

Race and Sport: Student Athletes

SECTION ONE

Ending Exploitation of Athletes Would Be Good Start to Fixing NCAA

By [Shawn Windsor](#)

SOURCE: <https://www.freep.com/story/sports/university-michigan/2018/05/13/ncaa-fix-exploitation-college-athletes/605162002/>

The NCAA has to change. Headlines from last week should help.

Finally.

First, the mom of a likely NBA lottery pick likened her son's experience playing college basketball to slavery. Then, a former U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said the NCAA's rules were "incomprehensible."

Not to mention unfair, outdated and borderline immoral.

She's right. They are.

Wendell Carter's mom is right, too.

Here is what [Kylia Carter told the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics last Monday](#), according to USA Today:

"When you remove all the bling and the bells and the sneakers and all that, you've paid for a child to come to your school to do what you wanted them to do for you, for free, and you made a lot of money when he did that, and you've got all these rules in place that say he cannot share in any of that," she said. "The only other time when labor does not get paid but, yet someone else gets profits and the labor is black and the profit is white, is in slavery.

"To be honest with you, it's nauseating."

Carter also admonished the NCAA for promising a free education to the players and not doing enough to make sure they received it. She said that the NCAA couldn't be trusted, and that the current system was intentional and modeled after indentured servitude.

If that sounds harsh, it is. Because the system is harsh, and reminds us, if we're being honest, of how connected college basketball is to the dark and uncomfortable history that continues to separate and segregate us.

All you have to do is go to a big-time college basketball game ... and watch, with your eyes wide open.

If you do, you'll notice the mostly white head coaches, athletic directors, university presidents, university trustees, sports media and student sections who ring the lower bowls of the game's most iconic arenas.

Then notice the mostly black players on the court.

It's not an easy equation. It's one that many of us would rather ignore.

But the math is not complicated: The demographics at prominent college basketball games do not reflect the demographics of our society.

There are deeply-embedded and obvious reasons for this. And while the NCAA can't be expected to alter the history of our country by itself, as a body that speaks for some of our most cherished institutions, we can expect it to stop perpetuating inequality.

This is why Carter's voice broke as she spoke to the Commission last week. She doesn't just know it. She doesn't simply see it. She feels it.

To be clear, she wasn't arguing that her son playing at Duke is the same as her ancestors enduring actual slavery. She was pointing out the link, the history, and the remnants of an arrangement that persist.

Something must be done. But it's not as simple as paying players. At least not to Carter. There must be more.

"If you pay the players and kept the system like it is, it would still destroy them — it would just destroy them faster," she said. "That's not the solution. Don't get me wrong, it helps, but not without educating them on this process."

Carter thinks universities don't do enough to prepare their most talented athletes for the next step. That schools must change the way

