

Pay Them Now

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Apparently it took the actions of a wealthy spoiled rich white kid to get the attention of the mainstream of American media on the issue of paying college athletes. The case of Johnny "Football" stirred the nation when the NCAA in its continuing quest to embarrass itself suspended the Texas A & M quarterback for signing memorabilia. Johnny signed not to make money, but so that those entrepreneurs who make a living from collecting signatures of athletes on sporting paraphernalia could cash their tickets.

Johnny Manziel was punished by the NCAA who ordered him to sit out the first half of the first football game of the season. The ludicrous nature of the punishment matched the ludicrous nature of the crime. Then it was matched by the mindless stampede of the media, and not just the sports media, to decry the NCAA policy that does not allow college athletes to make money off their athletic fame, at least until they leave the university. Even then, of course, the NCAA and its members continue to make money off these players.

So in newspapers, on web sites, on twitter, on sports talk radio, and wherever rabid college sports fans gather there was a wringing of hands and a gnashing of teeth. American sports fans were more concerned over this crime against humanity than they were over the atrocities in the Middle East

That this issue consumed the nation and was the focus of the mainstream news outlets was clear when *Time* magazine put Johnny "Football" on their cover and made their lead story "It's Time to Pay College Athletes." Outside the U.S. Vladimir Putin was the *Time* cover story. This week on "Bill Moyers and Company," a serious PBS news analysis and commentary program, the topic is "The Collision of Sports and Politics," which its promotional material notes was prompted by the *Time* cover story.

So for all you non-sports junkies out there, welcome to the center of the American universe.

If the issue of paying college athletes is indeed a major issue that must be addressed, then by some strange turn of fortune the solution to this problem has hit us square in

the face this week. It was once the belief that cures for disease could always be found in proximity to the disease itself. In the case *Time's* call to pay the college athlete, the response was supplied from the colleges themselves.

Sports Illustrated is publishing a five part expose of what it is characterizing as "corruption" at Oklahoma State University. In Part 1 the subject of pay is explicitly addressed and solutions to the pay issue are all over the magazine. "Payments, bonuses and sham jobs" were supplemented by cash handouts from football staff members and generous and appreciative members of the booster club. This wasn't some random process but seems to have had a clear pay structure based on production, as indeed it should. Unlike grades in the classroom, the players had to earn their money.

This is outsourcing and the free market at its best and most efficient. There was a "de facto bonus system" managed by a member of the football staff, and there were jobs available that paid the student athletes for their skills if not always their work. Do we need any other model? Couldn't the NCAA just bring in the Oklahoma State Staff, hold a few workshops, and get this system up and running by next football season at quality institutions of higher learning across the country?

Part 2 of the *SI* series seems to suggest that the academic part of the equation should simply be dropped. In theory athletes who insisted on taking classes would be allowed to take them, but in reality this would not be encouraged, especially if the athlete wanted to enroll in a difficult class or major. Academic advisers at Oklahoma State seem to have understood this system intuitively.

Part 3 indirectly suggests another solution to the pay issue. This section discusses the flood of drugs available on the OSU campus. When I was in graduate school I knew someone who was working their way through college selling pharmaceuticals and recreational drugs on campus. If it worked for him, and it did, it could work for the athletes and other enterprising students? Clearly there is demand, so why not facilitate the supply, and let the student athletes make a little money off it.

In his new book, *Slow Getting Up*, former college and NFL player, Nate Jackson claims that marijuana is the best

solution to the pain one endures in football. Given that marijuana was so popular among Oklahoma State players, it would be a simple matter to franchise its sale to the athletes. Laws, except in a few states, would have to be adjusted, but certainly the sports community is powerful enough to make that happen.

In just these first three *SI* articles on Oklahoma State there are more than enough solutions to the pay problems. In addition Yahoo Sports reported this week that five SEC players received payments from sports agents and marketing representatives while they were student athletes. Clearly the sources of funding are limitless and the solutions are many.

And one other thing, this weekend is being ballyhooed in gaming circles as one of the biggest sports gambling weekends in some time. A perfect storm of events with boxing as the lead is inspiring the gamblers. In the world of college football this year's first "game of the century" between Alabama and Johnny Manziel's team will bring a very large take for both legal and illegal bookmakers.

It seems only right that Johnny "Football" should get a piece of that action.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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