# The Impact of Paying Basketball Student-Athletes on the NCAA Brand

To what extent does restricting college basketball players to receive payment impact the brand image of the National Collegiate Athletic Association?

Business and Management

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### Introduction

To what extent does restricting college basketball players to receive payment impact the brand image of the National Collegiate Athletic Association?

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a nonprofit organization that enforces guidelines that regulate athletic programs across universities in the United States. Currently the NCAA does not permit athletes to accept payments as a return for marketing or branding themselves. Additionally, they do not allow colleges to offer monetary incentives during the recruiting process or during their time playing for the college such as additional payment based on performance. However, controversy persists as some college athletes do not feel they are fairly compensated for their contribution to the school's financial well-being. This controversy holds a great amount of importance as it discusses the different perceptions of employee exploitation and where the line needs to be drawn.

College sports, specifically Division I Men's Basketball, act as the main revenue stream for most of the academic institutions in the U.S (football gains more revenue for colleges when not in the tournament stage, however, the Men's Basketball tournament is the largest revenue stream for the NCAA), however, the programs cannot function without the athletes. The NCAA attracts these athletes by offering them free tuition, which is argued as not enough compensation for the athletes. Some athletes believe they are compensated through viewing college as an easier way to get scouted by professional organizations rather than taking part in an outside organization where getting noticed will be more difficult. Others believe they are not able to utilize the free tuition as they are constantly training to perform well. The NCAA Division I basketball championship is the largest revenue grossing event as it contributes to about 82% of the NCAA's annual income, making basketball the largest revenue stream for the NCAA. This demonstrates why basketball is

the focus for this controversy. Viewers find this basketball tournament entertaining because it portrays fierce competition between highly recruited amateur athletes. The NCAA must decide whether permitting athletes to be paid will have an impact on their branding as they maintain the marketing rights over all the players as well as the intention to retain amateurism in the league. On this matter the NCAA has several options: allow players to be paid from outside organizations such as brand deals, permit colleges to pay athletes during recruiting or during their career, or budget a certain amount of money to be given to each college in order to compensate the players. Currently, not allowing college athletes to receive payments at all has led to lawsuits being filed against the NCAA in order to deregulate the organization, creating a negative outlook on the brand itself. Restricting college basketball players to receive payments has had a negative impact on how the players and fans view the NCAA, therefore impacting the brand.

## Methodology

#### **Tools**

This paper consists of the following tools: Stakeholder analysis, Financial Analysis, PEST analysis, and Force field analysis. The Stakeholder analysis is a representation of who makes decisions regarding the top priorities for the NCAA. They identify which groups have the power to make decisions, which groups these decisions are intended to help, and which groups are irrelevant to the NCAA. The Financial Analysis explores the option whether the NCAA can move around their expenses in order to create a budget which would permit them to pay the players directly from their capital. The PESTEL analysis demonstrates the current situation of the NCAA, regarding political, social, economic, technological, ethical, and legal factors, and whether making a decision, such as allowing payments to college basketball players, would affect the brand image. The Force Field analysis represents the decision-making process when

exploring the option that colleges could pay players out of their own budget. It uses a weighted pros and cons list that attempts to make a case for both sides of the argument as well as weighting each argument to show how much credibility it adds to the controversy.

#### Sources

The use of news networks that handle sports and business-related matters, provides a better understanding of how headlines in sports would impact organizations such as the NCAA from a business standpoint. A business standpoint would be utilized in this matter as it is dealing with the idea of branding, corporate social responsibility, and budgets. The use of websites such as Business Insider, Investopedia, Bleacher Report, and the NCAA itself, demonstrate the comparisons being made between how athletic organizations relate to running a business. During the study of whether one party should be permitted financial payment while following the guidelines of another party, it is important to have various interviews, stories, and point of views that help understand the full scope of the situation.

### Mission Statement of the NCAA

The Mission Statement of the NCAA is, "to govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount," (NCAA Mission Statement, 2007).

This represents the current aim that the NCAA is trying to pursue regarding how customers view their organization, hence, representing their intended branding. They would like to be known as an organization that regulates athletics while promoting the importance of engaging in academics.

## Stakeholders Analysis

The Stakeholders Analysis identifies which groups have the power to make decisions for the NCAA as well as those who are impacted by the decisions and can therefore affect the general perception of the brand.

