

REDEFINING *AMATEURISM*



Communicating Change: Strategies for the NCAA's Resurgence
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Introduction

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a nonprofit organization that regulates college athletics for over 1000 member institutions in the United States. They were founded in 1906 and have served millions of athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders. There has undoubtedly never been a more challenging time for the NCAA than the current state of college athletics. They've lost hundreds of millions of dollars in legal fees, losing several battles in court that relate to 'amateurism' regulations. The ramifications of these results have been substantial and have created a strong need for strategic communication. The NCAA and President Charlie Baker would benefit from guidance that will help them navigate the unpredictable future of college athletics. A strategic communication plan can help plot the next series of decisions and create a template for future improvement. The NCAA needs to better communicate their importance to their member institutions and rebuild their image to be viewed more positively by stakeholders.



Communication Goals

➔ Support

Encourage positive messaging and importance of utilizing available resources

➔ Collaborate

Collaborate with stakeholders and work towards a common goal

➔ Educate

Dismiss the 'hands off' approach and focus on educating schools and students based on previous experiences

Executive Summary

➔ Public vs.
Private

➔ Stakeholders

➔ Protecting
Amateurism
(USOPC Model)

➔ Next Steps

The definition of amateur has been challenged many times in history. It is characterized by nostalgia, effectively rendering it as an idealistic term. Licensed attorney Virginia A. Fitt explains in the Duke Law Journal that amateur regulations have prohibited athletes from being inherently human throughout history. Their rights have been limited and there has been little to no negotiation between student-athletes and the NCAA. Striking a balance likely requires the partnership of government-run organizations and some adoption of public organization principles.



Public vs. Private

Public organizations are owned and operated by the government with the goal of serving the public in a lawful and mutually beneficial way. They are funded by taxpayer funds and generally fulfill needs of the majority of people under its jurisdiction. Private organizations are non-governmental that prioritize profit. They are funded by private investors and are incentivized to operate in capitalistic ways.

The NCAA is a private non-profit governing body. President of the NCAA Charlie Baker explained the importance of clearing debt and becoming financially stable in his 'State of College Sports Address.' Efficiency and financial stability have been major obstacles in college athletics. Maintaining core values is increasingly difficult when considering budget restrictions and being financially responsible.



Public vs. Private

Private organizations have succeeded in sports due to their structure and ability to set their own rules. While not operating under government control, the NCAA is heavily influenced by federal laws and regulations that force them to comply with antitrust laws. This has shifted the landscape of college athletics with major court rulings offering student-athletes rights to name, image and likeness (NIL) money, transfer portal freedom, and revenue sharing. NIL money is designed to allow athletes to earn money by marketing themselves, while revenue sharing refers to the student-athlete earning a portion of the revenue earned by the institution. Transfer portal rules have changed to allow student-athletes to change schools annually with no restrictions. All three changes have caused the NCAA to be under scrutiny for failures to adjust their regulations, but few understand their limitations as a private non-profit organization.



Public vs. Private

Michael A. Murray writes about American philosopher John Dewey's work surrounding the consequences of public and private organizations. He explains that Dewey believed that the key difference between the public and private organizations is who they are accountable to. Murray writes that there was a shift during the 20th century where private organizations were becoming publicly scrutinized in similar ways that government-affiliated organizations had been for centuries. The rise of the internet in the 21st century has given the public a voice, increasing that truth. The lack of continuity between the NCAA and U.S. Congress creates confusion and distrust with stakeholders. A shared vision between student-athletes, NCAA leadership and U.S. Congress can only be made possible by allowing for collaboration. It can be made possible by following the framework laid out by the United States Olympics & Paralympics Committee.



Protecting Amateurism - The U.S. Olympics & Paralympics Committee Model

While the NCAA may never become an entirely public organization, allowing for government control could lessen their challenges. Effectively communicating that control and providing transparency involving collaboration with student athletes and Congress could improve their chances of protecting some amateur beliefs.

The United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) has faced disputes eerily similar to the NCAA for over 100 years. Their battle for maintaining amateurism and operating with the intention of what's best for the athletes show parallels with the NCAA. The two organizations are connected, as roughly 80% of U.S. Olympic athletes competed in college athletics. Some athletes compete in the Olympics while still being enrolled in a university.



