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College Athletics and the Exploitation of the Black Body

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College Athletics and the Exploitation of the Black Body

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Action Research

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August 10, 2022

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Abstract

The Black body has gone through different forms of exploitation in the United States in the centuries since the first enslaved Africans were brought to this land. Although chattel slavery has long been “abolished,” it has taken a new form in college athletics. While most scholarship college football and basketball players are Black and produce millions of dollars of revenue for large and small universities, the players are not compensated and did not see a dime of it come to them. When I say that college athletics is a modern form of slavery, one might find that statement confusing because college athletes certainly do not go through all of the trials and tribulations that enslaved Black people went through in the American South. Yet, there are many horrifying parallels between the two systems, and I examined these parallels with my study. This was done through one-on-one interviews with current and former student-athletes, administrators who work in athletic departments, and journalists covering college sports. Despite the legislation that was passed by the NCAA, which allows college athletes to profit off of their Name, Image, and Likeness (N.I.L.), we still witness a system that enables college athletes to be exploited for billions of dollars.

Keywords: Black, Athlete, Exploitation, Compensation

Introduction and Social Location

I grew up around college athletics. I had two cousins who went played college basketball, one of which had a career considered by many as one of the most outstanding careers of a women's college basketball player ever. My love of college athletics goes back more profoundly than that, however. My mom and uncle both went to law school at the University of Michigan and became huge Michigan fans. It was through them that my love for Michigan football and basketball began. Even though I had never been to Ann Arbor, I found myself back in elementary school watching or keeping track of every Michigan football game every Saturday from August until January. Even now, 20+ years later, I still find myself living and dying with every snap of the ball when college football season rolls around.

For the first 19 or so years, college sports was just a passion, but nothing I thought could tie into my professional life. This changed in January of 2018 when a friend of mine approached me about starting a local blog here in San Diego that would cover various stories in our community. He was looking for someone to cover sports and wondered if I would be interested in working with him. I, of course, said "yes", and a few weeks later, I was the USD and Padres beat writer for the *San Diego Chronicle*. I started out covering all USD sports, but began to focus solely on USD Men's Basketball within a year. Around eight months later, I was approached by a Michigan football beat writer to cover recruiting for his site called *The Wolverine Lounge*. For two years, from January 2018 until December 2019, I felt like I was living the dream, covering college football and basketball, two sports I had loved ever since I was a kid. And on the football side, I had the chance to cover a team that I had grown up watching and was a massive two-year part of my identity. Both opportunities led me to have the chance to work professionally in athletics as a communications assistant for the University of San Diego Athletics. Through my

love for college athletics, I began to notice an alarming trend within the landscape of college athletics. I saw that the teams, particularly when it comes to football and basketball, were majority black. Yet, the NCAA was not allowing athletes to keep the millions of dollars they earned for their universities. Any athlete or athlete's family who accepted any payment from a sponsor, agent, or another party would cause their school to be sanctioned, and that player would have their accomplishments taken away. The Michigan Basketball scandal in the late 90's/early 2000s and the Reggie Bush USC scandal in the mid to late 2000s are two of the most glaring examples. Neither of the scandals likely exist outside of an unjust system in which athletes cannot reap any of the millions (or in some cases of billions) of dollars earned for their schools. Because of this system, the comparison between college athletics and slavery is not a new one.

Literature Review

My study began with Howard Bryant's book *The Heritage: Black Athletes, A Divided America and the Politics of Patriotism*. Written in 2018, in the wake of the Trump presidency and Colin Kaepernick's protest, Bryant examines Black athletes' role in social justice movements and the burden that black athletes have to carry. While focusing on professional athletes, Bryant also highlights college protests, such as what occurred at the University of Missouri in 2015, with members of the football team refusing to practice until students' demands were met following the death of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (Bryant, 2018, p.199). He argues that veil of amateurism that the NCAA cites as one reason colleges can refuse to play players is a lie. Bryant even claims that what we see in modern-day college athletics is a modern-day form of slavery. "The players knew that they were the same mules as their ancestors with nicer sneakers, better dorms, more perks (Bryant, p. 198).

I continued by looking at the actual numbers behind what a college athlete is worth. One argument often cited as a reason for not paying athletes is that there isn't enough money to go around. One fundamental question for my study is: Is that the case? I came across a paper co-written by a group of professors at Northwestern University and a professor at the University of Michigan. This was very interesting to me. A group of Northwestern Football players in 2015 filed a lawsuit with the NLRB, claiming that they were not student-athletes but employees and deserved compensation. In the paper, they broke down the numbers behind college athletics. The study took into account both "Power Five" (schools in the Big Ten, SEC, Pac-12, ACC, and Big East) and "Group of Five" schools, also known as non-power five schools. It is also considered a school like Utah that switched from five conferences to a power five conference in 2012. It noted the amount of money that conferences make from their various TV deals and how each school and conference divide up the revenue. The Big Ten, for instance, made nearly \$760 million in 2018 and distributed \$50 million to each school. (Garthwaite, Keener, Notowidigdo, and Ozminkowski, 2020). Most of this revenue came from various TV contracts for football and basketball. A key element of my action study will be arguing against the idea that there isn't enough money to pay the players, so this information will be valuable beyond estimation as I proceed with my study.

