's $100,000 over four years!"

Yes it is, but most athletes don't last at a school for the whole four years. Once you get a sport involved, there are politics, injuries, and a call to the office to tell the player, "Thanks, but we don't need you on this team anymore." Many players will get a scholarship for a year or two, then transfer to a different school which turns out to be a better situation.

A $25,000 scholarship may seem like a lot of money, but it really only covers the basics. It covers thousands of dollars in mysterious, unknown university fees, tuition, housing, a meal-plan and multiple hundred-dollar textbooks. Some players, if they come from a low-income household, get a few hundred dollars each semester from Pell Grants which enables them to buy chicken soup instead of chicken-flavored ramen.

Contrary to what all the opponents believe, being an athlete is a full-time job. On a typical day, a player will wake up before classes, get a lift or conditioning session in, go to class until 3 or 4 p.m., go to practice, go to mandatory study hall, and then finish homework or study for a test.

For a little extra money to see a movie or go out to dinner once a week, my freshman roommate worked a job at the university, earning about $7/hour. He would work his butt off all day, with two or sometimes three basketball training sessions, plus classes and homework, and go to that job for a few hours late at night. He would come back exhausted, but he needed whatever money they would pay him.

However, once the season started up, he couldn’t work that job anymore. We were on the road all the time, even gone for two straight weeks at one point. The teachers let us do our work from the road, but the job wasn't going to pay you just because you were playing basketball on a road trip. The team gave us meal money (about $7 per meal) so we could get chips and condiments with our sandwiches, but anything else was considered an NCAA violation.
The point of this is that a scholarship doesn't equal cash in a player's pocket. Even with any type of scholarship, college athletes are typically dead broke. But how much do the top NCAA executives make? About $1 million per year.

Who else makes money off these near-professional level athletes?

First, their own coaches. Many coaches earn at least $100,000 per year to coach one of the major sports like baseball, basketball, or football at a school. These coaches will receive bonuses for getting to the playoffs, winning championships, or breaking school records. You know what athletes receive as a bonus? Nothing.

Second is the NCAA. Recently, the NCAA and CBS signed a $10.8 billion television agreement over 14 years. The NCAA is also considered a non-profit company.

Third, the athletic programs. Universities bring in hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars to their athletic programs each year. Through donations, ticket sales, media rights, advertising, and anything else with a price tag, these athletes are symbols for their school and their program. If a school makes a huge scientific achievement, they will be in the newspaper for a few days. The athletic teams, however, are in the newspaper the entire year.

The flip side of this is that not all sports teams are profitable. For example, some less popular teams like swimming, tennis, or volleyball don't earn the university much money, and the bigger sports like basketball and football make up for the lost revenue. So why would we pay athletes if entire teams are struggling to survive?

We would pay athletes because when President Theodore Roosevelt helped create the NCAA in 1906, he had no idea what it would grow into. At first, it was a great place to watch athletes play sports while making sure the rules were being followed. But now in the 21st century, the NCAA is a billion dollar company. Why hasn't anything changed? Because the decision makers have the mentality of, "This is the way it's always been." They're scared to make amendments, even when it's necessary.

I'm not saying we should be paying athletes $5,000 or even $10,000 per semester. If each athlete got $2,000 paid over the course of the semester, this would give them some spending cash and an opportunity to start managing their money. Most athletic programs can't afford to pay athletes on their own, so the NCAA and their executives need to figure out a way to start compensating their golden geese.

Athletes earn their schools hundreds of thousands of dollars, increase enrollment, and if they do well, provide a recruiting piece for generations. Top NCAA executives are getting $1 million per year while an athlete can't earn $50 from signing a few autographs.

Let's open our eyes to what's really going on. The NCAA "prevents student-athletes from allowing their likeness to be used for promotional purposes."

There's only one thing I can say to this: Why?

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tyson-hartnett/college-athletes-should-be-paid_b_4133847.html