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Term Paper

In all of sports, there is no bigger responsibility than being the quarterback of a football team. Not a pitcher in baseball, not a point guard in basketball, not a captain of a hockey team come close to controlling the pace and outcome of a game the way that a quarterback in football does. While other sports feature positions with equal or greater physical impact on a game, the quarterback is unique because they dictate the entire strategy and ecosystem of a franchise. While golfers, fighters, and tennis players act alone, there aren't 103 players (the roster cap for a FBS team) depending on each and every decision you make. Therefore, when a division one college football team is recruiting this franchise player, it is clear that a full ride scholarship would be the bare minimum in regards to fair compensation. The economic worth of said compensation lands between 35 to 60 thousand dollars a year depending on the institution's tuition. At the next level, (NFL) a rookie quarterback is guaranteed to annually generate several millions of dollars, with first round picks signing deals worth 10 to 15 million dollars in their very first season. This contrast is steep. From 1906 to **2021**, the NCAA revoked player eligibility, vacated team wins and championships, and issued severe institutional sanctions when players were found guilty of profiting off their **name, image, and likeness.** Throughout this paper I will prove that independent endorsement income provides a useful step towards fair financial autonomy. Universities should ultimately provide direct compensation to all college athletes to fairly reward massive revenue generation and offset severe physical injuries, as well as mental health assurance.

Defining sport is certainly ambiguous. Depending on one's perspective or situation, the definition of sport must remain fluid in order to accurately represent what sport is/does in whatever context it is regarded. In John W. Loy, Jr.'s article *"The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort."* Loy argues that sport cannot be defined solely by the physical game happening on the field. Instead, he breaks sport down into an expanding hierarchy of sociological layers. Within this framework, **television ratings** serve as a primary metric to understand how a sport transforms from a mere game into a massive cultural and economic force. Through the lens of sport as a social institution and sport as a form of social involvement, the inherent point of sport remains within its entertainment value. The popularity of the NFL has allowed them to generate billions of dollars a year in television contracts alone. According to Kurt Badenhausen in his article, "*NFL National Revenue Totals,"* he reports that "The NFL generated an estimated **$8.1 billion** from national TV and media rights contracts during the 2021 season." This figure represents roughly 47% of the league's total annual revenue of $17.2 billion and made up the absolute biggest portion of the $11.1 billion shared national revenue distributed across the 32 NFL teams. In contrast, according to the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database, "FBS schools and their respective conferences collectively generated an estimated **$2 billion to $2.5** billion exclusively from TV and media rights during the 2021 financial year." While this figure is roughly 25% of the revenue generated by the NFL, you must consider the fact that the primary function of FBS institutions is education, and not sports entertainment yet they are collectively generating billions of dollars and they reinvest this money throughout the university and not just back into the football teams. This clearly shows that the landscape of college football is morally corrupt as the economic incentive to put together a quality football team outweighs the incentive to promote educational programs.

To bring this concept back to home, the average salary of a CU professor is $165,206 per year, meanwhile Dieon Sander (CU's Football coach) signed a five-year, 54 million dollar contract extension running through the 2029 season. This raises the question of what is the true quintessential purpose of these institutions? Education or entertainment? I think we all know what the answer should be, while it's impossible to deny what's actually happening. With million dollar coaching contracts, and billions of dollars in tv contracts, it is clear that the athletes on the field are missing out on some serious financial gains, and their NIL has been grossly taken advantage of since the birth of the NCAA in 1906. Only until 2021 did the NCAA put in place NIL rules reluctantly allowing the landscape to begin to shift, but it would be ignorant to think this simply solves the ethical dilemma of paying college athletes. I believe this revenue exponentially increases year by year, and NIL is essentially acting as a tax write off for the NCAA as it stands today in 2026. Consider a senior female Soccer player at CU, and think about the disparity between financial opportunities that were available to Travis Hunter. Both of these athletes are required to dedicate an equal amount of time and energy into their work, yet the compensation disparity is comically depressing. The system is broken. In Jane English's article *"Sex Equality in Sports,"* she separates the basic benefits of sports, like recreation, from scarce benefits, like fame and fortune. English argues that major social groups must have an equal chance of attaining these scarce rewards in order to be considered morally justified. When women are excluded from elite financial and social recognition, their collective self respect is compromised. Therefore, athletic justice requires an equitable distribution of status and reward.