Another critical element of my study will be the racial dynamics within the college athletics system. For this, I came across a study titled "How the NCAA's Empire Robs Predominantly Black Athletes of Billions in Generational Wealth," written by Ramogi Huma and professors from various schools around the nation, registered in the summer of 2020. Here we see a breakdown of the racial statistics of college football and men's basketball players and the racial statistics of leadership in universities. The paper also examines graduation rates for black

football and basketball players, leading to another question guiding my study. What else can be done to compensate college athletes outside of financial compensation? Are there more schools can do to ensure that athletes have the skills to survive after their playing careers are over? There is also the question about the communities that these players come from. Very little is being done in communities for black athletes, which is part of a larger exploitation conversation. Should these schools do more in the various communities these athletes come from instead of scooping them out for their athletic talent?

Finally, I wanted to examine the role of Black athletes, protests, and racial change in the United States, to which I consulted the book *Raise a Fist, Take a Knee Race and the Illusion of Progress in Modern Sports* by John Feinstein which was published in 2021. Throughout the work, Feinstein interviews Black athletes who have been at the forefront of social change in the United States and how sports and social justice movements have gone hand and hand throughout American history. Early on, Feinstein draws a parallel between the reaction of white media in 1968 when John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists during the national anthem after winning gold and bronze during the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City and the reaction of white media when Colin Kaepernick began taking a knee during the national anthem before San Francisco 49er games. Feinstein also notes how the consequences for both were highly similar, with Carlos and Smith having their medals stripped and Colin Kaepernick being blackballed from the NFL (Feinstein, 2021 p. 28). The main reason why I felt the need to use Feinstein's work as a part of my action research is that throughout the book, he makes the argument that all of these issues (protest, athlete compensation, stereotypes of Black athletes) are all connected in the greater fight against racism and white supremacy in the United States. As college athletics

continues to evolve, and player compensation arguments evolve with it, it all has to be put in the context of the social justice in the United States.

Context

There is no doubt that over the last two years, we have seen a dramatic change in the structure of college athletics because of three main factors: conference realignment, the transfer portal, and Name, Image, and Likeness (N.I.L.). Realignment has been a part of college athletics for decades, but we have never seen anything like what has happened over the past year. Last summer, college football fans were stunned when it was announced that Texas and Oklahoma, the two largest Big 12 schools, would leave the Big 12 Conference for the South Eastern Conference in 2025. A year later, folks were even more stunned when it was announced that USC and UCLA would leave the Pac-12 Conference to join the Big Ten Conference in 2024. Why would these schools join another conference across the country? The simple answer is: Money. The TV revenue that UCLA and USC can earn while in the Big Ten is upwards of \$100 million, compared to the \$35 million they made in the Pac 12. While this has undoubtedly been a significant change for college athletics, we won't know its full effect on sports for the next couple of years. The transfer portal and N.I.L. is a different story.

While transfers, just like conference realignment, have always been a part of college sports, the number of athletes in the transfer portal has skyrocketed over the last five years, especially over the previous two years. The transfer portal is a database where college athletes enter their information which alerts other institutions that the player is able to accept of scholarship or be recruiting by other schools. According to the NCAA, 1,583 Division I FBS players entered the transfer portal in 2020, increasing to 2,538 in 2021. We see a similar increase in men's college basketball, where 984 athletes entered the transfer portal in 2020, with 1,692

entering in 2021. In fact, 31% of men's college basketball players joined the transfer portal in 2021. (NCAA, 2022) These numbers are unprecedented for college sports. Because of the large number of players transferring at all times during the season, there have been discussions of having a "transfer period" during the season, similar to the free agency period that exists in American professional sports. One of the main reasons for the increase in transfer activity is the advent of N.I.L., which came into play "legally" on July 1st, 2021. What N.I.L. does is allow current college athletes to profit off of their name, image and likeness by, for example, signing endorsement deals with companies. This allows for some sort of player compensation.

