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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# Should Grambling State, Southern, and Other HBCUs Drop Out of Division I Football?

**Hampered by small budgets and larger institutional problems, once-proud HBCU football programs are Division I competitors in name only. Would they be better off dropping down to Division II?**

By Kevin Trahan | May 12 2016, 9:00am



Kelley L Cox-USA TODAY Sports

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Every November, Grambling State and Southern University meet in New Orleans for the Bayou Classic. It's a showcase of everything that fans find compelling about Division I football: a historic in-state rivalry between two like-minded schools with passionate fan bases, steeped in pomp and tradition, showcased on national television.

is the closest they'll get to the big-time college football we're used to watching every Saturday during the fall.

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HBCUs are technically in Division I—alongside Notre Dame and Stanford University and the University of Alabama—but they're playing a different game. According to USA Today, seven of the eight poorest public athletic departments in Division I are either HBCUs or majority black schools. There are 23 college football coaches who made more money than the entire Coppin State athletic department earned last year. Grambling State brings in just \$5.3 million per year—just a tad more than fellow Louisiana-based Division I school LSU pays football coach Les Miles, and a third of what LSU was prepared to pay Miles if it *fired* him last year.

"Grambling is not competing with LSU," Fritz Polite, the director of the sport management program at Shenandoah University, said.

"They are not recruiting the same athletes."

**[Read More: VICE World of Sports Episode Guide: The Bayou Classic](#)**

While schools such as Oregon erect gleaming, multimillion-dollar football training palaces, Grambling State's facilities are so poorly maintained that in 2013 its football players went on strike to protest the problem, highlighted by a dangerously dilapidated weight room that would be unacceptable at most high schools. Other HBCU athletic departments have similarly inadequate infrastructure, and increased sports spending is neither a priority nor a possibility—not when the schools themselves are struggling with falling enrollments,

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Grambling State, Southern, and other HBCU football programs are technically in Division I's Football Championship Subdivision, along with other smaller schools, but even then they don't compete in the FCS playoffs. Rather, due to lack of overall competitiveness, the winners of the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) and Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) meet in their own "bowl game" at the end of the season. "They want to still have that aura of being a Division I school, but they don't have the Division I resources," Polite said.

In short, the black schools are struggling, and essentially segregated from the rest of Division I athletics. And that raises a thorny question: Is it time for them to drop out of Division I altogether?

"There is a very reminiscent, wistful feel about the good old days when there was this greater relevance," said Thomas Aiello, a professor at Valdosta State who wrote a book on the Bayou Classic rivalry. "But [the decline] is very palpable. They know."

Bayou Classic: VICE WORLD OF SPORTS (Trailer)



"Back in the 1960s and 1970s, when Grambling was the black Notre Dame and had more players in the NFL than any other school, they were on TV all the time," Aiello said.

Ironically, it was segregation that turned HBCU football into a major powerhouse. Bigger schools like Alabama and LSU had more resources to attract top recruits, just like they do today. However, they opted to pass on many of the country's best high school players because of their skin color.

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In the 2017 college football recruiting class, 17 of the top 20 players are African-American. A half-century ago, almost all of them would have ended up at HBCUs.

"All those people that normally would have liked to have gone to Florida State, they would have loved to have gone to Florida. Because of segregation, they had to go to black colleges," Polite said. "That talent level produced some very exciting football."

Even after integration, HBCUs continued to attract talent. Doug Williams, the Pro Football Hall-of-Famer who played with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Washington, went to Grambling State. Walter Payton, arguably the greatest running back ever, went to Jackson State. Jerry Rice went to Mississippi Valley State. Steve McNair went to Alcorn State. Michael Strahan went to Texas Southern.

Once upon a time, that talent made HBCU fandom—largely among African-American fans, but also among whites who knew good football when they saw it—the equivalent of SEC fandom today, with many supporters rooting for and invested in the success of schools they didn't actually attend.

said.



Once upon a time, Grambling State's football team was as highly regarded as its marching band.  
Photo by Kelley L Cox-USA TODAY Sports

Of course, that was then. As massive television contracts reshaped the landscape of college football, HBCUs increasingly have been left behind. Today, when the best high school players in the country choose college programs, they hardly ever pick HBCUs.