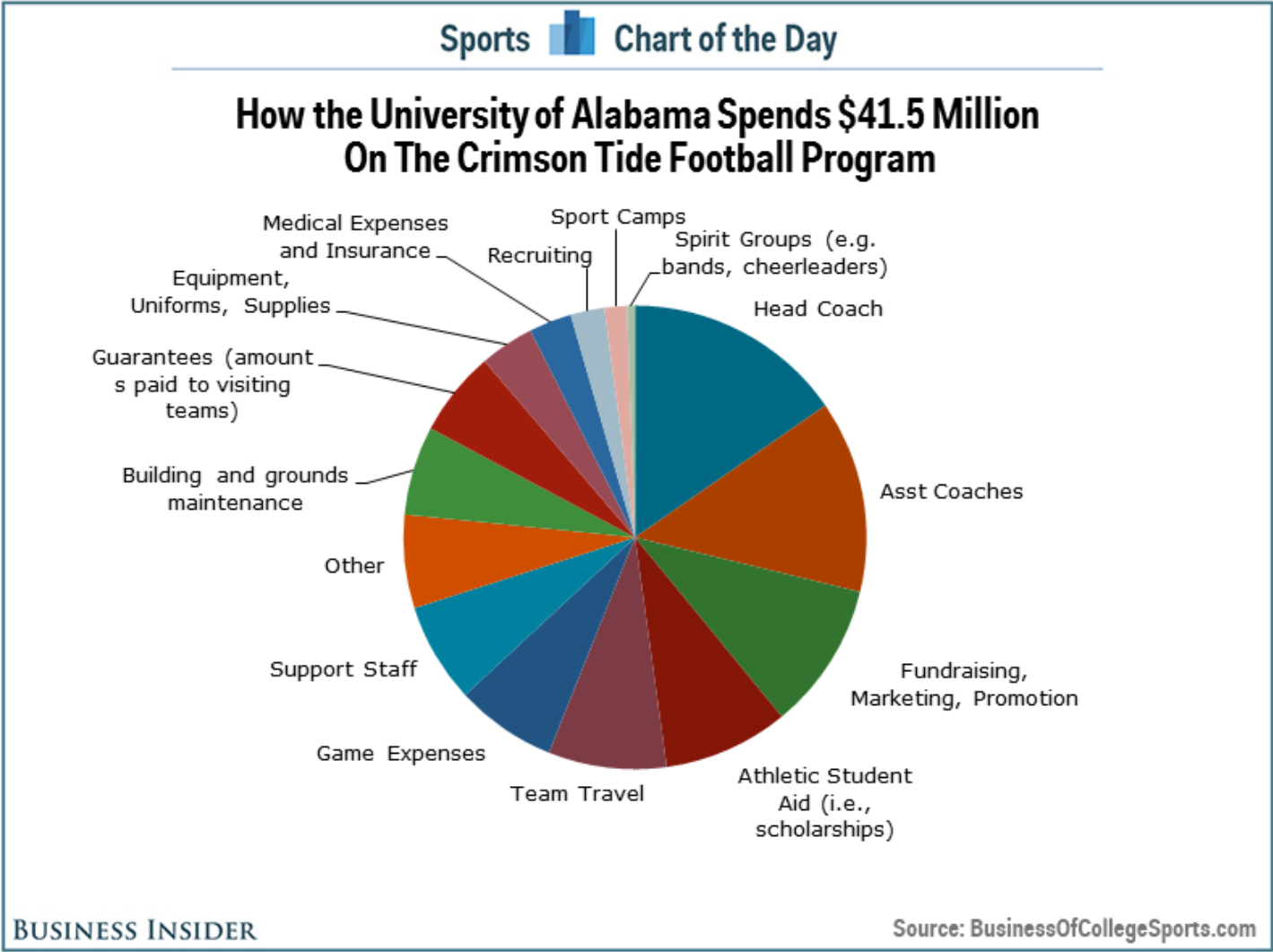


they think about these athletes, about the lives so many of them have led, and how they can help them adapt.

"You tell me it's about education, and we're giving you this fabulous education for your son to come to school here, so you're paying him with the education for his talent," she said. "If that's what you're paying him — you're paying him with education — why aren't you making sure he gets it? Why aren't you assigning somebody to him so if he is a one-and-done, why didn't you automatically assign him an academic advisor so that when he leaves he's got someone in his ear talking to him about the value of that education he left behind?"

"Wendell doesn't have that problem because I'm going to be there like a jackhammer, but all of the other kids, the thing you pay them to come to your school and do, most of them don't ever get it."

It's a point we don't hear often enough. Yet even if schools get better at doing this — and plenty of schools already have — we still aren't addressing the thornier issue of value. And how best to



ensure players are receiving what they are worth.

The simplest way to achieve this is to let the kids explore the free market. If, say, [Zavier Simpson, the point guard at Michigan](#), gets an offer to appear at an Ann Arbor car dealership in exchange for cash, he ought to be able to.

And if [Xavier Tillman, a forward at Michigan State](#), is asked to sign autographs at a mall in Lansing, he should be free to do it.

Letting student-athletes earn off their brand and likeness is one change Rice suggested the NCAA could make.

Some others:

"Ending one-and-done in men's basketball and the charade that it is. Allowing student-athletes to 'test' the NBA draft and retain eligibility if they do not sign a professional contract. Permitting student-athletes to consult agents or other professionals in order to better assess their prospects. (This is happening under the table right now and should be brought above board.) And as soon as the legal framework is clear, developing a new policy on name, image and likeness."

That last one is critical. Letting players earn money — but not paying them directly — would take away a lot of the under-the-table incentives that plague the sport.

This would also make the whole system less exploitative, so that moms like Kyla Carter didn't feel like their sons were treated like indentured servants.

Such fixes won't do much to change the unequal demographics at our universities, so that they better reflect the tapestry of our society, but it's a start ... as well as an end to college basketball's hypocrisy.

SECTION TWO

Pay for Play: How to End the Exploitation of College Athletes Once and for All

By [Bill Littlefield](#)

SOURCE: <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2017/10/24/ncaa-amateurism-bill-littlefield>

Workers should be paid.

We can argue about what the minimum wage should be. We can argue about how generous the benefit packages should be.

But who's going to argue that workers shouldn't be paid?

Only those who believe in the concept of the "student-athlete."

This was a concept corrupt in its origins. It was [developed by the NCAA](#) in response to a lawsuit charging that the family of a football player on an athletic scholarship killed in a game should receive some compensation. The fiction of the student-athlete prevailed at court. The NCAA was off the hook, as was the university for which the athlete played...and died.

In part because the fiction worked as a gimmick to allow the colleges and the NCAA to shirk their responsibility and save money, and in part because it appeals to people who, for whatever reasons, prefer to think of the men who play football and basketball at the university level as amateurs, no matter how much income they generate for others, the fiction has prevailed.

No matter that lots of the best basketball players are on campus for less than a year, "attending school" only to fulfill a silly requirement designed to enhance the value of the TV product at the expense of the workers.