The connection between the transfer portal and N.I.L. is seen in cases such as University of Miami basketball guard Isaiah Wong, who threatened to enter the transfer portal following Miami's surprise journey to the Elite Eight if he did not see his N.I.L. compensation increased. "He had a great season leading his team to the Elite Eight," his agent said to ESPN. "He has seen what incoming Miami Hurricane basketball players are getting in N.I.L. and would like his N.I.L. to reflect that he was a team leader of an Elite Eight team." (Givony & Borzello, 2022) While Wong did not enter the transfer portal, a similar situation was seen in the case of Pittsburgh Wide Receiver Jordan Addison who entered the portal on May 3rd. Once news broke a few days before that he was likely going to be entering the portal, 24/7 Sports reported that the University of Southern California would look to be giving him a \$3 million N.I.L. deal (Nivison, 2022) which led to questions about tampering, including a phone call from Pitt head coach Pat Narduzzi to USC head coach Lincoln Riley. Texas wide receiver Xavier Worthy was reportedly offered a six-figure N.I.L. deal by an unnamed school if he entered the portal (Fisher, 2022). The transfer portal has essentially become a college sports-free agency with N.I.L. as the currency.

The situation has led to a debate about whether this is good for college sports. Critics of the portal and N.I.L. cite that larger schools will now be able to hoard talent by promising lucrative N.I.L. deals to potential transfer targets and recruits. They point to Texas A&M, where head coach Jimbo Fisher put together a historic 2022 football recruiting class, bringing in 30 commits, including eight five-stars, according to 24/7 Sports (24/7, 2022). Although coach Fisher said that N.I.L. had nothing to do with their success, many did not see it as a coincidence that Texas A&M could put together such a stellar recruiting class following the legalization of N.I.L. This led to Alabama head coach Nick Saban calling out his former assistant by remarking to a crowd of Alabama boosters that Texas A&M “bought” their entire recruiting class, which led to a war of words between Fisher and Saban. Within the last year, there have been numerous cases of players receiving “pay for play” deals (which are illegal), and boosters have them disguised as N.I.L. deals. Currently, the NCAA does not have any guardrails to limit how much a player can earn in N.I.L. deals and where that money is coming from. Certain schools have openly talked about how much money they will need from their boosters to remain successful, such as Ohio State football coach Ryan Day, who told a crowd of Ohio State boosters that he would need \$13 million in N.I.L. money to keep his recruiting classes near the top of college football.

Project Rationale

48% of collegiate Division I football players are Black (Semuels 2019). 53.6% of men's Division I college basketball players are Black (Lapchick 2019). These athletes make millions of dollars for their universities and play for head coaches who are paid absurd amounts. Let us examine the case of Alabama football. Alabama's head coach, Nick Saban, is college football's highest-paid coach making \$9.3 million a year. He is considered by most analysts to be the best

coach in college football and, arguably, the greatest coach of all time. He just won his 7th national championship in 2020 and is one of two coaches to win national championships at multiple schools since the inception of the AP Poll in 1936. Alabama's athletic department generated \$164 million in 2019; 59.8% of the revenue came from football (Casagrande, 2020). How much money do you think the players get from this? Nothing. It is the same story in basketball. Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski makes \$8.98 million a year, and Duke basketball generates around \$11.8 million yearly for Duke University (Settimi, 2020). Yet what are the players getting? It is argued that the players receive benefits in the form of a scholarship and sports experiences. Yet, there are two problems with this argument. First, the portion of money that schools spend on scholarships is not proportional to the financial benefits generated by the athletes. Second, it is difficult for the vast majority of these athletes to monetize their educational experiences in the future since very, very few of them will actually be able to build future wealth solely from professional sports. The bottom line thus is that these athletes, who are majority black and brown, are having their labor unfairly extracted under the current system. This is why the current system can be thought of as a new form of slavery. These athletes, who are majority black and brown, have their labor taken advantage of and get nothing in return.

Unlike professional sports, there is no way for college athletes to unionize. In 2014, a group of Northwestern football players attempted to unionize under the guise that they were University employees. Following an intense legal battle, the N.L.R.B. (National Labor Relations Board) ruled that the players were not employees but students first. The Board ruled that if players were granted collective bargaining rights, it would have an impact that could cause a loss of stability in labor relations between players and the N.C.A.A. (Strauss, 2015). This loss destroyed any chance of college athletes' attempt at unionizing and having any form of collective

bargaining power. However, along with the NCAA ruling about N.I.L., the winds may be changing. Recently, the N.L.R.B released a memo stating that college athletes are student employees and could potentially have the right to unionize. This came to fruition on July 22, 2022, when Penn State football players announced they would become the first college athletes to unionize.