Protecting Amateurism - The U.S. Olympics & Paralympics Committee Model

The USOPC has partnered with independent, government-backed organizations to help regulate and operate in the best way for all parties involved. This ensures the delicate balance of amateurism and athlete rights protection. They have not entirely become a public organization, but they have built a hybrid model that adopts some of the important principles. Technically speaking, the USOPC is a federal charter which was established in 1978. The U.S. government recognizes and empowers them as a National Governing Body. Providing the government with more power and transparency makes it easier to have control over regulations and reformations.

Working closely with the government is not necessarily a seamless, quick change. The USOPC has engaged in discussions with U.S. politicians for a century, when there existed differing opinions about participation in the Berlin Olympics. Communicating differences can shift the narrative on government influence and invite reformation.



Protecting Amateurism - The U.S. Olympics & Paralympics Committee Model

According to a research note from Olympic historian John A. Lucas, that time period was a low point for the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and amateur athletics as a whole. It detailed the intersection of politics and sports, as the committees voted to participate in the Berlin Olympics despite Nazi interference, an eye-opening result that changed public perception forever. It served as a point in time in which the concern of stakeholders became apparent.

Many of the current core values of the USOPC align with the NCAA, but one in particular stands out. “Recognizing the expertise of our member organizations, especially NGBs, we respect their vital role and pledge our support to their success,” reads the core principles on the USOPC official website. National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are often associated with international committees, which the NCAA does not have. This makes it difficult for the NCAA to be held accountable. As a result, the USOPC looks to higher governing bodies for assistance and leans on their support. The NCAA should look at the U.S. government in a similar way, as they obtain more power and can easily influence regulations.



Stakeholders

From 2020-2023, support for collegiate athletes to make money has risen drastically. According to a survey done by the Harris Poll, 74% of adults at least somewhat agree that student-athletes should be able to profit from NIL, which was up from 62% in 2020. 67% of adults in the survey believe the schools should pay students directly. Stakeholders are aware and concerned of the seismic shift that name, image and likeness regulations have had on college athletics which means that properly managing those stakeholders has never been more crucial.



Stakeholders

Primary

- Student-Athletes
 - Understanding the needs and desires of student-athletes is important but tricky. With over 500,000 competing on an annual basis, no two are the same
- Member Institutions
 - The NCAA has consistently pinned student-athlete management on its member institutions but has an opportunity to provide more value to them. Charlie Baker has put an emphasis on the schools' responsibility, but there is also a responsibility for the NCAA to assist in the decision-making.
- NCAA Leadership Committees
 - With increased efficiency under Charlie Baker, committees have been restructured to be smaller and less involved in rule changing. That makes the communication with them more important.
- Players' Associations and Advocacy Groups
 - These groups represent the student-athletes and working closely with them can improve collaboration with student-athletes
- Media Partners
 - The broadcast deals are worth billions of dollars, providing the networks with power and influence over some major decisions.



Stakeholders

Secondary

- U.S. Government
 - There are laws that have been implemented in recent years contributing to the necessity of improved communication. The court decisions indirectly affect the regulations and the rights of the student-athlete
- Alumni and Fans
 - They have the power to contribute financially and morally to the member institutions and college sports as a whole. Properly educating the groups responsible for the growth of the sport will have a strong impact on public perception. They should be managed closely.



Next Steps

Ultimately, the NCAA needs to effectively communicate with all of its stakeholders. Working with student-athletes will strengthen their lobbying efforts in encouraging Congress to do what's best for college sports. They have the power to increase regulations and provide structure for all NCAA member institutions. While it is unlikely for the NCAA to become a federal charter like the USOPC, there are ways to influence U.S. Congress to implement proper changes that protect some of the amateur beliefs in the process.

With a strategic communication plan, these changes can be made. Rebuilding public trust and proper regulation can be done by focusing on strategies that emphasize government partnership. Working with stakeholders instead of against them is easier said than done, but never impossible.



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What is Amateurism?

➔ Idealistic

It is believed that as sports evolved from their Olympic roots in Greece, the growing interest created opportunity for rewards. It lost the high idealism, as athletes were seeking financial gain for their efforts. Their motives were questioned and idealistic regulations were set in place to prevent those desires.

➔ Built on Nostalgia

➔ Focused on Motives

➔ Ancient

What is Amateurism?