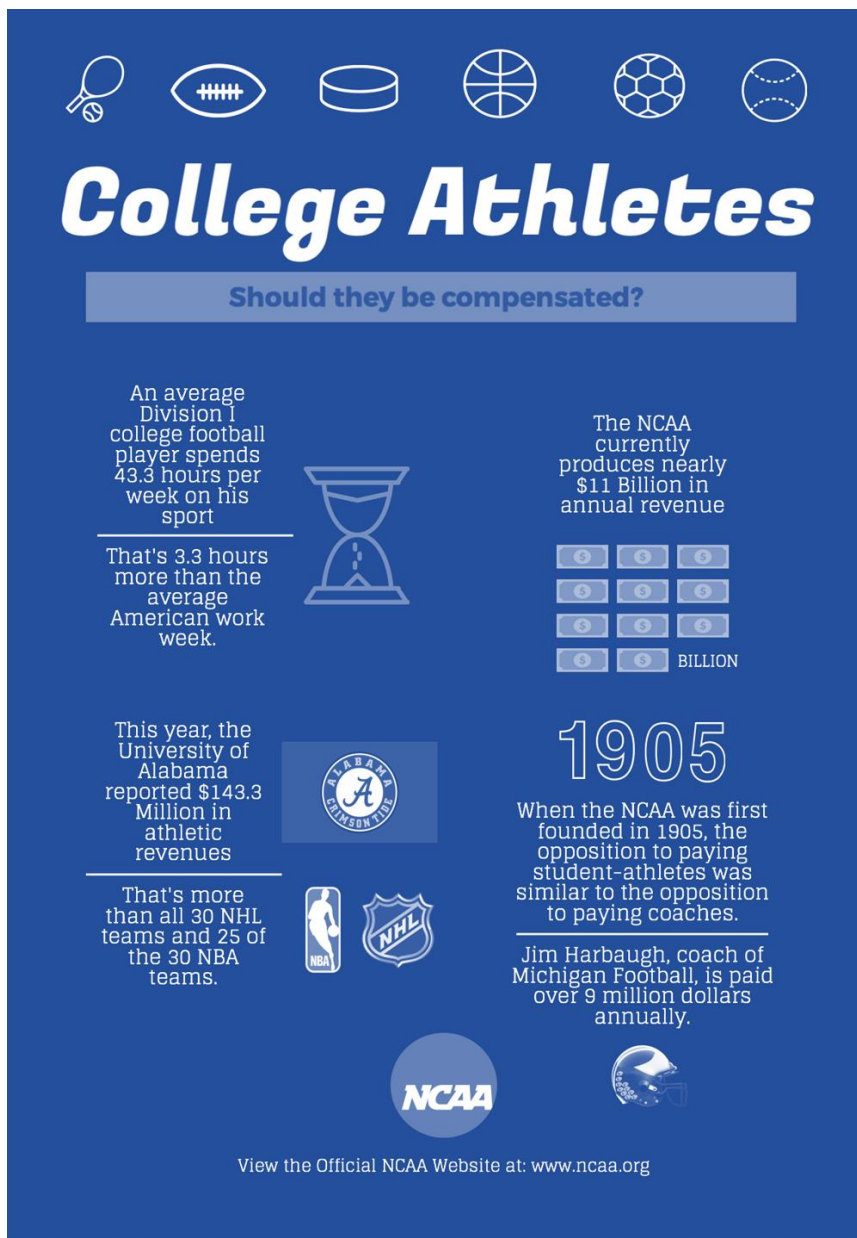
No matter that lots of the athletes who do stay in school are taking courses designed to keep them "eligible," rather than to provide them with a college education, however one might be inclined to define that.

No matter that the business of the revenue sports has grown monstrous enough to provide coaches with multimillion-dollar salaries and universities with palatial centers for the housing, feeding and training of the athletes.

...when they can no longer work to the standard their coaches anticipate, they can lose their scholarships and become former athletes without degrees.

None of this is to suggest that lots of young men and women don't benefit from athletic scholarships. If they're involved in sports that don't eat up all their time, and if they're working with coaches who care whether the athletes are students and are willing to provide them with the opportunity to *be* students, great. The volleyball players and swimmers have a shot at taking the courses they want to take, thus learning to be something other than volleyball players or swimmers. But the football and men's basketball players frequently don't have that opportunity, because the system isn't designed to provide them with it. It's designed to profit off their labor in the creation of a spectacle. And when they can no longer work to the standard their coaches anticipate, they can lose their scholarships and become *former* athletes without degrees.

Periodically, there is a scandal significant enough to produce objections to that system. But the system benefits the most competitive colleges and universities spectacularly, and their resistance to significant change is powerful, and the voices of the athletes who are run over by the system are usually faint or lost.



One way for the college and university presidents to achieve real change would be to acknowledge that the schools are operating as minor leagues for pro football and pro basketball and treat the players accordingly; that is, pay them for their labor. The market would set the rates. A star high school running back would earn more than a reserve who'd be likely to sit on the bench until somebody got hurt or the coach changed his mind. Recognizing that the responsibilities of those players to the coach and the team would take precedence, the colleges and universities would be required to provide the players with open-ended vouchers enabling them to take courses and pursue a degree whenever it was feasible. Meanwhile, the players would be assured that medical expenses incurred as a result of their work would be assumed by their employers, who would also be responsible for whatever lifetime care those injuries made necessary.

This approach would ... also give athletes the chance to be students at some time when they weren't so busy being athletes.

This approach would diminish the level of hypocrisy currently apparent in the revenue sports. It would also give athletes the chance to be students at some time when they weren't so busy being athletes. In addition to actual pay for work, this opportunity would seem to be reasonable compensation.

The second prescription for the current ills associated with college sports would be de-emphasis of the product. Universities and colleges and the NCAA could decide that college basketball and football have gotten too big for their own good, and for the good of the institutions. The heat could be turned down under the NCAA Basketball Tournament and the Bowl Championship Series.