Research Design

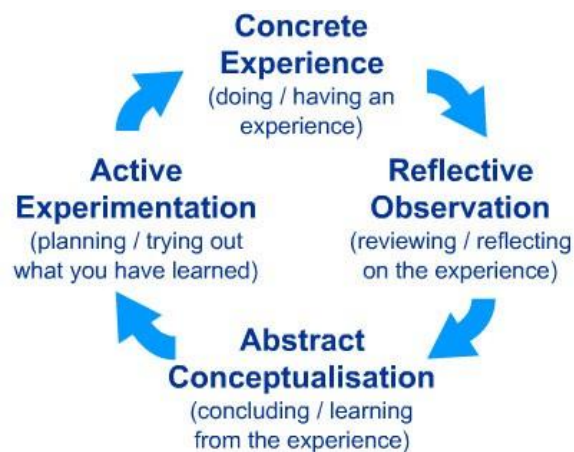
My research cycles were divided into three parts, the first being a focus group discussion with a diverse group of journalists who work and cover college sports. I used my past connections through my previous work in journalism to bring this group together for a conversation over Zoom. The second cycle consisted of one-on-one interviews with current and former N.C.A.A athletes, mainly football and basketball players. Most of the athletes interviewed during this cycle were Black, with a few exceptions, and all of whom were male. The final cycle consisted of one-on-one interviews with administrators who work in the landscape of college athletics. All participants in this cycle were white. Each cycle consisted of five questions depending on the participant's identity. Each interview and focus group was semi-structured to give room for additional questions that could potentially come up based on participant responses. Each focus group and interview was recorded with the participant's consent, and the recordings of said meetings were stored on a password-protected computer.

Data Collection

For my action research, I used Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, given that the goal of my research was to center on the experience of the Black athlete. Kolb's model (see figure 1 below) consists of active experimentation, concrete experience, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization. I felt that this model would give me the best chance to center on

Black athletes and allow me to use qualitative data such as emotions and tone of voice. I also believed that this would allow for open dialogue and would create a brave space in the focus groups and interview sessions that would take place.

Figure 1



Cycle 1

Given this context, I began with my first cycle, a series of interviews with a diverse group of journalists working in the landscape of college athletics. This group included media members who work at various outlets throughout the sports world, but most of whom primarily write about college sports. The intention of speaking with this group was to get their ideas about the overall state of college athletics. The first question I asked was about N.I.L. and whether or not they expected it to become legal when it did. The consensus among this group was that, they were not surprised cases such as O'Bannon v. NCAA and National Collegiate Athletic Association v. Alston had begun to strip away the NCAA's idea that college athletes were amateurs. Between those rulings and California Governor Gavin Newsom's Fair to Play Act which was signed into law in 2019, everyone agreed that the NCAA's amateurism bubble was on the verge of bursting. One journalist mentioned that this is all happening while other conversations about the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) breaking away from the NCAA entirely are happening. They brought

up the recent comments from Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith, who said, “Those schools who have committed the 85 scholarships and more, in the FBS in football underneath the CFP umbrella, are different. And that difference needs to be recognized.” (Fortuna, 2022).

From there, the conversation moved to a brief discussion of intellectual property and trademark issues that could come about due to N.I.L. and questions about whether schools are doing enough to educate their athletes about these issues. One of the points brought up in the space was about how professional athletes may not have to think about this as an issue because they have extra support around them that college athletes do not have. As the conversation continued, I asked the group about N.I.L. and oversight. One person remarked that right now, college athletics is like the “Wild Wild West”, with no group regulating what players can receive in N.I.L. deals. However, the group concluded that the NCAA is a morally bankrupt institution (one person even used the word “corrupt”) and that the NCAA is in no place to provide regulation for N.I.L, despite their attempts to do so. Shortly after the Isiah Wong and Jordan Addison cases, the NCAA did release governance and attempted to prove new guidelines when it came to N.I.L. From the NCAA’s press release: “The guidance was developed by a task force of national leaders with student-athlete opportunity at the forefront of discussions. Specifically, the guidance defines as a booster any third-party entity that promotes an athletics program, assists with recruiting or assists with providing benefits to recruits, enrolled student-athletes or their family members.” (Brutlag Hosick, 2022). The idea that the NCAA had “student-athlete opportunity” at the forefront drew some laughs from the group, given that it does not appear that has the NCAA ever had in interest of student-athletes at the forefront of their discussions.

The question was then asked, if not the NCAA, then who should provide oversight? The first point was if it should be up to the states where the Universities are located to be the ones to

provide regulations. One person mentioned that states like California and Michigan had either passed or planned to pass N.I.L. legislation before the NCAA made it legal. The other idea proposed was to have each conference offer regulations that apply only to the schools in that conference. This seems like the more realistic option given the direction that college sports are going with realignment and the idea of “superconferences” becoming more likely every day. While there was some debate over which model would work best (states vs. conferences), everyone agreed that the NCAA should not oversee player compensation.

As the conversation wrapped up, the final points were about player compensation in general, whether N.I.L. was even enough, or if schools should pay their athletes directly. In most instances, the money players earn from N.I.L. is not from the school but from boosters and wealthy alums connected to the school. These boosters set up what is known as “collectives,” and the players receive compensation from these collectives. While there have been rumors about certain schools setting up “pay for play” programs, there is still no direct evidence that the money players receive comes from the schools. Because the schools are still making hundreds of millions of dollars off the labor of these players, the question was asked and remains, “Is N.I.L. enough for players, or should the schools be doing more such as paying players directly?” One response to this question in the group was that paying players directly could open up another massive can of worms about player compensation. Should all athletes be paid equally regardless of how much revenue their sport makes for their school? What about female athletes whose sports may not be revenue producing but are still putting in the time and labor similar to their male counterparts? The group believed this is one of the many questions facing the future of college sports.

