

Susie Seidel

English 4

Borgsmiller

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PROMPT: You will select a recent text (an article, social media post, video, etc.) that takes a stand on a current issue. You will engage in a written conversation (response) with the author to attempt to persuade them to change their perspective.

REFUTED ARTICLE:

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/jan/09/its-time-to-pay-the-tab-for-americas-college-athletes>

College Picks up the Tab

A ten year old boy dressed in rags, suffering in a third world country, is pushed into a boxing ring. He fights through sweat and blood, surrounded by screaming adults who are profiting off of the outcome. These are essentially the same circumstances of a Division I athlete, dressed head to toe in high end athletic wear, center court in a state of the art facility, who later celebrates a victory with his teammates over prime rib the school provided. Kareem Abdul-Jabaar attempts to connect these two scenarios by comparing youth sports to child abuse in order to criticize culture today for expecting college athletes to perform for society and organizational benefit without just compensation. However, this dramatized comparison clearly lacks truth in regards to the current provisions and opportunities college athletics provide for students and athletes. While Abdul-Jabbar argues in the article “It’s time to pay the tab for America’s college athletes” that athletes should be paid because payment for their performance is only equitable, college athletes should not be paid as true equity is unachievable and therefore prioritizes athletics over average students and athletes themselves.

Abdul-Jabaar writes in regard to his college career, playing for the University of California- Los Angeles from 1966-1969. He foremost claims for an athlete not coming from a well off family, it was difficult to adequately provide oneself with the necessary fuel and resources to perform well, which put upon him an unfair burden. However, as times changed this is no longer the norm, and athletes are well off without a paycheck. Abdul-Jabaar recalls “holing up in the dorms at night” not being able to “afford to go out”, and found it frustrating he was able to “win championship after championship each year, hear thousands chant” his name and return home to “count change so [he] could buy a burger” (Abdul-Jabaar). Life for a black athletic pioneer in the 1960s would be undoubtedly difficult, however, for athletes in 2019, the daily amenities received are quite different, which makes payment in order to obtain basic necessities unnecessary. Since 2014, universities have been allowed to provide food beyond student’s scholarship grants to meet their nutritional needs (Allen). At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, student athletes have access to a dining hall below their stadium, with meals throughout the duration of the day from eggs and potatoes to crab legs, or “refueling-stations” located in the weight room or locker rooms. As such resources and accessibility are emulated at schools across the country, the ability of athletes to afford basic living standards are no longer inconsistent, but guaranteed by colleges to ensure quality performance. Paying athletes to achieve this is therefore pointless, and even more so, the resources they are provided would be considered just, only not monetary compensation which is even more so fair- or even seen as unfair to struggling, Ramen-eating college students who do not play a sport. The definition of fair is then relative, but for athletes, while those in the past athletes faced unethical

disadvantages, rules and precedents currently in place to benefit athletes prevent that from occurring today.

Abdul-Jabaar furthermore argues that the NCAA generates millions of dollars in revenue, which entices many to believe that athletes should receive a fair cut. What is not considered though is that much of the profit is reinvested into colleges in order to directly and morally benefit students as well as athletes. Abdul-Jabaar criticizes that while “the NCAA earns \$900m dollars [yearly], the players banging it out on the courts earned zip” (Abdul-Jabaar). The fact that its annual revenue seems to be outlandishly high is a legitimate cause for question, as the NCAA is frequently condemned for being overbearing and corrupt. Furthermore, it is in fact NCAA athletes who are earning these millions of dollars for the program, whether it’s by simple viewership, merchandising, advertisements or campaigning. Despite the seeming profitability of colleges benefitting from the NCAA, it is noted by Cody Mcdavis of the New York Times that only about 24 colleges in the NCAA are profitable. These colleges’ revenues are commonly put back into athletic programs (Mcdavis). Such investments include improved athletic resources and facilities, as well as recreation centers. According to a study conducted by Ohio University, Purdue’s \$98 million dollar renovation of a fifty year old recreational facility promoted use by students who then averaged a .2 higher GPA than students who did not use it (“Benefits of Expanding College Athletic Facilities”). As for the benefits of athletes themselves, improvements within the University of Wisconsin- Madison nutrition program to properly fuel athletes totaled \$1,232,404 (Myerberg). The profits generated by colleges are not simply going into the pockets of coaches or the NCAA, but into school facilities and programs to benefit an average student as well as a star athlete, which improves the overall well-being of student life on