This seems unlikely, because business on the college sports front is so good for some institutions, and because so many of the ones for which it *isn't* so good dream that it will be someday soon, if only they can gather enough wealthy boosters to hire the right multimillion-dollar coach and build a multimillion-dollar weight room. For many of those colleges and universities, the dream turns out to be toxic. No matter. Thanks to the glitz and glamour associated with the product on TV, hope endures.

So de-emphasis is unlikely, which means the better approach is modification of the system in order to provide salaries and genuine educational opportunities to the workers who make the industry of the revenue sports possible.

The voucher idea is not new. Richard Lapchick suggested something like it decades ago, when he was the director of the Center for the Study of Sport and Society at Northeastern University. At least that was when I first heard it. And of course the idea of paying those who produce the products of college football and basketball has lots of adherents. But in the wake of [the most recent scandal](#) — a mess that has not only

embarrassed the NCAA and several universities but also intrigued the FBI — it's as good a time as any and perhaps better than most to adjust the system so that it reflects reality, roots out at least some of the more obvious opportunities for corruption, and stops cheating those so long cynically referred to as "student-athletes."



SECTION THREE

It's Naive to Think College Athletes Have Time for School

By Jasmine Harris

SOURCE: <http://theconversation.com/its-naive-to-think-college-athletes-have-time-for-school-100942>

From my first day as a sociology professor at a university with a Division I football and men's basketball team, education and athletics struck me as being inherently at odds.

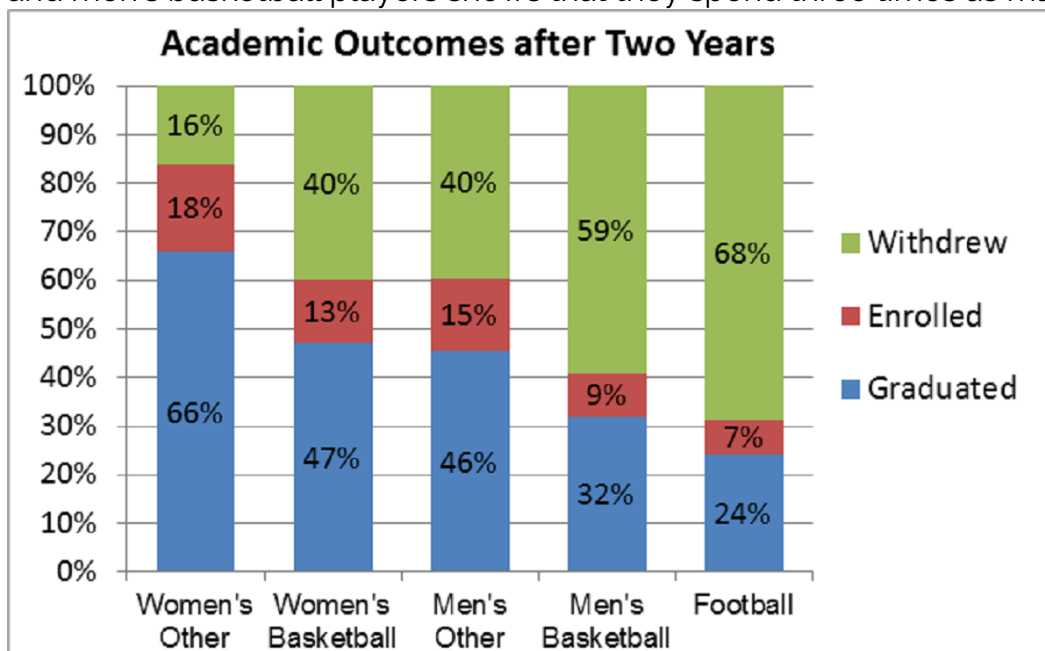
Student-athletes filled my courses to take advantage of the fact that the classes met [early in the morning](#).

The football and men's basketball players – [most of whom were black](#) – quickly fell behind due to scheduling constraints. Only so much time was set aside for academics and, often, it wasn't enough. Academic rigor and athletic success were simply incompatible goals.

Now – as [a researcher](#) who is studying college athletes through the lens of race and class – I have compiled evidence to show just how much more time college athletes devote to sports over academics.

Lopsided but 'normal'

Early data from my [ongoing research](#) on the academic experiences of black Division I football and men's basketball players shows that they spend three times as many hours per week on



