

Should College Athletes be Paid?

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For years, proposals to pay college athletes have drawn polarizing responses. Athletes such as [LeBron James](#) and Richard Sherman and politicians such as Senators [Chris Murphy](#) and [Bernie Sanders](#) have expressed their support for allowing students to make money during their college careers. College and athletics administrators have mostly rebuked the idea.

* “College athletes are workers,” says Sanders.

* “College athletics is about college students playing other college students, not employees playing employees,” [Mark Emmert](#), NCAA president tells CBS Sports.

Terren Klein, CEO of College Pulse tells [CNBC Make It](#) in a statement.

“What we found is that the majority of students are in favor of paying student-athletes and give overwhelming support for allowing student-athletes to profit off their name and image.”

The student-focused analytics company asked students about several potential models of compensation for college athletes.

*Thirty-eight percent of students said they favor, and 15% said they strongly favor, allowing universities to pay college athletes a salary, meaning that more than half (53%) of all students polled were in support of compensating college athletes.

*Among athletes, support for such a policy is significantly higher, with 40% of athletes polled strongly in favor and 31% in favor. Support was lowest among white students. An estimated 51% of white students said they favor or strongly favor paying student-athletes a salary, while 52% of Hispanic students, 56% of Asian students and 61% of Black students said they favor or strongly favor paying student-athletes a salary.

*College Pulse also asked students how they thought distributing salaries to student-athletes should work. Sixty percent of those polled said that salaries should be paid to all athletes, and 38% said salaries should only be paid to athletes playing sports that bring in revenue. Women were more likely than men (65% compared to 52%) to support paying all athletes.

When asked whether athletes should be allowed to profit off their likeness, support was even higher. About 77% of all students said they favor or strongly favor that policy and 81% of athletes said the same. An overwhelming 80% of all students and 83% of athletes agreed that athletes should be paid if their image is used for purposes such as selling merchandise.

Here's what paying athletes could mean for college sports

The consequences of paying college athletes directly, or allowing them to make money from their likeness, varies widely according to the proposal. In February, California State Senators Nancy Skinner and Steven Bradford introduced the [Fair Pay to Play Act](#) to the California state legislature, which would allow athletes at California colleges that make more than \$10 million in media rights revenue each year to make money from their likenesses. They would also be allowed to hire an agent or attorney to represent them in business deals, without losing their eligibility to play college sports, similar to Olympic athletes.

Mark Emmert, the president of the NCAA, has argued that if California schools allow college athletes to make money, they would have an unfair advantage over schools in other states and has warned that these schools would be [barred from competing in NCAA championships](#).

As a result, some California schools such as Stanford and the University of Southern California have [opposed the bill](#).

“Allowing student-athletes to receive compensation from their name, image, and likeness, would present serious challenges for higher education institutions and to the collegiate sports model,” wrote Bernard Muir, athletic director at Stanford University in a letter to the California State Senate. “We believe that for any reform to be fair and meaningful to all student-athletes, it needs to occur at the national level and be adopted by the NCAA.”

One proposal: Market demand and market value will vary from athlete to athlete. Zion Williamson, for example, who played for one season at Duke before joining the NBA, is “a unicorn” who only comes along every five basketball seasons at the college level. A starting quarterback, a punter or a role-player on a team would all have different values.

In addition to allowing college athletes to make money off of their likenesses, [Joe Nocera](#), sports business columnist for The New York Times, proposes paying all college athletes minimum salaries of \$25,000, capping coaching salaries — \$650,000 for basketball coaches and \$3 million for football coaches — and giving players 10% of TV and marketing revenues.

Some argue that most college athletics programs [do not have the funds](#) for these kinds of expenses, and [the NCAA reports](#) that just 24 Football Bowl Subdivision schools were profitable in 2014.

The overwhelming majority of colleges and universities in the NCAA across all three divisions subsidize part or all of athletics. The reason they invest is because sports provide educational value to student-athletes while enhancing overall campus life and building life-long connections with alumni and other supporters.

But Nocera argues that his model would save schools money. “Is offering cash compensation really that much worse than the current system, in which universities build lavish facilities and spend absurd sums on their

'programs' to lure good players? Doesn't it make more sense to give some of that money to the players?" he writes. "It would actually be less expensive."

Paying college athletes "would change college sports tremendously," says Jim Cavale, CEO of a software company specializing in athletic social media analysis; but "how it will, economically, impact college sports, we'll find out."

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the implications of paying college athletes?
2. Would the pay for play option further emphasize the disparity between "have and have not" colleges?
3. Should all sports, mens' and womens', be equally affected?
4. What about Division I, II, and III colleges?
5. What about affecting an athlete's amateur status?
6. Would such a policy have a correcting or a deleterious effect on graduation rates?
7. What should be the role of the NCAA?
8. Should athletes be given both pay and scholarships? Could they choose one or the other?
9. Could some hybrid system work, such as allowing athletes to earn money off their images, but not reimbursing them for playing?
10. Do you have other ideas for addressing this problem?