Cycle 2

Following those conversations, I moved on to my next cycle, a series of one-on-one interviews with current and former college athletes. These interviews were done over Zoom, and those involved were given pseudonyms. The purpose of speaking one-on-one with these participants was to provide them with a chance to tell their stories about what it's like being a college athlete. The first question asked to any former athletes was how they felt about N.I.L. and if they believed their athlete experience would've been different had N.I.L. existed when they were college athletes. I was struck by the answer of one of the participants. This former college basketball player spoke about how different his family life could have been had he been allowed to make money while playing college basketball. He then went into detail about how he hopes for his younger brother, a current high school athlete, that he'll have the N.I.L. opportunities he never had.

Another athlete, a former college quarterback and highly sought-after recruit, talked about the recruiting process pre-N.I.L. and how players he knew were promised gifts and pay-for-play deals if they committed to a particular institution. Although he did not receive any benefits as a recruit, he did talk about once he showed up as a freshman and won a big game, he could have anything he wanted from anyone on or around campus. "That's so much for an 18-year-old to handle," he said. "It's thrilling because you feel like you have the world at your fingertips, but terrifying at the same time."

In talking to former athletes about the current state of N.I.L., they were happy that college athletes were finally getting a piece of the pie. Still, one participant expressed frustration about former athletes who have had their accomplishments stripped away because of "violations." "Does Reggie Bush get his Heisman back? Can Michigan's Fab Five banners go

back up?” When asked if schools are doing enough to support their athletes, one remarked to me that it seems like the only times schools care about their athletes, particularly their black athletes, outside of sports is when black trauma becomes impossible to ignore, much like it did during the summer of 2020. All agreed that schools need to have a N.I.L structure in place, not only for the benefit of the athletes but for the athletic programs to remain competitive.

When talking to current college athletes, the focus remained on allowing them to tell their own stories about their athletic experiences. The first question was about their views on N.I.L and whether they think it’s best for college athletes. Players said yes, but some were concerned about how quickly things have progressed in the last year and believed that some athletes were too eager to jump into N.I.L. deals. “Once you sign your name on the dotted line, whoever is a part of that collective or company ‘owns’ a part of you,” said one player. “You can’t let someone control you just because you were in a rush to get your bag.” While I did not ask players if they had signed any deals yet (for their confidentiality), I did ask about their schools’ N.I.L. approach, and I heard different answers depending on the school. Some players, particularly ones from larger institutions, have had an easier time finding out what deals are available to them through collectives and boosters. In contrast, others have been forced to seek out those deals independently. This has been frustrating for some athletes because they believe their schools could do more to set up collectives with their wealthy alumni. “There really isn’t a way for players to find deals through the school,” said one current college baseball player. I noticed he was wearing gear, suggesting he had signed one deal with a company. He confirmed that he had, but he had to facilitate the deal himself.

For athletes who felt like their schools were not doing enough regarding N.I.L., I wanted to ask how they felt their institution supported them as an athlete. There were few complaints

about the general student-athlete experience, but the conversation returned to N.I.L. and how certain schools are dropping the ball there. “We don’t have to become a school where our athletic department is throwing bags at recruits to get them to come here, but if we don’t change our approach, we’re going to fall behind.” Finally, I asked about the racial dynamics of college sports. The Black players indeed agreed that Black bodies are exploited under the current system of college sports, even with N.I.L. “The pandemic really shed light on how the N.C.A.A. views Black athletes. We say it with the #notncaaproperty movement right before the 2021 NCAA Tournament. [Mark] Emmert (the president of the N.C.A.A.) basically said, ‘we’ll address your concerns after you play this tournament that will make us a bunch of money.’”

Cycle 3

The third and final cycle involved one-on-one interviews with athletic administrators. Like cycle two, this took place over Zoom, and participants were given pseudonyms. This cycle was closer to the goal of cycle one, to get their view on the state of college athletics and their school's position on N.I.L. The first question asked to each participant was about their school's position on N.I.L. and if they had a structure. As was discussed during the session with the athletes, some schools had done more to put their athletes in a position to sign N.I.L. deals than others. When I asked about their lack of movement on N.I.L., answers varied. One administrator talked about taking a longer-term approach with N.I.L. “What’s happening now is not sustainable in college athletics,” he said. “Eventually, I believe that this system of zero regulations will burst, and these schools that are throwing money around will get hit with some type of punishment.”