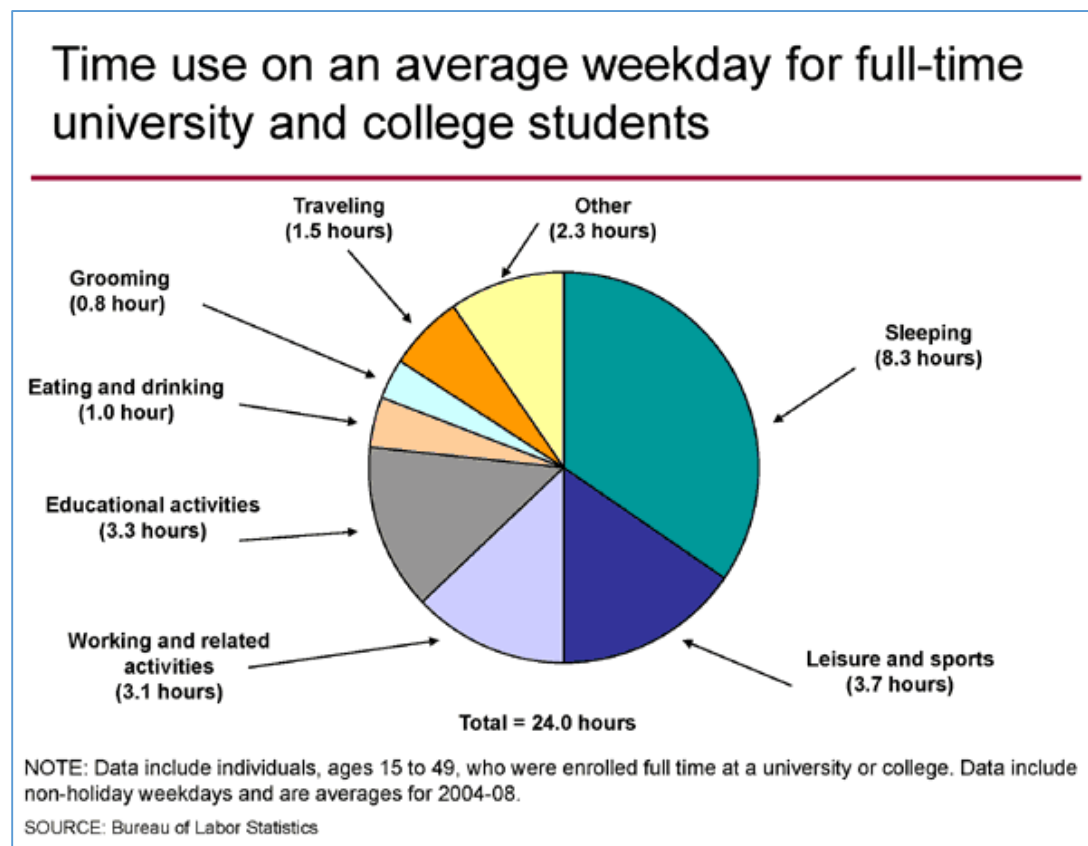
athletics as they do on academics. On average, the players spend more than 25 hours on sports-related activities other than games, such as practice, workouts, general team meetings, film sessions and travel. On the other hand, the player spend less than eight hours on academics outside of class, such as writing papers, studying, getting

tutored or working on group projects. This imbalance is institutionally constructed and perpetuated. Perhaps most disturbingly, the student-athletes I surveyed perceive this lopsided situation as “normal.”

Some may [argue](#) that the players should be satisfied with the fact that their scholarships enable them to reap the benefits of a college education. The problem with that argument is that college athletes aren't able to fully actualize their identities as students to the same degree as their classmates. College sports is just too demanding, and universities do not make any special concessions for athletes' additional time commitments.

Money at stake

It is important to distinguish the lives of college athletes who don't generate money for their institutions, such as [soccer and tennis players](#), versus those who are deeply intertwined with the generation of revenue for colleges, universities and the NCAA, which cleared [US\\$1 billion in revenue in 2017](#). That kind of money cannot be made without [serious time commitments](#) among the players.



Every time I watch a college football or men's basketball game on TV, I can't help but wonder what the players on my screen missed in class that day.

They are students

such as Jalen (a pseudonym), a football player who requested a meeting with me mid-semester. He wanted to discuss how my office hours conflicted with the team practices and film sessions. For an hour we discussed what he understood as unfixable. Jalen wanted and needed to utilize the main academic support systems provided by the college, but literally didn't have the time.

Jalen was by no means alone. Rather, his plight was emblematic of untold numbers of college athletes who struggle to balance sports and academics.

Workers or students?

So, are college athletes workers who attend school part-time? Or are they students who play sports part-time? Players at schools across the country are [speaking up](#) about the fact that they generate revenue for the colleges they play for but not for themselves. They have attempted to [unionize](#) and [filed lawsuits](#) to get what they see as their fair share.

Meanwhile, the NCAA claims that student-athlete balance is not only possible, but that [most Division I players](#) achieve it.

Disparities persist

The reality is most football and men's basketball players [underperform academically](#) and [routinely graduate](#) at lower rates than "other student-athletes, black non-athletes and undergraduates in general."

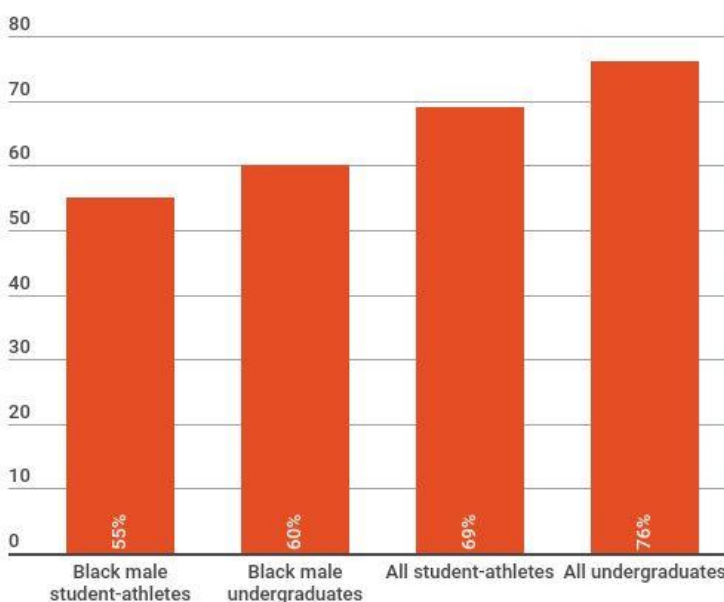
Recent academic scandals – from [fraudulent classes](#) to [inappropriate tutor support](#) and [administrative cover-ups](#) – reveal that a sports-first mentality permeates college campuses.