➔ Built on Nostalgia

It's no surprise that fans are developed in their childhood, watching their favorite players compete at the highest levels. As we age, the underlying realities and motives of these athletes and organizations are realized and there is a strong desire to return to innocence. The nostalgic effect of remembering what sports were like previously contributes to an emotional belief in amateurism. Playing for the love of the game ceases to exist when we are made aware of the human nature of athletes. Nostalgia can impact our beliefs in a powerful way.

➔ Focused on Motives

➔ Ancient

➔ Idealistic

What is Amateurism?

➔ Focused on Motives

Amateurism has historically been defined by motives or lack thereof. It has been defined by the NCAA that amateurs should participate for solely for the love of the game. It weaponizes the idea that other motives are destructive and selfish. Instead, recognizing the human nature of having multiple motives behind decisions will allow for the focus on student-athletes as people preparing to be professionals instead.

➔ Ancient

➔ Idealistic

➔ Built on Nostalgia

What is Amateurism?

➔ Ancient

The parameters for what amateurs should be were established over a century ago in England, where they established laws against amateurs earning compensation. Communicating the existence of resources and support in collegiate athletics will contribute to collaborating with student-athletes instead of contesting them.

➔ Idealistic

➔ Built on Nostalgia

➔ Focused on Motives

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SWOT Analysis

S

Strengths

- Infrastructure and resources to regulate
 - Brand recognition
 - History and Continuity
-

W

Weaknesses

- Villainous reputation
 - Lack of power in litigation
-

O

Opportunities

- Establish new era of college athletics
 - Re-establish parameters of amateurism
-

T

Threats

- New privatized league
- Student-Athletes as employees

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Infrastructure and resources to regulate
 - With a centralized governing body, the NCAA can provide value that a new organization wouldn't be able to mimic immediately.
- Brand recognition
 - They are well-known and have established trust with certain stakeholders for over 100 years. While inconsistent, the NCAA brand has a strong foundation that threats cannot replicate.
- History and Continuity
 - School administrators are not fond of change, so the NCAA has the ability to lean into their history and structure.

Weaknesses

- Villainous reputation
 - There have been times in history where the NCAA is perceived as the 'bad guy'. Reframing that perception will be challenging, but not impossible.
- Lack of power in litigation
 - In recent years, the NCAA has faced insurmountable court cases that have shifted the college landscape. Working on stronger negotiation tactics can improve collaboration, effectively increasing litigation power.

SWOT Analysis

Opportunities

- Establish a new era of college athletics
 - The NCAA can shift their perception to be more positive if they focus on building the future of college athletics. Recognizing that it will never be the same is the first step to taking advantage of the opportunity that lies ahead.
- Re-establish parameters of amateurism
 - The definition of an amateur has never been debated more, allowing the possibility to change the language and redefine what it means to be an amateur.

Threats

- New privatized league
 - Private investors have worked on plans to establish leagues that would take over college football and/or basketball. Working with stakeholders to focus on the value that the NCAA brings will contribute to combating this threat.
- Student-Athletes as employees
 - Labor laws will take more effect if student-athletes become employees, taking away some of their rights as students and strongly impacting the athletes who are not earning a substantial income. Emphasizing the importance of student-athletes in non revenue sports will help mitigate the desire of becoming employees.

Media Monitor

Effective communication strategies should be backed by constant media monitoring. How stakeholders react and engage can change instantly, so keeping a keen eye on the external media is important. The media scan will roughly capture the 2024-2025 college year (September 1, 2024 – April 1, 2025). It is over three years after the introduction of NIL, five months after the unlimited transfer rule, and before revenue sharing is expected to begin taking place (July 2025).



Media Source #1

3/17/2025

Link: https://www.espn.com/college-sports/story/_/id/44294511/ncaa-let-athletes-negotiate-nil-deals-enrollment

Description: This article on ESPN is prefaced with a video describing the value of NIL in the growth of women's sports. It describes the history and increased profit to female athletes, encouraging them to take advantage of their platform. The article is titled NCAA to let athletes negotiate NIL deals before enrollment and serves as a general news release reporting a major rule change made by the NCAA. The reporter, Dan Murphy, gives context on the inherent recruiting challenge that the rule placed on schools and explains how schools lobbied for this change. Prospective student-athletes were granted the ability to negotiate NIL contracts before enrolling, providing a sense of security in their decision.