When I asked if there was any fear that his school may be left behind, he was adamant that there would be some intervention at either the state or federal level. When other

administrators were asked about their lack of approach to N.I.L., others put the ball in the corner of their alumni. They cited that it's really not up to the school to put together N.I.L. collectives on their own but to work in tandem with their alums and boosters to create pathways for players to earn money. When asked if the school had been in any contact with alumni to start a collective, the response was, "No comment." From there, the interviews shifted to discussing other changes in college athletics, such as conference realignment. Most administrators were quite hesitant to discuss this topic, and I believe it was because they wanted to keep their moves close to the vest. With the daily changes in college sports, from realignment to conferences moving towards a model without divisions, there are new opportunities for schools to take advantage of said changes every day. For example, until it got reported on the day it was announced, no one (except the parties involved) knew about USC and UCLA's decision to join the Big Ten. So much about what is happening in college sports is a leverage game, and there is nothing that an administrator will do that could risk them losing said leverage.

Takeaways and Recommendations

Following the three cycles, I began to code through the data and draw takeaways from the various conversations. One of my first takeaways from the athlete conversations was about how comfortable the players, especially the Black players, felt talking about their experiences early on. Too often, they thought they were not in control of their narrative. The only time they get asked about their lives outside of sports is usually during some sort of "evaluation" process, such as during recruitment or the draft if they go professional. But my goal was to create a space where they felt they could be their most authentic selves without feeling on trial. From the stories I heard, I believed that I did just that.

Although I did cycles with journalists and administrators, the primary purpose of this action research was to center the players and shed light on the unjust system of college athletics. I also wanted to create a space where the players felt comfortable being both vulnerable and emotional. So much about Black masculinity is about being tough and never showing any emotion. For years, both hip-hop and sports culture were about being “a real ni**a,” which meant that you could never cry and never show any weakness. Only recently have we seen a shift in this. In 2018, following his trade from the Toronto Raptors, NBA player Demar DeRozan opened up about his mental health struggles following his trade from the team that drafted him and a city that treated him like family. “We all got feelings...all of that. Sometimes...it gets the best of you, where times everything in the whole world’s on top of you.” (Conway, 2018). While this was met with some ridicule by the internet, many applauded Demar for his openness to open up about his struggles, and we’ve seen hundreds of Black male athletes do the same since. By centering Black athletes in my research, I hope to be part of a changing conversation about Black masculinity and Black mental health.

The second key takeaway was the players realizing the power they had to speak up on how this issue relates to race. Black players noted they felt empowered by the example of Black athletes such as Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James, who have not been afraid to speak out about racism, even if they will receive criticism for it (or, in the case of Kaepernick, cost him his career). Black male and female athletes have always been at the forefront of social change in the United States. As I’m writing this, news broke that the legendary Boston Celtics center Bill Russell has passed away at the age of 88. While his achievements on the court were beyond spectacular in their own right, it was his work off the court as a social justice pioneer that will forever be his most incredible legacy. He was one of the first Black athletes to use their athletic

platform to fight for Black Americans' civil and human rights. The Black players who participated in my action research believed that Black athletes have a duty to be a part of social change in the United States.

Another takeaway I had was the constant unknown that is college athletics because of all the changes that are happening daily. When I began my IRB proposal in the Spring of 2021, there was no N.I.L., no significant discussions of conference realignment, no discussion of a transfer period, and now this is all that's talked about in college sports. Because so much of this is new, I think that all the participant groups are still very unsure about where college athletics is going. Are we moving towards a three or four superconference model on the football side? What about smaller conferences? Will there be some type of promotion and relegation like is seen in European Soccer? What happens to Olympic sports? These are all questions that are being asked by folks in and around college athletics, and we simply don't know the answer.

The most important policy recommendation is that there needs to be a N.I.L. structure at all institutions with an athletic department. Departments need to work hand in hand with their alumni base to set up collectives and allow players to establish relationships which would then lead to players making N.I.L. dollars. Any collective setup, however, must be player focused, and those promising N.I.L. dollars to players must be good for it. We're already seeing cases where players are promised X amount of N.I.L. dollars if they commit to a particular school, only to show up at that school and realize that those who said they would pay the player were lying. In cases like this, N.I.L. is focused not on the player but on the institution. Boosters and alums doing favors for their institutions while leaving the players hung out to dry is another form of exploitation. Any conversation between athletic departments and boosters/alums about N.I.L. collectives must include the players and their best interests. Not only do these collectives need to

exist, but departments must also communicate to their current and future athletes that there is a pathway for them to make money while playing their sport at the said institution.