The NCAA continues to describe Division I football and basketball players as ["regular students who happen to play sports."](#) However, the NCAA rarely details how this student-athlete balance is supposed to work. There are [tournament time commercials](#) that remind viewers how most college athletes "will go pro in something other than sports." However, less mentioned, if at all, are what kind of practical routes exist to this theoretically "balanced" identity. Even the NCAA's own [surveys of college athletes](#) show that athletics takes precedence over academics.

[Coaches and college staffers are getting rich](#) in the name of higher education while their mostly black players are – in their own words – ["broke."](#) And this despite the fact that student-athlete responsibilities have grown as the business of college sports grows. For instance, some of the

Degree of Difficulty

A study by Shaun Harper of the [USC Race and Equity Center](#) found that among students graduating from college at a [Power Five conference](#) university between the years of 2013-2016, black male scholarship athletes on all sports teams had lower rates of graduation than their non-sporting counterparts.



SOURCE: Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division 1 College Sports, Shaun R. Harper, USC Race and Equity Center, 2018



games [last longer](#), and the [average hours](#) that players spend per week on athletics continues to creep upward.

Conflicts continue

Recently, 2017 Heisman runner-up, Bryce Love, drew criticism for "[setting a bad precedent](#)" for choosing to attend summer classes instead of Stanford's media day.

Almost 60 percent of participants in my current national research study find it difficult or very difficult to balance sports and academics – from the moment they set foot on campus until graduation, if they graduate at all. Considering the fact that less than 2 percent of college football players get into the National Football League, and only 1.2 percent of college basketball players get drafted into the National Basketball Association, the reality is that many college athletes will [never see a payoff in professional sports](#). But the real tragedy is that – having devoted so much time to sports instead of their studies – they won't really get to see their college education pay off, either.

SECTION FOUR

Dangerous Stereotypes Stalk Black College Athletes

By Joseph Cooper

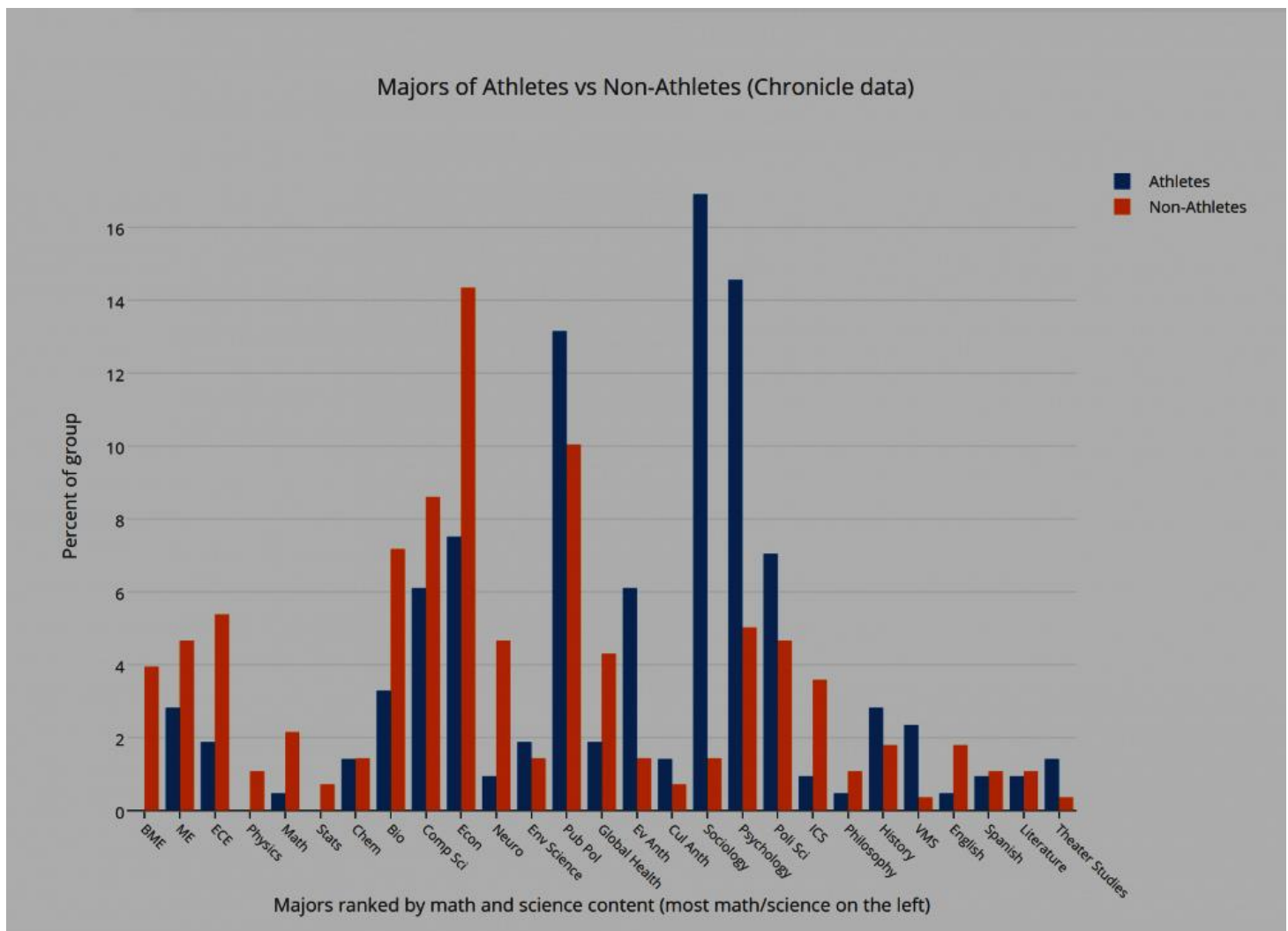
SOURCE: <https://theconversation.com/dangerous-stereotypes-stalk-black-college-athletes-101655>