For one, there are far more choices. Football is popular, and while HBCU enrollment is declining overall, other colleges and universities are growing. "You also have an explosion of the number of football programs," Aaron Taylor, a professor at the Saint Louis University School of Law, said. "In the state of Florida, in my childhood, Florida, Florida State and Miami were the main ones, but now you have South Florida, Florida International, Florida Atlantic. These were programs that did not exist."

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**millions more** than they were just a decade ago. With their big budgets—for example, Alabama earns about \$150 million a year—the power conference programs offer far greater opportunities for athletes. They have elite coaches and world-class weight rooms; their games are broadcast on national television each and every week; they build pricey academic facilities and hire ample support staff to ensure athletes stay eligible for competition.

As such, you can't blame a talented African-American football player for selecting Alabama over Alabama A&M.

"Would you rather have filet mignon over here, or would you rather have a hot dog on the other side?" Polite said.

Compounding the issue are state budget cuts to higher education. Consider the situation in Louisiana, which is particularly dire: **the state has cut over half of its total higher education funding**, putting Grambling State and Southern—which are already working with small budgets—on even thinner ice. Per-student cuts in Florida (32 percent), Alabama (38 percent), Mississippi (24 percent) and Georgia (23 percent) also have disproportionately affected HBCUs, which simply don't have the resources to absorb financial losses as well as larger institutions.

In Illinois, which has seen a rise in higher education spending but is currently mired in a budget crisis, majority-black Chicago State nearly had to close its doors. The school's basketball coach, Tracy Dildy, **recently told VICE Sports that he didn't think that was a coincidence**.

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"Not only the University of Illinois, the University of Illinois-Chicago, it would never happen. University of Illinois-Springfield it would

And it just happens to be the only predominantly black institution in the whole state of Illinois."

Are HBCUs an afterthought for lawmakers? It's hard to argue otherwise. Governors in Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana have all suggested merging or closing schools like Grambling State, much to the dismay of alumni.

"When we talk about states, there's not a lot of political clout for HBCUs in a lot of places," Taylor said. "There are histories [in some states] that are hostile ... to HBCUs. There is racism in these places that is still impacting HBCUs."

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Some believe the National Collegiate Athletic Association also works against HBCUs, which were not accepted as member institutions until the 1970s. Taylor said the association is "indifferent" to the problems facing the schools.

"The NCAA never wanted the HBCUs to being with," Aiello said. "They've always treated HBCUs as the redheaded stepchild that was forced upon them, that they didn't want."

In an attempt to measure educational quality, the NCAA introduced a measure in 2003 called the Academic Progress Rate. The problem is, it measures eligibility, not academic quality. While larger schools have armies of tutors to make sure athletes are keeping up in their classes and staying eligible, **HBCUs scramble to keep up.**

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State basketball coach Andre Payne said. "We're constantly checking in with our academic advisor back at campus who's letting us know what tests they have, and then we've got professors that work with us. They give those guys their assignments before they leave, or they put them online. So you've just got to be creative."

Creativity often isn't enough. In 2014-15, the most recent year of reporting, all 23 teams punished with postseason ineligibility by the NCAA due to low APR scores are from HBCUs. "We know that APR is as much a reflection of resources as it is intent to educate these students," Taylor said.

Polite and a number of his colleagues met with the NCAA in 2011 to explain these issues. "They didn't take any of our recommendations and they never invited us back," he said. "The NCAA never has to give a reason. They just do what they want to do."

On the football field, the disparities between HBCUs and other Division I programs can best be seen during "guarantee games"—that is, when HBCU teams play road games against major programs and get blown out in return for a paycheck. This practice is common among smaller schools, but HBCUs take it to an extreme.

Three years ago, Howard finished with 11 total yards of offense in a 76-0 loss to Boston College. In 2013, Florida A&M went to Ohio State as a 50-point underdog and came away with a \$900,000 paycheck—over half of Florida A&M's \$1.6 million football budget, **according to the Columbus Dispatch**—to help chip away at the school's \$6 million deficit.

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The HBCU guarantee game phenomenon extends to basketball, too. **Mississippi Valley State went on a 14-game, 13-state road trip to**

did something similar. Texas Southern and Arkansas-Pine Bluff played no home games. Of the 119 non-conference games SWAC teams will play this year, only 16 (13 percent) are true home games, and only six (five percent) are true home games against other Division I teams.