With N.I.L., certain schools will be more comfortable setting up collectives and paying players than others, and I believe that is completely fine. At Texas A&M, a football coach openly talked to recruits about how the boosters who sit in the suits at Kyle Field (the home football stadium for Texas A&M) will pay big money for those players to come to College Station. Not every school, certainly smaller ones like the University of San Diego, has the resources to pay every single athlete that comes to the university. But nearly every school has corporate partnerships, its alums (some of whom are immensely wealthy), and schools can establish relationships between their athletes and these partners. It's going to look different at each school, but there will always be ways for institutions to create pathways for their athletes (the majority of whom are Black) to make money from N.I.L., and it's up to the schools to make that happen.

Limitations

As my action research began, my most significant limitation was time, mainly due to the IRB process, which started in the Summer of 2021. At that time, there were changes in the process that were intended to help expedite the process for us all, but for many of us slowed us down quite a bit. When I created my initial IRB application, I created it under the category of "Non-Human Subjects" because I believed that it would fit under that category, given its guidelines. When my initial submission was returned, I submitted it again under the "Expedited" review category. Despite submitting again in November 2021, my submissions were replaced multiple times, even as the Spring semester of 2022 began. Ultimately, my IRB submission was not approved until March of 2022, which put me behind the 8-ball regarding reaching out to participants.

My second limitation was attempting to keep up with the daily changes in college athletics that affected my project. While gathering the background data for the Context for my project, whenever there was a new college football story on ESPN, I noted it in case it became relevant to my action research. When news first broke during the summer of 2021 that Texas and Oklahoma were looking to make a move to the SEC, I knew it was a big deal but did not think that it would have any bearing on my project since conference realignment wasn't a topic I would be discussing. However, as more and more changes began happening in the landscape of the sport, I noticed connections between all these issues and realized how they all applied to my project.

Conclusion

Throughout my action research, I overcame numerous obstacles and challenges, the first being the constant changes in college sports. While working on my IRB proposal, the N.I.L. ruling was handed down by the N.C.A.A. While this was long overdue and needed for the players, it did force me to go back and make changes to my initial proposal. When the ruling first came out, I even considered completely changing my topic because I worried that my topic would become moot because players can now make money. As it turns out, the introduction of N.I.L. did not make my topic moot because it is unclear whether, in the long run, N.I.L. will eradicate the structural inequities that plague college athletics. Moreover, another objective of this project was to center the Black athlete experience and give players a chance to be vulnerable and emotional. I needed to create a space where in particular Black athletes could do so, and I believe I did that. I also believe it is vital to change the stigma about Black masculinity that came up during the conversations. It is necessary to create spaces where Black men can feel emotional

and don't have to hide behind a facade of being tough. Ultimately, we are seeing more spaces where Black men can feel this way, and I'm proud that I was able to create one of those spaces.

While it's clear that improvements are being made when it comes to athlete compensation at the collegiate level, there are still so many unanswered questions about where college sports are going. Will there be federal or state legislation to police N.I.L.? What does the N.C.A.A. look like in the next five years with president Mark Emmert on his way out? And perhaps the biggest question on the table: What about female sports? 2022 celebrates the 50th anniversary of Title XI, which demands equal treatment for both men's and women's athletes. Yet, while the N.C.A.A. claims it is making strides to create a more equitable system in college athletics, critics aren't so sure. They cite the disparity in facilities and equipment between men and women at their respective basketball tournaments in 2021. Due to time limitations, my most considerable regret with this project is that I could not include women's sports as a part of my study, especially Black female athletes as participants. Despite that, I believe that the conversation around N.I.L. and compensation must include large, revenue-producing sports such as football and men's basketball and non-revenue and female sports.

I chose this topic because I love college sports, especially football, and basketball. As I stated in my Introduction, my fanhood for my college teams is a massive part of who I am. This is a major source of motivation for me: to study how the system can be made more equitable for the athletes who give up so much of themselves to play the sports that I love. I hope that this research, can be a part of the greater conversations and initiatives that improve the lived experience and futures of Black athletes in the United States for years to come.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

University of San Diego Institutional Review Board

Research Participant Adult Consent Form

For the research study entitled: College Athletics and the Exploitation of the Black Body

I. Purpose of the research study

Nathan Wiggins is a student in the School Of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he/she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is: To study how, or in what ways, modern-day college athletics perpetuates the exploitation of the Black Body.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a one-on-one interview regarding the state of college athletics, how the

current system allows Black athletes to be exploited and how the current changes that college sports are going through still isn't enough to support student-athletes. These interviews will be private and you will not be interacting with other groups during this interview session. Please note that all sessions will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be used for this project only. Participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym (fake name) to be used during our discussion. If your actual name is used during the interview, it will be deleted during the analysis process.