If you go strictly by the official account, heatstroke was the [cause of death](#) for University of Maryland football player Jordan McNair. McNair died earlier this year following a grueling practice in which training staff [failed](#) to properly diagnose and treat his condition.

But there's another culprit – or at least a contributing factor – that should not be overlooked.

As I argue in my forthcoming book – "From Exploitation Back to Empowerment: Black Male Holistic (Under) Development Through Sport and (Mis) Education" – what threatens black college athletes such as McNair is not just the brutal treatment to which they are subjected on the field.

Rather, it is a [long-standing](#) and deadly stereotype in American society that views black males as [subhuman](#) and superhuman all at once.



This stereotype, which is complex and has many layers, holds that black male athletes have superior athletic abilities that enable them to [excel at high levels](#) in sports such as football. The stereotype also holds that black males have a distinct physicality that allows them to [endure extreme amounts of pain](#).

This is the same myth that was used to justify the [enslavement](#) and mistreatment of black people in America from before the Civil War through today's [era of mass incarceration](#). In fact, [a case can be made](#) that there are many parallels between the exploitation of black student-athletes today and how black labor was exploited during American slavery.

McNair also appears to have fallen victim to a sports culture in the U.S. that promotes a [win-at-all-costs mentality](#). This culture also places an [inordinate amount of emphasis on generating revenue](#). And it represents a [damaging view of masculinity](#).

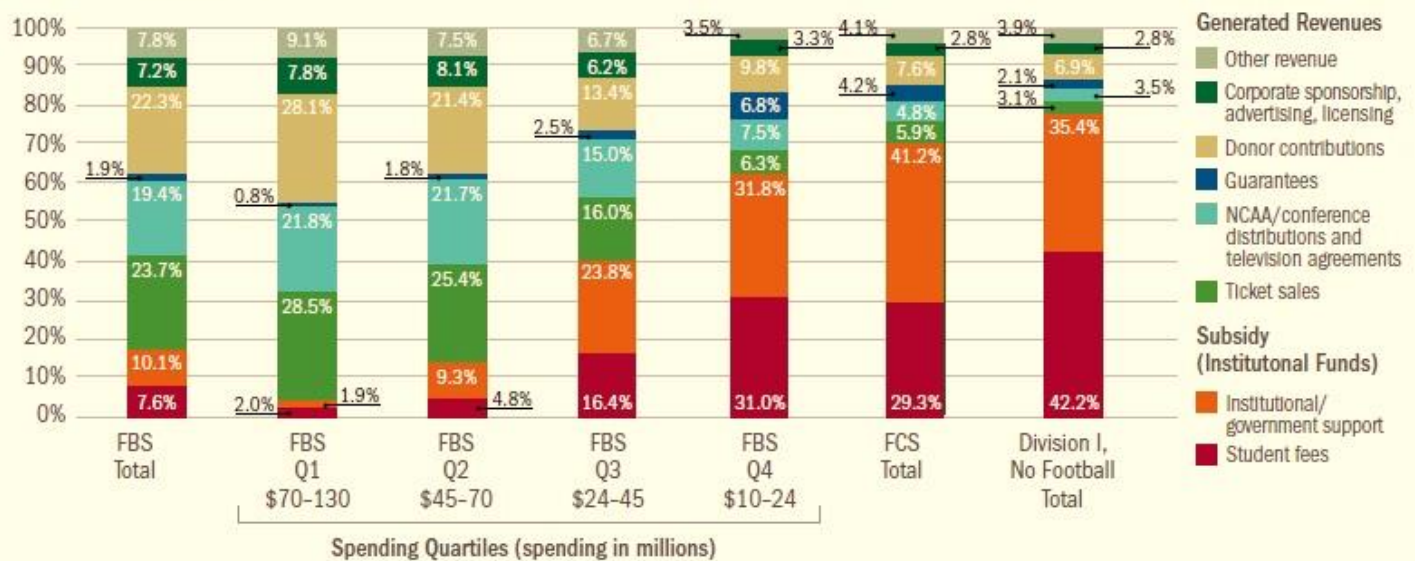
I make these arguments as a [scholar](#) who [focuses on the nexus between sport, education, race and culture](#).

Perceptions of black strength

I assert that black males in general, and black student-athletes in particular, are viewed [primarily as physical beings](#) – sometimes seen as “beasts” and the like. This dehumanizes them in ways that [threaten their well-being](#).