While I contended that Shedur Sanders NIL is more valuable to the university than practically every athletic program combined, (other than basketball) I will argue that those athletes are morally deserving of a piece of the pie regardless, rather than remaining as an after

thought despite their lack in revenue pull. Every student athlete is a walking advertisement for the university. According to Vicki Schull and Lisa A. Kihl in their article, "*Good Intercollegiate Athlete Representation,"* The research outlines exactly how democratic, positive athlete representation shifts the culture and improves outcomes. Through democratic representation virtues, fostering core student values, and systemic educational support, the paper concludes that a multi-level governance system supporting this representation fulfills an **educative function** that enhances the overall development and integration of student-athletes into the broader campus community.

I suggest that any individual athlete has the right to profit off of their own endorsements and should keep all those profits to themselves, but there needs to be more compensation for those who aren't necessarily in the spotlight. For this reason I believe that student athletes deserve to be compensated and treated essentially as employees of the university rather than a tool to be used where individuals walk away from their experience with more opportunities other than coaching their respected sport. While I don't believe the average student should earn anywhere near the salary of the average professor, I do contend that there is a moral right to justify an athlete's choice to pursue their athletic career more than what an athletic scholarship can offer. Using my personal experience as an example, every year that I participated in college baseball at the division one level, players from the team were asked to help work recruitment camps for the team. I would sit on a stool and write down stats of high school athletes and talk about incoming players with coaches. Meanwhile, I never got paid a penny. In fact, I was paying the university to be there as I wasn't on a full ride scholarship. In the moment, when I was sweating profusely, It definitely felt like this environment was taking advantage of my time, knowledge, and skill set.

In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, John Rawls argues for fair equal opportunity, stating that “social and economic inequalities must be attached to offices and positions open to all, under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.” I suggest that state laws should mandate universities to develop marketing staff dedicated to finding every athlete NIL opportunities, as well as financially compensating every athlete in some regard depending on their level of NIL worth. This figure could be less than the state wide minimum wage, as the ceiling for endorsements is now non-existent, but without some degree of compensation these athletes are being taken advantage of. My day to day lifestyle as a collegiate athlete consisted of a 5am workout, a 9am and 12pm class, followed by a 2pm-5pm practice, every single day. Keep in mind, my family was paying money and receiving nothing for this sacrifice.

According to the NCAA's official recruiting facts sheet, “fewer than 2% of all NCAA Student-Athletes go on to play professionally in their sport.” That means 98% of athletes commit their livelihood to a craft just to have to pivot their career and find a new dream directly after their career ends. This creates an immense mental health concern for these individuals, let alone the physical deterioration of an athlete's body. Comprehensive research published in the Journal of ISAKOS states; “Physical and mental health scores worsen over division I collegiate sports season and decline further following mid-season injury or illness.” The article documents both the psychological distress and physical health degradation experienced by college athletes.

In the article “*CNBC’s Official College Sports Valuations 2025: Top 75 athletic programs,”* written by Michael Ozanian, they found that the financial size of an average Division 1 athletic department generates an average annual operating revenue of roughly $120 million for Power 4 conference schools (SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, ACC) and about $16.8 million

for Group 5 schools, (AAC, C-USA, MAC, MWC, Sun Belt) while top-tier athletic programs are valued between $190 million to $1.5 billion for the University of Texas at Austin.

All that revenue, all that investment, and all that pressure is largely in the hands of one 19 to 22 year old kid playing the position of quarterback. For over a hundred years the NCAA would strip away that kid's success, diminish his personal value, and siphon off his financial future all because he sold a shoelace. NIL may be a step in the right direction, but it is undoubtedly a pathetic excuse rewarding only the top 1-2% of participants. A concept that would make Karl Marx roll in his grave. With these contentions in mind, and considering the reluctance of the NCAA to uphold an ounce of ethical responsibility, there may only be one last thing to do:

"Readyyyyyy, set, hut hut HIKE!"

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