Your participation in this study will take approximately 60 minutes/1 hour. III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

a) Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day:

San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

University of San Diego counselor on call: 619-260-4655

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better

understand how modern day college athletics perpetuates the exploration of the Black body that has existed in the United States for hundreds of years.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

The information or materials you provide will be cleansed of all identifiers by Nathan Wiggins.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either: 1) Nathan Wiggins

USD Email: nwiggins@san Diego.edu

2) Dr. Kecia Brown

USD Email: keciabrown@san Diego.ed

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant: Date: Name of Participant (Printed): Signature of Investigator: Date:

Zoom Video/Audio Recording: Additional Consent

A video recording will be made of you during your participation in this study. The videorecordings will only be used for data collection purposes and transcript analysis. Records will not be shared and will be deleted upon completion of the project.

In addition to consenting to participate in the research study, you may choose to sign or NOT sign the statement below.

I hereby give permission to the Zoom video recording for this research study to be used only for data collection purposes. I understand that this Zoom video recording will not be publicly released or shared and will be deleted upon completion of the project. 1) I hereby give permission for the video recording made for this research study to be also used for professional meetings, such as being shown to professors and researchers at a scientific conference.

2) I hereby give permission for the video recording made for this research study to be also used for educational purposes, such as being shown to students in a classroom or available for viewing by students via a password protected file which cannot be copied or downloaded.

Signature of Research Participant:

Appendix B

Request Letter to Athletes

[For Black and non-Black NCAA Athletes]

To whom it may concern,

My name is Nathan Wiggins, and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Higher Education Leadership program. One of my graduation requirements is to conduct an Action Research project, which I am conducting under the supervision of Dr. Kecia Brown. I am currently starting my Action Research on the College Athletics and the Exploitation of the Black Body. I am emailing to ask for support in recruiting participants.

Throughout my project, I hope to speak with current and former college athletes to gain their thoughts on the current state of college athletics and how it relates to the history of exploitation of Black bodies that goes back to slavery. This will be done through a series of one-on-one interviews. Although the focus of the study is Black athletes, I would like to speak to non-Black athletes as well to gain their perspective on the issue. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. These interviews will be private one-on-one interviews and the participants will be audio and video recorded.

In my study, I will use the following process to engage my participants:

Phases in Study	Activity	Time Commitment
Cycle I	One-one-one interviews with current and former college athletes to talk to them about their experiences and see their perspective on the recent changes in college sports with the advent of Name Image Likeness (N.I.L.) and the transfer portal.	60 minutes

Participation in this study will take a total of about 60 minutes over a 2-month period.

If potential participants have any questions, please have them contact me through email at nwiggins@san Diego.edu or Dr. Kecia Brown at keciabrown@san Diego.edu. Thank you so much for your support!

Appendix C

Request Letter to Journalists

[For Journalists]

To whom it may concern,

My name is Nathan Wiggins, and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Higher Education Leadership program. One of my graduation requirements is to conduct an Action Research project, which I am conducting under the supervision of Dr. Kecia Brown. I am currently starting my Action Research on the College Athletics and the Exploitation of the Black Body. I am emailing to ask for support in recruiting participants.

Throughout my project, I hope to speak with people who have covered college sports from a journalist perspective, to gain their thoughts on the current state of college athletics and how it relates to the history of exploitation of Black bodies that goes back to slavery. This will be done through a series of one-on-one interviews. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. These interviews will be private one-on-one interviews and the participants will be audio and video recorded.

In my study, I will use the following process to engage my participants:

Phases in Study	Activity	Time Commitment
Cycle I	One-one-one interviews with journalists who have worked in the landscape of college sports and have seen things change drastically in the last year with Name Image Likeness (N.I.L.) and the transfer portal.	60 minutes

Participation in this study will take a total of about 60 minutes over a 2-month period.

If potential participants have any questions, please have them contact me through email at nwiggins@san Diego.edu or Dr. Kecia Brown at keciabrown@san Diego.edu. Thank you so much for your support!

Appendix D

Request Letter to Administrators

[For Administrators]

To whom it may concern,

My name is Nathan Wiggins, and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Higher Education Leadership program. One of my graduation requirements is to conduct an Action Research project, which I am conducting under the supervision of Dr. Kecia Brown. I am currently starting my Action Research on the College Athletics and the Exploitation of the Black Body. I am emailing to ask for support in recruiting participants.

Throughout my project, I hope to speak with university administrators focused on collegiate sport to gain their thoughts on the current state of college athletics and how it relates to the history of exploitation of Black bodies that goes back to slavery. This will be done through a series of one-on-one interviews. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. These interviews will be private one-on-one interviews and the participants will be audio and video recorded.

In my study, I will use the following process to engage my participants:

Phases in Study	Activity	Time Commitment
Cycle I	One-one-one interviews with university administrators who have worked in the landscape of college sports and have seen things change drastically in the last year with Name Image Likeness (N.I.L.) and the transfer portal.	60 minutes

Participation in this study will take a total of about 60 minutes over a 2-month period.

If potential participants have any questions, please have them contact me through email at nwiggins@san Diego.edu or Dr. Kecia Brown at keciabrown@san Diego.edu. Thank you so much for your support!