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Drake Group Supports NLRB Ruling in Favor of Athletes at Northwestern

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WEST HAVEN, CONN. --The Drake Group, a group of faculty members from colleges around the country, said today it supports a National Labor Relations Board ruling that will allow Northwestern University football players to form a union and bargain collectively.

“The stand taken by the Northwestern athletes is a courageous one,” said Drake Group President, Allen Sack, a professor of sport management at the University of New Haven and a player on Notre Dame’s 1966 National Championship football team,

“The NLRB ruling supports the Drake Group stand that student athletes are treated more like professional athletes than like students,” he added.

A regional director of the NLRB in Chicago ruled Wednesday that football players at Northwestern “work” nearly 50 hours a week on football and that they are more like employees than amateur athletes. The ruling resulted from action by the players and the National College Players Association (NCPA).

“The unionization of college athletes is a natural outgrowth of the NCAA’s 1973 decision to replace four- year scholarships like the one I had at Notre Dame with one-year renewable grants that can be canceled for just about any reason,” Sack said.

That means, he said, that like employees, college athletes can be “fired.”

The Drake Group, founded in 1999 to defend academic integrity in higher education from the corrosive aspects of commercialized college sports, believes colleges must create campuses that encourage personal and intellectual growth for all students, and demand excellence and professional integrity from faculty charged with teaching.

This year, the Drake Group has proposed congressional legislation (“CAP Act”) that would cause a radical restructure of the NCAA.

During the past four decades, says Sack, “the NCAA has crafted a scholarship payment system that provides a relatively cheap and steady supply of blue chip athletes for the burgeoning business of collegiate sports and gives coaches the kind of control over them that employers have over employees.”

But unfortunately, when a players’ scholarship is cancelled “because he doesn’t perform well or is injured, his ability to continue as a student is jeopardized,”

Both the Drake Group and the National College Players Association support providing educational and medical benefits for college athletes, although they disagree on the Drake Group's support for granting a limited antitrust exemption to a radically restructured NCAA.

The Drake Group believes an exemption is crucial to bringing excessive spending, on things like coaches' salaries, under control, and funneling TV media revenues back to college athletes in the form of educational and medical benefits, Sack said.

The Drake Group has outlined its stand in proposed federal legislation, called the CAP ACT (highlights below). Among the conditions that would be linked to a proposed antitrust exemption are providing multiyear scholarships (five year maximum) that extend to graduation and which cannot be reduced or canceled on the basis of performance, contribution to a team's success, illness, or injury.

Full cost of college attendance (COA) scholarships would be allowed in the Drake Group proposal for athletes in the NCAA's most competitive division. Enhanced academic standards, as well as remedial education would be mandated. Faculty- only oversight committees on each campus would insure that athletic department rules are consistent with student welfare best practices and an athlete welfare advocate would provide independent legal advice to college athletes at no cost.

Drake Group President Elect David Ridpath said, "The goal of the CAP Act is to maintain athletes as an integral part of the student body and to create a clear line of demarcation between college and professional sport, a goal that the current NCAA has totally abandoned."