Although such terms as “beasts” are widely embraced in mainstream culture and in some instances by black athletes themselves, such as Marshawn Lynch, whose [“Beast Mode” clothing line](#) is drawn from his nickname, these terms are still harmful. This is especially the case in sports, where [masculinity is equated with toughness](#), playing through pain and not giving up.

Figure 3. Where the Money Comes From: Source of Athletic Budget Revenues for Division I Colleges, by Subdivision, 2010



Note: Includes public institutions only. FBS institutions were organized into quartiles based on total athletic spending. “Guarantees” are revenues received for participation in away games. “Other revenue” includes concessions, endowments, sports camps, third-party compensation, and other revenue.

Data Source: USA Today's NCAA Athletics Finance Database.

Source: Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2012.

Former Raven John Urschel opens up about retirement, concussions, football and math.

It may be true that these ideas are applied to male athletes in general. But these views impact black males even more due to their unique experiences in the United States. Just as they did during the days of [chattel slavery](#), I argue that deeply embedded stereotypes about the physical capacity of black individuals to endure pain results in their perpetual mistreatment in the sports arena.

The stereotypes about black males' work ethic in sports like [football](#) and basketball has resulted in their [higher incidences of cardiac deaths](#).

Not valued for intellect

Black student-athletes are also subject to educational neglect. Consider, for instance, the various [academic scandals](#) in big-time college sports. Some of these scandals involved cases in which black male athletes were [found to be illiterate](#), but still allowed to compete in their respective sports and [generate millions of dollars for the institutions](#).

Black males are often deemed as intellectually [inferior and morally deficient](#). For example, black males are disproportionately more likely to be [enrolled in special education courses](#) versus gifted courses in the K-12 education system. They are also less likely than their white peers to have their [race and gender associated with being intelligent or academic achievement](#).

For black male athletes, the [dumb jock stereotype is commonplace](#) and reinforced by the fact that they are more likely to be [admitted to college academically underprepared](#), more likely to be enrolled in [perceived "easy" or less rigorous courses](#) so that they can remain eligible to play sports, and [less likely to graduate](#) compared to their peers.

Despite this [academic neglect](#), black males continue to [constitute a majority of the participants on football and men's basketball teams, 55 and 56 percent, respectively, in big-time college sports](#). This highlights how they are [more valued for their athletic abilities](#) than for their academic promise.

This is what enables sports organizers and coaches to present college sports to black males as a viable way to make it in society.

The view of black males as super-human is present in arenas other than sports. It lurks behind many of the [police killings of black men](#) of late. This was highlighted in the infamous police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, when police officer Darren Wilson described the 18-year-old Brown as a ["demon" and "Hulk Hogan"-like](#).

Beyond the glitz and glamour

This type of pathological labeling applies in football. Black males' physicality is [exploited](#). For example, at the University of Alabama, where head coach Nick Saban is paid [US\\$11.1 million per year](#), black males represent [80 percent of the starters on the team](#). Yet, not only are black male student-athletes [not equitably compensated](#) based on market value for their athletic abilities, they also [graduate at a lower rate](#) – 59 percent – compared to 71 percent for their athlete peers and 67 percent for the general student body. Thus, they are simultaneously [academically underserved and athletically exploited](#) in terms of economic compensation.

With both stereotypes – subhuman and superhuman – in play, black males within sport and beyond are [systematically dehumanized](#) and consequently deprived of the love, care and attention that should come with their humanity.

The [large amounts of money](#) being generated in college football, along with the increased commercialization and celebrity flair associated with the sport, creates an illusion of fun, American grit and a unique brand of entertainment.

But behind all the glitz and glamour are factors that contribute to the [exploitation of athletes](#). These factors also result in undetected or undeserved – and entirely preventable – [long-term health problems](#) such as depression and high blood pressure, and in some instances, [deaths](#).

The need for reform

In terms of medical coverage, colleges are [not required to assist college athletes](#) beyond their athletic eligibility years even though injuries they suffer in college can affect them for the rest of their lives.

Over the past several decades, organizations such as the [National College Players' Association](#) have [advocated](#) for increased medical coverage and protections for college athletes. The founder of the NCPA, former UCLA player Ramogi Huma, established the advocacy group after he [discovered](#) that the NCAA prevented UCLA from paying medical expenses from injuries that occurred during summer workouts.

University of Maryland President Wallace Loh recently stated that the university had accepted ["legal and moral" responsibility](#) in the death of Maryland football player Jordan McNair. That's a step in the right direction.

An acceptance of responsibility is not enough, though. Serious systemic reform and a change in culture is needed. These changes must address racism and racist stereotypes that lead to mistreatment of black athletes.

U.S. society must also confront its unhealthy obsession with sports glory, commercialism and overall neglect of athletes' rights and well-being.

One important reform that should be adopted immediately to benefit all college athletes is to require all medical staff for teams be independent from coaches' and athletic department authority. This was something reportedly [proposed and rejected](#) at the University of Maryland.

There should also be an advocacy group separate from the NCAA to help college athletes negotiate with the colleges they attend for improved working conditions related to safety and their overall well-being. This includes an improved academic experience, mental health support, and help with making the transition to their life after sports.

NOTE: Images not in the original