Media Source #1

3/17/2025

Analysis: This article explains a microcosm of the NCAA amateur rules' deconstruction. The introduction of NIL has transformed the rights of the athletes, and the institutions are leaning on those changes to better serve themselves. The NCAA can use this rule change as an example of how they are cooperating with student-athletes. The sources quoted include Tennessee attorney general Jonathan Skrmetti and an unnamed NCAA spokesperson. Skrmetti explained the benefit to student-athletes and says that kids should be able to prosper like how everyone else in college athletics has. He added, "I'm glad to see the NCAA give up on defending a world that no longer exists."

The NCAA spokesperson talked about the progress that has been made over the past few years in allowing all athletes, regardless of timeframe, to seek NIL benefits. It was well handled by the NCAA and is an example of how they can effectively communicate the positive benefits of these types of settlements. Doing so is a valuable piece to the puzzle of better communicating their goals and achievements as an organization.



Media Source #2

10/30/2024

Link: <https://apnews.com/article/college-basketball-ap-top-25-ecfecf898c7c91150e90c2851de8b7f0>

Description: This article was written at the beginning of the most recent college basketball season. It was also during the college football season, in which NIL was a major topic of discussion, but it's effects on basketball and other sports had not been publicized to the same degree as football. The article highlights the struggles and stress it has created for basketball coaches, reshaping the recruiting landscape and effectively changing their jobs.



Media Source #2

10/30/2024

Analysis: The author, Dave Skretta, includes quotes from both players and coaches, who've been around to experience recruiting before and after NIL was a factor. It's caused coaches to retire earlier than expected and players to remain in college longer before declaring for the pros. This should be a critical communication focus that will help gain the trust of coaches and players.

Skretta writes about the lack of rules and frames the article in a way to explain the uncertainty in college athletics. Speaking directly to that uncertainty can strongly benefit the message of collaboration and partnership amongst players and coaches. There is a negative tone embedded in some of the paragraphs that use the terms 'stressful', 'free agency', and 'quit'. Using positive phrases in communication messages like 'new opportunity' and 'freedom' can sway the negativity surrounding these changes.



Media Source #3

10/21/2024

Link:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/interactive/2024/nil-money-deals-college-sports-athlete-pay/>

Description: This is another article from the fall of 2024, when NIL transparency and clarity were coming to a head. This article uses public records and privately received documents to provide some details on specific NIL contracts. The numbers range from \$10 to \$1.2 million, making up a total of \$125 million in the documents that were gathered.



Media Source #3

10/21/2024

Analysis: An article such as this serves to give information to fans who are curious about the financial details in college sports. In professional sports, fans are granted disclosed details of every contract and transaction. Transparency in sports media is as high as it's ever been, with increasing media coverage and the speed at which information travels.

Fans and people in the industry (coaches, athletic directors, companies) are showing interest in these numbers, as they are critical to developing future strategies. The word 'secrecy' appears in this article, which sums up the theme.

There are plenty of unknowns that should be considered in all communications efforts. Informing some stakeholders while maintaining the privacy of other stakeholders requires a delicate balance.

The article references athletic directors believing that many NIL deals are not reported. The NCAA needs to prioritize complying with state and federal laws by working with student-athletes and athletics compliance department. That will create stronger relationships and ensure trust with stakeholders.



Social Media Audit

Scan: March 15th, 2025 – April 15th, 2025

➔ Instagram

@ncaa



501k Followers

- 9,717 posts
- Several posts a day, rarely post without collaborating with other accounts
- Heavy emphasis on highlighting ALL sports

➔ Facebook

NCAA



363k Followers

- 334k likes
- Similar content as Instagram, but far fewer engagements
- Little to no comments on posts

➔ X

@ncaa



1.9M Followers

- Most posts are reposts from sport specific NCAA accounts
- Repurposed content from Instagram
- Low viewership relative to follower count

➔ TikTok

@ncaa



66.3k Followers

- Biggest opportunity for growth
- Low engagement on majority of posts, but some viral content

Social Media Audit

Scan: March 15th, 2025 – April 15th, 2025

Recommendations

The best opportunity for growth is on TikTok and X, platforms in which the NCAA has struggled. On X, the 1.9 million followers represents the demand for college athletics content. Social media provides the opportunity for organizations like the NCAA to get out in front of new stories, communicating accurate and trustworthy information. Otherwise, they risk rumors and false information spreading. X is the leading platform in written content, providing access for press releases and website content to be promoted and showcased.