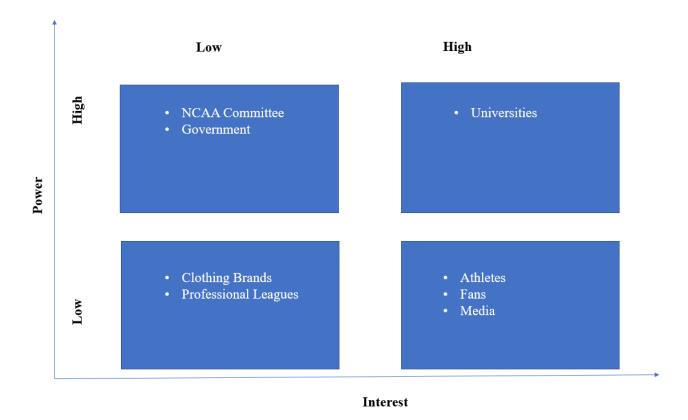


Figure 1

As seen in Figure 1, there is a variation between whom the NCAA needs to keep satisfied, and whose opinions they currently value. The people that the NCAA value would be the ones that have the biggest impact on how their brand is perceived. Since the NCAA is a collection of colleges, universities keep the NCAA relevant and existent. Without the colleges, the NCAA would simply cease to exist. Although that may be a rather obvious observation, the decisions made by specific colleges can impact participation in athletics. As seen in the University of Minnesota Academic Fraud scandal, which landed them a four-year probation and

took away five scholarships, decisions made by universities can impact the branding of the NCAA (CBS News, 2000).

The high-power groups whose interests are not necessarily kept in mind are the NCAA committee and the government. These two organizations are the ones that implement regulations to maintain order in the organization. They have the power to decide whether the NCAA will permit players to receive payments, however, they do not control the how their brand is perceived, as that would be the people whose interests the NCAA would keep in mind.

The high-interest groups, that do not have the power to make decisions regarding regulations, are the groups that the NCAA is targeting to satisfy, since they impact the brand image due to generally being more populous. Aside from the athletes, it is much easier to engage in groups such as a fanbase or social media as it takes little effort to participate. These groups are the ones that tip the balance in how brand image is perceived, therefore possibly influencing regulations.

The low-interest, low power groups are the ones that the NCAA does not care for and does not have much of a say in the decision-making process. Groups such as companies that are hoping to gain brand deals, as well as outside professional organizations, would simply benefit or detriment from decisions made by the NCAA. The NCAA does not need to please these groups since they have no direct impact on the ticket sales or regulations. However, they do offer options for players to deviate from the association as professional leagues act as substitute goods for the NCAA and brand deals offer monetary incentives that the NCAA cannot offer.

## Financial Analysis

### NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION AND SUBSIDIARIES

# CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED AUGUST 31, 2018

	2018			
		Temporarily	Permanently	
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Restricted	Total
DEVENUES.				
REVENUES: Television and marketing rights fees	\$ 844,267,484	\$ -	<b>.</b>	\$ 844,267,484
Championships and NIT tournaments	133,374,157	<b>&gt;</b> -	\$ -	\$ 844,267,484 133,374,157
Investment income—net	22,657,492		-	22,657,492
Sales, services, and other	57,456,759		-	57,456,759
Contributions—facilities—net	-	6,647,348	-	6,647,348
Total revenues	1,057,755,892	6,647,348		_1,064,403,240
RECLASSIFICATIONS:				
Temporarily restricted resources used				
for occupancy costs	4,885,482	(4,885,482)	-	-
Temporarily restricted resources used				
for program services	138,091	(138,091)		
Total reclassifications	5,023,573	(5,023,573)		
EXPENSES:				
Distribution to Division I members	609,223,992	-	-	609,223,992
Division I championships, programs, and NIT tournaments	103,401,082			102 401 002
Division II championships, distribution,	103,401,062	-	-	103,401,082
and programs	41,836,305	-	_	41,836,305
Division III championships and	12/000/000			12/030/303
programs	32,321,528	-	-	32,321,528
Association-wide programs	207,145,686	-	-	207,145,686
Management and general	43,377,401			43,377,401
Total expenses	1,037,305,994			1 027 205 004
Total expenses	1,037,303,994			1,037,305,994
TOTAL CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	25,473,471	1,623,775	-	27,097,246
NET ASSETS—Beginning of year	352,095,244	46,652,961	_150,000	398,898,205
NET ASSETS—End of year	\$ 377,568,715	\$48,276,736	\$150,000	\$ 425,995,451

See notes to consolidated financial statements.