campus regarding grades and personal health accessibility. Therefore, the reinvestment in to the campus and student body is more beneficial than paying an athlete to buy a meal they can receive for free when considering their school's hundred thousand dollar "refueling station".

Proponents of paying college athletes such as Abdul-Jabaar argue that such reinvestment into athletic programs should instead fund stipends for athletes. While this could be considered a compromising solution, doing so has been attempted and found universities who instead put profits toward stipends for athletes struggled to keep up with the expense, which means schools struggle to aid athletes let alone all students. When North Dakota State announced a stipend to athletes in 16 sports totaling to a \$600,000 dollar expense, its rival school, the University of North Dakota implemented a similar addition, but eventually had to cut five teams over the next two years to pay for the added expense (Mcdavis). It is thus unfair for average students to have the needs of athletes prioritized over their own, and unfair for tennis, softball or other players of less profitable programs to sacrifice their sport in order to keep up with the paycheck stubs of another. While on the surface it seems equitable for the NCAA to pay athletes a portion of their high revenue, doing so is inequitable for non-athletes or athletes of lesser programs and negatively impacts their educational experience and opportunities.

Paying athletes furthermore prioritizes athletics over education, which jeopardizes the vitality of education for athletes from weak educational backgrounds, who are disproportionately black, and insufficient in preparing them for the future. A study in Political Research Quarterly referred to by Abdul-Jabaar concluded that "negative racial views about blacks was the single strongest predictor of white opposition to paying athletes" which is deemed relevant as "a large percentage of players at Division I schools are black", making it so that the issue of paying

college athletes greater impacts black athletes (Abdul-Jabaar). As a white, middle class female not planning to play college athletics I can not adequately provide an opinion on this matter. However, what remains of this racial gap is part of a bigger issue regarding education, as “the athletes in major football and men’s basketball programs are disproportionately black” and of these athletes, many are from “poor and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds”. These students enter college so unprepared that “academic failure seems inevitable,” and are then steered by coaches in to empty, surface level classes, or are supplied materials equivalent to cheating (Yankah). While payment is likely seen as fair by athletes, what is not considered is the long term inequity of lacking education. Student athletes are first are foremost students, and paying athletes distorts the priorities of ones college experience, and makes it so that athletes are viewed as students who can’t do anything more than play a sport, which perpetuates the current status quo for athletes, and is only exacerbated by payment. The opportunities a student could be exposed to in college such as pursuing a major, studying and attending class will never be pursued and growth beyond the capability of making a basket or throwing a pass will be unachievable when their priorities are only in regard to payment. For every athlete, there comes a day when they will no longer be able to profit solely off performance of their game, and without a legitimate education to fall back on, they are simply set up to fail. By the time this plays out though, the college would have already gained from that athlete’s abilities. This failure to recognize sports as an education sets an example that is unethical for athletes to mimic as they make decisions for their futures, which unfortunately can not be a life time on a college basketball court.

It is a moral attitude held by Abdul-Jabaar and proponents of paying college athletes to prioritize justice for students who may struggle to find a voice amidst their age and circumstances. However, such young men and women are not abused children forced to play a game while those profiting sit back and watch. These athletes are provided resources to ensure quality performance by food and facilities, and are furthermore provided a chance to obtain a college education while pursuing what they love, all the while benefiting average students on campus. Payment on top of this is unnecessary, and only distorts the integrity of college sports.

Works Cited

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