

Should College Athletes Get Paid?

The NCAA is a money-making organization and COVID-19 will complicate collegiate sports even more

BY KEVIN PARRISH JR.

One of the biggest questions in college sports is whether the Nationally Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) should pay student-athletes, who not only juggle responsibilities of a full-time student academically, but also have to make time for practice, meetings, film sessions and games.

One reason for making such a move is the millions of dollars universities pocket off student-athletes' name, image and likeness, especially elite Division I level student-athletes who could potentially earn tens of thousands annually in revenue—if they were allowed to receive payment. Since the NCAA began in 1906, student-athletes have not been allowed to earn money off their name, image and likeness, according to NCAA.org.

The NCAA is a money-making organization and COVID-19 will complicate things even more, because the NCAA won't generate the same amount of profits they have had for decades. March Madness, the famous three-week Division I college basketball Tournament, was canceled due to the virus which cost the industry nearly \$1 billion dollars in revenue, according to Investopedia.com. It's an ongoing legal fight that could take years to change the system officially; however, that change seems to be in motion.

There are a couple of reasons the NCAA has been hesitant to pay college athletes: It would eliminate the line between amateur and professional sports. It would prioritize athleticism over academics. Equity issues over payment could arise. And Institutions would likely cut back on their other programs—the less popular sports.

"I don't understand why college athletes don't get paid because they bring university value," said Jordan Beslow, a sports management major at Bowie State University. "If a student can be a tutor for his university and get paid, why not an athlete too?"

The most recent example is former University of Duke star Zion Williamson, a player with hype similar to NBA superstar LeBron James, who came out of Saint Vincent Saint Mary's High School in 2002 as the No.1 player in the country.

A lot of people showed more interest in college basketball during the 2018-2019 season than the 2019-20 season because fans were interested in Williamson. Duke saw a massive spike in sold merchandise and the amount of interest in their televised basketball games. According to Michael Smith of sportsbusinessdaily.com, last season, Duke participated in the top three

most-viewed college basketball games on ESPN. Ticket costs for Duke games were an average of nearly \$330, which is the highest-priced resale ticket in college basketball. And even when Duke hit the road for away games, ticket prices were a shocking 200 percent over the average price.

Through social media, Williamson also made a difference for Duke, especially on Instagram. According to Adam Zagoria of Forbes.com: Duke gained 358,000 followers, which exceeds the total all-time following of all other college basketball accounts. They had more followers than all but two NHL teams—Blackhawks and Penguins. More than every MLB team except for five clubs—Yankees, Red Sox, Cubs, Dodgers and Giants. And more followers than 19 of the 32 NFL teams.

Williamson, however, did not receive any of the millions of dollars Duke generated off his star profile and performances, due to the NCAA rule of students-athletes not being allowed to profit off their name, image and likeness. According to Kelsey Trainor of FanSided.com, had the NCAA carried a similar player revenue share percentage as the National Basketball Association (NBA) during the 2018-19 season, Williamson could have had pocketed an estimated \$5 million dollars.

"I think it's ridiculous that he got no cut of the revenue he brought to Duke," said Jeff Siegel, the founder and editor-in-chief of Early Bird Rights. "He was a legal adult who was generating revenue for the university and should be compensated fairly."

The only way to discover the total amount of profit Williamson drove in for Duke, would be relatively easy to come up with, if access to all of Duke's finances for the last ten years was available for public consumption. Short of that, it's nothing that can be accurately stated.

Williamson played one year at Duke before entering the 2019 NBA Draft where the New Orleans Pelicans drafted him with the No. 1 overall pick. They signed him to a four-year contract with a maximum value of \$45 million, according to CNBC.com.

Williamson also signed a seven-year, \$75 million shoe deal with the Jordan Brand, the largest annual shoe deal for a rookie, according to ESPN.com. Then agreed to a seven-figure endorsement contract with Gatorade, according to forbes.com.

The pressure is mounting on the NCAA to allow student-athletes to earn profits off their name, image and likeness—now more than ever before. They have competition from pro leagues, which are now compensating top prospects directly out of high school. Projected lottery picks LaMelo Ball and R.J. Hampton both decided to forgo the college route to play profes-

sionally overseas for one year, where they received full — salaries and preparation for the 2020 NBA draft by playing against experienced professional athletes. With the 2020 NBA Draft months away, both players are currently projected as first-round picks.

Daishen Nix, the nation's No. 1 ranked high school point guard in the country, de-committed from the University of Central Los Angeles and joined the G-League on April 28. The 6-foot-5 inch guard from Fairbanks, Alaska, is expected to receive a deal around \$300,000, according to the New York Daily News. ESPN's 2021 Mock Draft has Nix projected to be selected in the first-round.

Jalen Green, the No.1 high school player in the country from the 2020 class, had offers from nearly every major Division I school from across the country. On April 16, however, he chose to start a new movement and join the G-League—the NBA's pro developmental league, according to ESPN.com. Green is expected to receive a sum payment of \$500,000 and play against experienced professionals, just at a lower level. Before entering the 2021 NBA Draft as a lottery pick. ESPN's 2021 Mock Draft has



Green projected as the No.2 over-all pick.

Isaiah Todd, the No.13 ranked high school player in the class of 2020, de-committed from the University of Michigan on April 17 to explore the pro route of playing in the G-League for a year, according to ESPN.com. The 18-year-old from Baltimore is expected to receive a salary of \$250,000 if he reached all the bonuses that are in his contract. ESPN 2021 Mock Draft also has Todd as a projected first-round pick.

“If the NCAA doesn't start paying athletes, they better prepare to watch more elite high

school prospects go overseas or into avenues like the G-League,” said David Carter, a mass communications student at Bowie State University.

In September 2019, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill that would allow college athletes in the state to earn compensation for the use of their likeness, sign endorsement deals and hire agents to represent them.

The NCAA announced April 29 its intention to start allowing athletes to profit off their name, image, and likeness beginning in 2021-22. They can also receive compensation for third-party endorsements and other areas like social media, personal businesses, and appearances, according to Bleacher Report.

“There are a lot of pros to paying college students,” said Ely Sussman, an associated editor at SB Nation. “Like helping athletes from low-income homes provide for their families and having them perform at their highest level thanks to the resources allowing them to eat and train properly. It will also improve the public image of the NCAA if they are treating athletes fairly instead of exploiting them.”



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