Figure 2 (National Collegiate Assocation and Subsidaries, 2018)

Figure 2 depicts that the NCAA is unable to consider the option of allocating a part of their budget to be used as compensation for the players. Since the NCAA is a non-profit organization, it does not plan on receiving large amounts of profit. Whatever profit they gain

they give back to schools which is demonstrated in the area labeled, "Expenses," in the statement. The NCAA funded 609 million dollars to Division I programs in 2018 demonstrating that most of their annual billion-dollar expenses goes to these Division I programs. Despite there being an almost equal number of schools per division (300-400), Division I schools require more funding by the NCAA. This is due to Division I schools having more students, larger stadiums, and more media attention, therefore requiring more attention to maintain a certain standard of their brand's image. The NCAA hopes to keep up this cycle of gaining revenue then expending the revenue back on the schools. Mike Krzyzewski has coached Duke University's men's basketball for 40 years, he believes that the NCAA cannot afford to cancel another March Madness basketball tournament after the cancellation due to COVID-19 as that is the largest stream of revenue for Division I Men's basketball (Medcalf, 2020). The NCAA made 867.5 million dollars from the 2018 March Madness basketball tournament through television and marketing rights, demonstrating how reliant the association is on this tournament occurring (McGee, 2020). The NCAA's financial statements depict that they barely have 27 million dollars in profit every year. In order to provide monetary incentives to players, they would have to take out funding for various programs, which could have a detrimental effect on the quality of the programs portrayed on television, therefore hindering the brand image of the NCAA.

# PESTEL Analysis

Political	University athletics heavily rely on revenue from ticket
	sales, NCAA funds, and government funds (5 Ways to
	Fund Your College Athletic Program, n.d.).
	• The NCAA will not permit any brand deals,
	sponsorships, gifts, or any type of monetary transaction
	in return for the fame they gain through playing for the
	school (Francis, 2019).
	• The NCAA does not want any external organizations
	trying to control college athletes or try to promote
	themselves through players because they believe it will
	hinder their brand image of an organization that takes
	pride in academics and success (Francis, 2019).
Economic	• The COVID-19 crisis has made the offering of
	scholarships harder to give (Treisman, 2020).
	• University athletics are perceived as a money-losing
	program that helps schools with brand image (5 Ways
	to Fund Your College Athletic Program, n.d.).
	• Money that is made through athletics is put back in the
	program (National Collegiate Assocation and
	Subsidaries, 2018).
	• Television and marketing rights fees, primarily from
	Division 1 men's basketball championship, generate

most of the revenue (Where Does the Money Go?, n.d.).

- The NCAA received 933 million dollars in revenue last year from the 2019 March Madness Division I basketball tournament (Parker, 2019).
- 56% of all student athletes in NCAA Division I received athletic aid for their education as of 2017 (Team, 2018).
- Schools are missing out on increased revenue when popular high school talent chooses to sign elsewhere.
- Schools miss out on 'Zion Effect.' Zion Williamson was the most popular college prospect coming into
   2018 and when he signed to Duke University, ticket sale revenue increased by 82% (Mccarthy, 2019).

### **Social**

- The National Basketball Association has restarted, which means the start of college basketball is likely (Treisman, 2020).
- Players may feel they are not being compensated
   properly as they are getting online education in return
   for their participation in the athletic program through

the pandemic (Coronavirus Sports: COVID-19 Impacts and Solutions for College Recruiting, n.d.).

- Could sustain basketball players for all four years if they offer monetary incentives.
- Could offer choice between scholarship or the ability to accept gifts and endorsements.
- Perceiving college athletes as employees is a current dilemma the organization is facing. (Rukeyeser, 2019).
- Very reliant on March Madness tournament (Insignares, 2020).
- Lost out on 375 million dollars due to March madness being canceled in 2020 (Parker, 2019).
- Currently 347 colleges that take part in Division I sports, meaning viewership is not equally divided (List of NCAA Division 1 Schools, n.d.)
- Highschool basketball players are beginning to look more into signing with professional organizations directly rather than participate in athletic programs offered by universities (Davis, 2017).

## Technological

 The COVID-19 crisis has caused schools to transfer learning to online, decreasing value in giving scholarships (Nontraditional Courses, n.d.).

