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# Is It Time to Start Paying College Athletes?

**T**HE time may have come when we ought to turn big-time college athletics into professional operations and let the profits help support our system of higher education.

Where the profits go now isn't clear, because athletic department finances usually aren't revealed. There must be profits where 50,000 to 100,000 people pay \$15 each to sit and cheer for their teams. Any amateur computer operator can quickly tell you that adds up to a lot of money in a season.

The NCAA continually tries to track down money passed to coaches and players that it hasn't authorized. Sometimes it detects vi-

olations and imposes sanctions on the institutions, punishing people who had nothing to do with it. If guilty parties are winning they may get more pay instead of punishment.

Big-time athletics already is professional in that players are recruited nationwide and hired to play for room, board, tuition, books and fringe benefits. These may include use of a deluxe sports car provided by a generous booster, charge accounts at clothing stores, spending money, etc.

The big bait is the hope of becoming a star and being drafted by an admittedly professional team. But pay in college might be pretty good, too. Last month the Indiana Univer-

sity basketball coach said some colleges were offering high school stars more money to attend college than professors were paid to teach there.

One study by NCAA reported that only 43 percent of the football lettermen at major colleges graduated.

Our over-emphasis on athletics was spotlighted a couple of years ago when Jackie Sherrill was hired to coach at Texas A&M for a salary said to be the highest paid to any university employee in the nation, including university presidents.

Of course, if college athletics should be turned professional a few new coaches might be needed. One of the more amateurish characteris-

tics of big-time ball playing is coaches ranting about ratings and baiting game officials about their decisions. Coaches have been seen making mistakes, too.

The suggestion has been made many times that athletes be paid for their "work" without such distractions as attending classes sometimes and trying to maintain grades between games. Eligibility isn't such a big problem in pro leagues.

Most students attend college to obtain an education. It could benefit all parties if those engaged in athletics were paid salaries above-board and profits from their games were directed to boost salaries of educators and improve quality of education for those who want to learn.