

From the Sidelines



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Everyone gets paid but the players

AS I WRITE THIS NCAA (National Corrupt Athletic Association) executives, the top 15 of which split more than \$6 million in salaries annually while working in a \$35 million building, are probably on vacation but have sent a bumbling investigator to try and discover whether or not Texas A&M quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Johnny “Football” (he’s trademarked it) Manziel was paid a few thousand for signing his own name to some merchandise.

In my opinion the status quo in big-time college football and basketball is not working. I no longer buy the argument against some kind of payment to players that their room and board and tuition and food and education are payment enough. That might have been true 25 years ago but not today; not when the average pay for head coaches at the big schools is more than \$1.5 million a year. Not when television networks, shoe companies, video game makers, and bookies are making billion dollar profits off the labor of, ahem, “student-athletes.”

Please don’t give me the “if we pay football players then we’ll have to pay wrestlers and volleyball players” line. As sportswriter Jason Whitlock put it, “This is America. We pay people who generate revenue. That’s capitalism. Wrestlers and volleyball players don’t generate revenue.”

The NCAA exploits athletes. Until very recently, you could go to their website and buy an Ohio State jersey with the number 5 on it, for example, and the NCAA claimed that was a generic Buckeye jersey, no significance and just a coincidence that it is the number QB1 Braxton Miller currently wears. Hey, you could be a big Chimdi Chekwa fan, right?

But when news surfaced that Miller, Manziel and other notable college players were signing their names on stuff, in possible violation of the NCAA’s (bad) rules, while simultaneously the association was profiting from the same jerseys, even the insanely inconsistent president Mark Emmert was embarrassed, and pulled the merchandise from his site.

The big-time schools aren’t blameless but rather shameless, moving from conference to conference in search of more money, shunting aside all tradition in search of bigger payouts. It’s only a matter of time when the remaining major conferences get even larger and then break away from the NCAA—and when they do they should recognize that today’s football and basketball players are basically full-time employees of their schools and deserve compensation.

Anyone think it’s fair that the athletes’ scholarships are 1-year renewable and an injury can potentially mean no scholarship? Not to mention no worker’s compensation for those injuries. Can you blame these guys for wanting a few bucks to or go on date or fly home to see their parents? The NCAA and the universities are making a lot of money from unpaid labor.

Of course the devil is in the details of setting up programs to pay players, and as Whitlock wrote, “this is America,” so shady side deals would be set up just as they are now despite the NCAA’s 400+ page rulebook. But the time has come to change the system; the noble principles that college presidents include in their statements on “amateurism” aren’t being matched by their actions. ■

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