	Could increase depth in recruiting process through
	applying improved data analytics software (Teats,
	2020).
Ethical	College athletes are imperative to the financial well-
Difficult	Conege differences are imperative to the financial wen
	being of universities, as well as the branding of the
	NCAA, therefore, not paying them or allowing them to
	receive payment is perceived as unethical (Witz, 2019).
	The perception that a company is exploiting their
	employees creates a negative outlook for the company
	(Labor Explotation: Could You Be a Victim of Modern
	Slavery, 2018).
Legal	Not paying college athletes is leading to movements to
	deregulate the entire NCAA (Rukeyeser, 2019).
	Trey Johnson, former Villanova defensive back for
	their football program sued the NCAA for not paying
	their players. He believed that the players should be
	treated as employees and the work they put is not being
	compensated for. He believes they should be receiving
	at least minimum wage (Witz, 2019).

Figure 3

The NCAA acts as an organization that provides regulations and funds for collegiate sports. As shown in Figure 3, they currently excel when it comes to viewership ratings as well as

maintain arenas and fan count for big name schools. However, they do not divide that viewership well, as smaller name schools do not receive as much attention compared to big state schools. Therefore, if big name colleges use money to attract players, the competition will be further unbalanced as smaller schools will not receive the same level of talent as the bigger schools. This would be an explicit violation of their mission statement which is to provide a sense of 'fair' competition (NCAA Mission Statement, 2007). The current mode of compensation for players is offering them scholarships in exchange for their athletic abilities, however, players do not realize they are giving up their ability to monetize their own likeness that they gain through televised games. Some key players, that act as high value employees, are leaving the organization in order to get paid more money. Currently, the NCAA bans all athletes from receiving payment from outside organizations in return for their marketing rights. The NCAA must decide an ideal employee retention cost that they are willing to spend that may or may not impact their brand image because in the long run, acquiring a new employee or player is far more expensive than retaining one. From an ethical standpoint, the NCAA could be perceived as an organization with a controversial corporate social responsibility if viewers believe they are exploiting athletes for their marketing rights. The nonprofit business model the NCAA runs on cannot afford to face lawsuits that may not necessarily result in them having to pay retribution, but a slander on the image of the organization.

# Force Field Analysis

The Force Field Analysis is weighted on a scale of 1-5, 1 being the lowest amount of influence a factor can have in swaying the decision, and 5 being the largest amount of influence a factor can have in swaying the decision, relative to the other factors listed. Factors are weighted on how direct their impact is on the issue.

Universities should pay	Question	Universities should not pay
Oniversities should pay	Question	Oniversities should not pay
athletes.		athletes.
(Push Factors)		(Restricting Factors)
3 - Athletes would be more	Should the NCAA	5 – Could create an
incentivized to stay all four	permit universities	unbalanced scale of
years at the college.	•	competition as the richer
	to pay athletes from	schools will be able to
	their own budget?	attract better talent.
4 – More nationally known		2 – May lower ticket sales
high school prospects would		as people do not find the
be inclined to join a		game as competitive
university rather than		anymore.
playing professionally		4
directly.		

5 – If monetary incentives attract more entertaining talent, that could be proportional to a rise in ticket sales.



4 – NCAA and colleges are starting to gain the brand image that the reason they are not allowing athletes to be paid is because they want to exploit and control the players as much as possible.



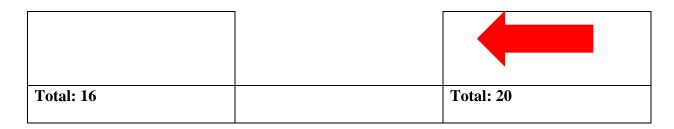
5 – Players are already compensated for through scholarships.



4 – NCAA is a non-profit organization and is approximately breaking even every year, therefore cannot help universities to pay athletes.



4 – The NCAA worries that if college athletes receive payments and gifts through private sponsorship deals, their brand image will be hindered.



### Figure 4

This figure represents the exploration of the option that universities could potentially pay college athletes in order to prevent any negative backlash their brand may receive from viewers that believe that athletes are being compensated in an unethical manner.

#### **Push Factors**

Athletes such as Jalen Green, LaMelo Ball, and R.J. Hampton have a large social media following as well as being credited as the top athletes in their respective class. However, these athletes were offered upwards of \$500,000 dollars to compete overseas or in other U.S. professional leagues (Rude, 2020). These players could have sparked a sharp increase in ticket sales if they were incentivized to take the traditional college route. This is seen when star highschool athlete Zion Williamson, chose to take the traditional college route leading to what was known as the 'Zion effect,' as Duke ticket sales rose 82% compared to the year before he had joined (Mccarthy, 2019). The idea that a player can have a direct correlation with increased ticket sales justifies the heavily weighted push factor to pay players. The NCAA must make a decision whether the increased revenue they would gain from recruiting top talent would outweigh the cost of using money as an incentive to persuade players to play for college. Despite the NCAA trying to maintain a tight brand image, they are being perceived as controlling when they do not allow popular players to receive brand deals or gifts. ESPN number one recruit for the class of 2019, James Weisman, was suspended from play after the NCAA uncovered that his family was given money to help persuade him to sign with the University of Memphis. Later,

