

Workers of the Court, Unite!

The case for college athlete unionization

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This isn't just some low-stakes extracurricular

- “On average, Pac-12 athletes are spending 50 hours a week on athletics during season.” – 2015 Pac-12 study
- College sports is big business.
 - The NCAA alone now brings in over 1 billion dollars a year.
 - CU Boulder reported \$85,084,427 revenue for FY2018.
 - 38 NCAA schools brought in over \$100million.
 - CU Boulder's new football coach signed a 5-year, nearly \$15million contract.
 - Plus there are 8 assistant football coaches making \$225,000+/year.
 - Outback Bowl's head exec makes over \$1million for one game a year.

College athletes' rights are being trampled

- Denied the right to even attempt to bargain for compensation.
- Lack of adequate long-term health care for injuries that come from their labor on the court.
- Lack of robust protections against retaliation for submitting grievances or otherwise trying to change their working conditions.
- Denied the right to have a real say in their working conditions.
 - Denied the right to leave for a new employer (school) without current employer's consent.
 - Little power to fit their sporting activities with their other (academic) needs.

Solution: Unionization

- Recognize the wins made by professional sports unions.
 - College and pro athletes are the core of their multi-billion dollar industries.
 - Both risk their long-term bodily integrity for the entertainment of others.
 - They're known far beyond their own circles, often across the the country.
- Learn strategies and recognize hurdles from graduate worker unions.
 - Continuity is hard; both groups spend only ~4-5 years on campus.
 - Both groups are necessary for their departments to function.
 - Asking for rights has failed; "Power concedes nothing without a demand."

Pro athlete unions protect athletes' rights

- Free agency in MLB came from Curt Flood and the MLBPA struggling against MLB orthodoxy.
- Significant changes in NFL practice rules happened in 2011 thanks to NFLPA fighting for player safety.
- NBAPA won strong pension plans for retired players.
- WNBPA fought against unjust fines for protesting racist violence by police officers, defending athlete's rights to have a voice.
- All professional unions give athletes opportunity to be fairly compensated for their labor.

Graduate workers' strategies

- Negative media attention – illustrates school's misguided priorities.
- Public shows of strength – builds solidarity and worker-consciousness.
- Work stoppages – demonstrates the critical role of the workers.
- And ironically, evidence suggests schools with unionized graduate workers have better relationships with their advisors! There must be some significant source of resistance to worker uniting...

College athletes path forward?

- Recognize themselves as workers as well as students.
- Publicly share struggles/injustices to build wider support.
- Build worker consciousness with public demonstrations.

Shut. It. Down.

Our path forward?

- Recognize that inaction is a choice to support the status quo.
- Publicly support your school's athletes, and college athletes generally.
- When the time comes, walk that picket line.

We can't lead this fight – the fight must be led by the athletes – but we can't ignore our place in it. We must ask ourselves if it's just to support a multi-billion dollar industry that is unwilling to pay its most vital workers. The answer is clearly no. What will you do?

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