HBCUs need these games to stay in Division I, **but as Taylor wrote for Inside Higher Ed**, they are paying a high price in order to Not Actually Keep Up with the Joneses:

*For many under-resourced colleges, guarantee games have become the preferred means of generating quick revenue. Florida A&M's most recent athletic budget lists these games as the second largest source of revenue. But these games come with a price, as they feed into perceptions of HBCU inferiority and put players in the role of sacrificial lambs.*



Southern University's football team (in white) lost at Georgia 48-6 in 2015. Photo by Dale Zanine-USA TODAY Sports

Given the state of HBCU athletics, is it worth staying in Division I? Some say no.

"Times have changed, and to me it doesn't make much sense to field a mediocre team at the Division I level when you could have a top team in Division II," Taylor said.

Dropping to Division II likely would solve many of the problems facing HBCU athletic departments. They wouldn't have to sponsor as many sports and as many scholarships, and they could travel less, playing

—serving as road warriors and cannon fodder in guarantee games— and could instead focus more on academics.

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Exiting Division I also would mean the return of old rivalries, as SWAC and MEAC schools could play current Division II HBCUs like Tuskegee and Morehouse. The most important HBCU game of the year—the Bayou Classic—could still be played.

Moreover, today's Division I HBCU tackling dummies would be well positioned to be tomorrow's Division II powerhouses. Six of the current Division I HBCUs have higher attendance at games than anyone in Division II. Southern finished in the top 10 in FCS attendance in 2015, and HBCUs make up six of the top 15. Four others finished in the top 30. The fans likely will be there, no matter what.

"I don't understand why the HBCUs would want to be in the Division I model when they know they can't keep up with those resources," Polite said.

On the other hand, there's history to consider—and, perhaps more important, pride. Leaving big-time football would carry symbolic weight. Pragmatism aside, do schools like Grambling State and Southern want to look as though they are waving white flags, once-great black institutions surrendering to state legislatures and a NCAA that appears to be kicking them to the curb?

"There are plenty of people in those communities that say that [leaving Division I is] just a way of letting the NCAA win," Aiello said.

As HBCUs continue to be squeezed on and off the football field, they ultimately will have to decide if that's a game worth continuing—or if

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# The Plot to Disrupt the NCAA with a Pay-for-Play HBCU Basketball League

## black schools behind. Some people think there's a better way.

By Patrick Hruby | Jun 20 2017, 2:05pm

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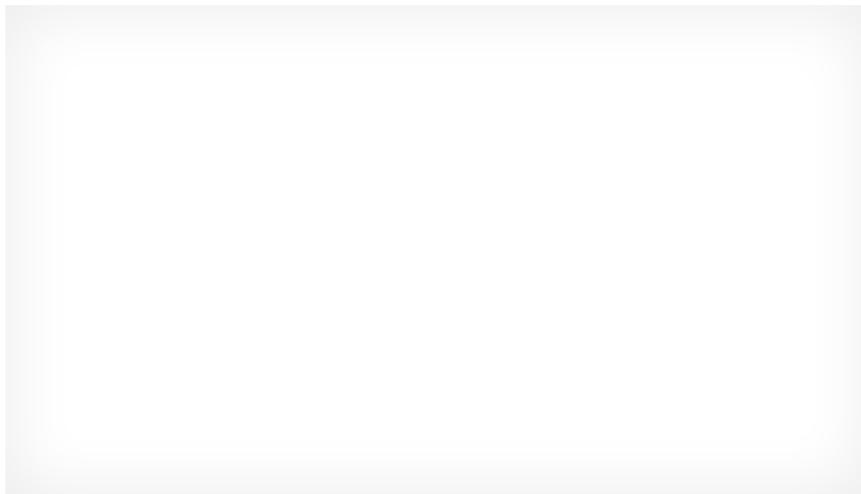
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Bob Donnan-USA TODAY Sports

**W**hat if I told you there was a way to pay men's college basketball players a fairer portion of the hundreds of millions of dollars they generate, boost the flagging fortunes of the nation's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and stick it to the sanctimonious, self-serving quasi-monopolists at the NCAA?