On TikTok, it's much trickier. Repurposing Instagram content can be impactful in that it adds consistent, quality content. Despite that, TikTok has garnered the largest share of attention in the social media industry, making it a necessary entity. One of the strongest tools on TikTok is their resharing option. While X seems to be the platform that they prefer to repost, TikTok is the platform in which quality content is more prevalent. Identifying and resharing quality, accurate content by creators will undoubtedly boost the credibility of circulating information.

Ensuring that stakeholders are valued while sharing accurate information are the keys to how the organization's social media can improve drastically which ultimately provides clarity and trustworthy messaging.

REDEFINING AMATEURISM



BY: JOEY RIZZI

OPPORTUNITY

The NCAA has a tremendous opportunity to prove their value through improved strategic communication that focuses on collaboration and delegation.



WHAT THE NCAA IS

- **A nonprofit governing body**
- **Regulates over 1000 member institutions**
- **Founded in 1906**

WHAT THE NCAA IS NOT

- **An employer of student-athletes**
- **Not responsible for individual school decisions**
- **A public organization**



AGENDA



**What is
amateurism?**



Fans



**Member
Institutions**

WHAT IS AN AMATEUR?

- 1. one who engages in a pursuit, study, science, or sport as a pastime rather than as a profession**
- 2. one lacking in experience and competence in an art or science**

- Idealistic**
- Built on nostalgia**
- Human Nature - Multiple Motives**



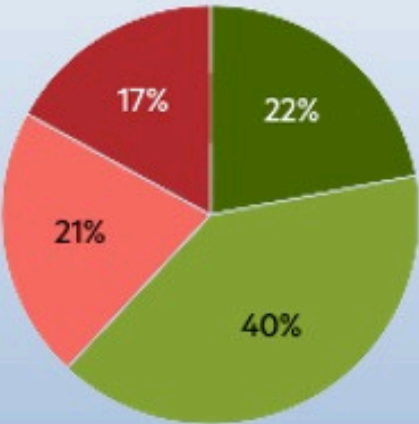
FANS AS STAKEHOLDERS

- **Aligned with student-athletes, loyal to institutions**
- **Need to be educated on responsibility of institutions**
- **Managed by communicating the NCAA's partnership with athletes, echoing sentiments of playing for the same team**

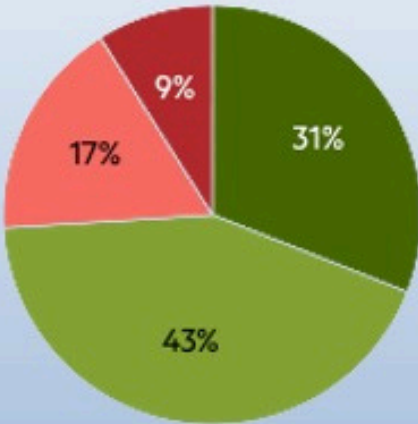


Support for College Athletes Being Able to Profit From NIL Has Increased

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



November 2020



August 2023

Surveys were conducted online within the U.S. by The Harris Poll among a nationally representative sample of more than 2,000 U.S. adults.

Chart: Lev Akabas • Source: Sportico / Harris Poll



400



40 MILLION PEOPLE



**THE PRESIDENT'S
MESSAGE TO SCHOOLS**

13
million fans in
their database

1000+
member
institutions



NCAA passes series of rules that sets table for schools to pay players directly

- **lacking in experience and competence**
- **‘Education’ and ‘Teaching’**
- **‘Support’**
- **‘Opportunity’**

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of several modern skyscrapers with glass facades, creating a sense of height and urban density. The image is in a cool blue color palette.

RECAP

01

What is Amateurism?

- **Preparing to be professional**
- **Lacking experience**

02

Fans

- **Engaged and educated**
- **Lobby with schools**

03

Member Institutions

- **Holding them responsible**
- **Focus on collaboration and opportunity**

**THANK YOU,
QUESTIONS?**

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Conclusion

In Conclusion, at the heart of every major decision that has impacted college athletics are the laws and regulations surrounding 'amateurism'. While reshaping the college sports landscape is not something that can happen overnight, redefining amateurism is an excellent place to start.

Reworking the framework and parameters can be done through strategic communication, understanding perception and carefully managing stakeholders in ways that will encourage support, collaboration, and education.



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