Wiseman chose to drop out of college completely and focus on training for the National Basketball Association (Boone, 2019). This factor receives a moderate weighting as a push factor because if the NCAA had permitted players to receive payment, that could have possibly prevented athletes from dropping out, however it is still an indirect effect, therefore demonstrating some uncertainty. The recent trend of athletes wanting to train for professional organizations is costing the NCAA top prospects that could help them increase revenue that can be used to better stadiums and training facilities.

### **Restricting Factors**

The NCAA is a non-profit organization. Their financial reports state that they are breaking even almost every year as they are placing all their profits back into various funds for the colleges within their reach, proving that using NCAA funds to pay the players is unrealistic. This received a heavy weighting as a restricting factor as there is a large spectrum of colleges in the Division I program that will not be able to pay their players without NCAA financial assistance, therefore giving the richer schools an advantage in attracting talent. Ticket sales would be indirectly impacted as competition would be perceived as unfair. Since this is an indirect impact, the restricting factor is weighted as lower than moderate. Permitting athletes to receive payments will impact their intended branding of wanting to integrate the importance of academics as people will begin to perceive the organization as a professional league rather than an amateur league. This is more of a direct impact as paying the players will violate their mission statement, therefore receiving a heavier weighting. The greater number of direct impacts that the restricting factors possess, demonstrates reasoning for why it is not feasible to permit colleges to pay their athletes themselves.

## Conclusion

The question of, "To what extent does restricting college basketball players to receive payment impact the brand image of the National Collegiate Athletic Association?" is assessed by evaluating the various options the NCAA has in order to alleviate this controversy. Restricting college basketball players to receive payment has impacted the brand to a great extent as it has portrayed to consumers that the NCAA is not compensating players in a manner that is justifiable for the revenue they are responsible for. Currently, the NCAA is trying to pursue their intended branding as an organization that provides a healthy environment for student-athletes to strive, which is how they justify not permitting payment to go to players because they believe that organizations will exploit the popularity of players. However, the NCAA is gaining the perception that they are the ones exploiting the likeness of the players without allowing them to receive any compensation for their merit.

The NCAA has three options when deciding how to handle the issue of compensating players: The NCAA can allocate a certain amount of their budget to be used for paying players, permit universities to pay athletes themselves, or the NCAA can permit athletes to be paid by outside organizations in exchange for their marketing rights. As shown in Figure 2, the 2018 Financial Statement, the NCAA does not have the ability to pay athletes if they would like to maintain the current standard of operations. If they were to embark on this option, the funding they provide to schools will have to be cut by a specific amount, therefore lowering the quality of cosmetic factors that sustain and advertise the programs, causing a negative impact on the brand image. Figure 4 represents a force field analysis which demonstrates that universities should not be permitted by the NCAA to pay athletes. There is a greater number of restricting factors than propelling factors that have a direct impact on the NCAA brand if universities can pay their

athletes. Some examples are unbalanced competition, and the idea that players are already compensated through scholarships. If the NCAA were to have unbalanced competition, viewership would decrease, leading to a decrease in revenue. If the NCAA permitted players to receive compensation other than scholarships, they are violating their own mission statement that promotes a paramount educational experience for student-athletes. The lack of rationality that the other two options hold leaves the option of allowing players to receive payment from outside organizations. As shown in Figure 1, the Stakeholder Analysis, athletes are a high interest group, meaning that they are essential to keeping the NCAA's brand intact. By allowing athletes to receive payment by outside organizations, the NCAA is fulfilling the requests of a high interest group, as well as not increasing financial tensions on the universities themselves, which is also a high interest group. Viewership grossing players such as Jalen Green, LaMelo Ball, and R.J. Hampton may have stayed with the NCAA and not indulged in other professional leagues if they were permitted to take part in brand deals.

Allowing players to be paid by outside organizations would create a merit-based system where the better players obtain more money based on their popularity, increasing competitiveness, therefore increasing viewership. The NCAA currently not permitting such an option that does not impact the budgets of the organization, the balance of competition, and viewership, creates the perception that the organization is exploiting its employees by not allowing them to receive payment, impacting their brand image to a great extent.

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