If all of that sounds too good to be true, then you haven't yet heard from Andy Schwarz. A San Francisco-based antitrust economist, [longtime critic of college sports amateurism](#), and—full disclosure—occasional [contributor to VICE Sports](#), Schwarz has a plan to make it happen. [It's a business plan](#), in fact, and while it's still in its early stages, it works, in a nutshell, like this:

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Step 1: Form an HBCU-exclusive basketball league.

Step 2: Tell the NCAA to pound sand, and pay the nation's very best high school and college basketball players to be part of it.

Step 3: Profit. Oh, and also change the face of big-time campus athletics forever.

The way Schwarz and his HBCU league co-founders—Ohio-based sports and entertainment attorney Richard Volante and Washington, D.C.-based author and historian Bijan Bayne—see it, the NCAA is a bit like a traditional taxi company, while their concept is akin to Uber or Lyft. The league would consist of at least 16 members drawn from the four current NCAA Division I and II HBCU conferences, institutions such as Howard University and Florida A&M; its athletes would be full-time students.

They also would be paid to play basketball, between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a year. Moreover, they would be allowed to endorse products, sell autographs, sign with agents, accept gifts from boosters, declare for the NBA draft, and even be drafted by NBA teams without losing their eligibility.

NCAA amateurism rules prohibit all of the above, generally limiting athlete compensation for playing sports to the value of an athletic scholarship: room, board, tuition, and in some cases a small cost-of-attendance stipend. Recently, University of Central Florida kicker Donald De La Haye said that his popular YouTube videos, which depict his daily life as a college athlete and have earned him income, **may violate those rules and cost him his eligibility.**

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In the HBCU league, Schwarz says, athletes like De La Haye would be encouraged to market themselves.

"There's no amateurism," he says. "If we're in a high school recruit's living room, our pitch is that we want to give you a contract for \$75,000, with workers' comp, health insurance, and a 401(k). There are opportunities for ancillary revenue on top of that. We offer great campuses and alumni networks. We invite NBA teams to come, and to draft you while you're still in school. If and when you make that jump, we are thrilled for you.

"We walk through that menu, and then we ask, 'If you're thinking of going to a school outside of our league, ask them if those same possibilities are there.'"

industry, in which NCAA member schools agree not to pay athletes instead of competing and bidding for their services in a free market the way every other industry works, and the way campus athletics work if you're a coach or athletic director.

It also stems from the failure of recent legal challenges to amateurism. A class-action lawsuit brought against the NCAA by former University of California, Los Angeles basketball star Ed O'Bannon over the use of athletes' names, images, and likenesses ended with federal judges finding that the association violates antitrust law, but also ruling that the NCAA can continue to prohibit player pay.

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Similarly, when a National Labor Relations Board regional director found that Northwestern University football players qualified as school employees under federal labor law and had the right to unionize, the NLRB's national office declined to exercise jurisdiction over the university's appeal of the decision, effectively leaving the unionization effort in limbo.

The two rulings left Schwarz, who consulted for the plaintiffs on the O'Bannon case, "depressed." But he also perceived an economic opportunity. Cartels like the NCAA form because all members agree they can make more money by colluding with one another than by competing. They break up when some members decide they're getting the short end of the stick and would be better off going head-to-head with their former partners.

"If you want to disrupt a cartel," Schwarz says, "you need to find someone inside it who is not winning."



Do HBCUs really benefit by being part of the NCAA cartel? Photo by Bob Donnan-USA TODAY Sports

Enter HBCUs. Once upon a time, schools like Grambling State were sports powerhouses. Widespread racial segregation meant that many of the best African-American athletes, like basketball's Earl "The Pearl" Monroe, starred for black institutions. In the 1970s, Grambling's football team played on national television every week, was viewed by fans as the "black Notre Dame," and had more former players in the NFL than any other school.

"In early September, *Wide World of Sports* would air a game called the Whitney Young Classic between Grambling and Morgan State [another HBCU] at Yankee Stadium," says J. Kenyatta Cavil, a professor at Texas Southern University and an expert on HBCU athletics. "They would air it with the same gravity as a University of Southern California-Notre Dame game."

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Desegregation has since drained the HBCU athletic talent pool. Over time, schools like Morgan State and Florida A&M have **fallen further and further behind bigger and richer primarily white institutions** (PWIs), and in particular the members of the NCAA's Power Five conferences.

Four years ago, Grambling State's football team **went on strike** to protest dangerous, dilapidated athletic facilities; in 2010, Mississippi Valley State's football stadium was **deemed so unsafe it was temporarily closed**. On the field, the disparities between HBCUs and other Division I programs can best be seen during "guarantee

In 2013, **Florida A&M lost at Ohio State 76-0** but collected \$900,000, over half of the school's \$1.6 million football budget that season. Basketball isn't much different: **Mississippi Valley State went on a 14-game, 13-state road trip** to start its 2015-16 season, losing all 14 games while earning \$600,000.

"The HBCUs don't have a choice," says Fritz Polite, assistant dean of student affairs at Shenandoah University and a sports management expert. "They have to find some type of alternative method to raise money. The model the NCAA has in place doesn't meet their needs at all. The rich are getting richer."

While major college sports are an estimated \$10 billion-a-year industry, HBCUs see little of that money. **An ESPN analysis** last year found that Power Five schools made \$6 billion in 2014-15, while the Group of Five mid-major conferences accounted for another \$2 billion. The total combined revenues for the Mid-Eastern and Southwestern Athletic Conferences that year, **according to a USA Today database**, were roughly \$289 million—a competitive amount when compared to other small-time Division I football conferences, but a pittance compared to the big-time bowl-eligible ones.

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The lack of funding makes it harder for HBCU athletic programs to keep up in the classroom, too. In an attempt to measure educational quality, the NCAA uses a metric called Academic Progress Rate (APR), which is rooted in athletes' course completion and grade point average. Two seasons ago, all 23 teams punished with postseason ineligibility by the NCAA due to low APR scores were from HBCUs.

**A 2015 Washington Post story** explored how the NCAA system leaves HBCUs stuck between what Polite calls "a rock and a hard place." On one hand, the schools have a historical mission to educate the poorest and least academically prepared students, including athletes; on the other, they have scant resources to do so. As the *Post* put it:

*HBCUs typically can't afford for their athletes to attend summer classes. They have far fewer academic advisers to provide oversight. Unlike power conference schools, HBCUs can't afford enough NCAA*

to return to get their degrees and boost a slumping score.

Howard has two full-time academic advisers for approximately 350 athletes. At Morgan State, the only academic adviser listed on the athletic department's online staff directory is also an assistant cheerleading coach. But schools in the power five conferences often have an academic counselor devoted to football and men's basketball and one for every three to four of the institution's other sports.

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The NCAA's Accelerating Academic Success Program offers "resource-limited" schools grants of **up to \$900,000 over three-year periods to fund academic support for athletes**. But Polite says that when he and other members of the academic and athletic community wrote a joint letter to the association in 2012 urging changes to the APR process and greater redistribution of money away from Power Five schools and toward HBCUs and other have-nots, the NCAA **"didn't take any of our recommendations and they never invited us back."**

"If you sat the [HBCU] presidents down and asked them truthfully, a lot of them would say the system is not benefiting them," Cavil says. "But I think they don't see any better options."

**S**chwarz and his partners believe they can provide one. A basketball league featuring the nation's top collegiate talent—the future NBA players who currently attend schools like Duke University and the University of Kentucky—could provide a much-needed shot in the arm to HBCU athletics as a whole. It also could benefit member schools in general through what some economists have called "**the Flutie Effect**," in which high-profile athletic success spurs a virtuous, school-lifting cycle of better branding, improved alumni giving, increased and more selective enrollment, and more overall excitement.

"There's nothing that George Mason could have done in American society that is equivalent to the buzz it got from its run [to the Final Four in 2006]," says Bayne, the author and league co-founder. "No website, no brochure, no famous alum. I've worked at places where

schools were. So the hope is that in the long run, the entire student body [of the HBCUs] will benefit in indirect ways."

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Schwarz says the proposed league also would dovetail with the HBCU mission to serve and support the African-American community. Currently, amateurism in major college sports functions as **a de facto racial wealth transfer, redistributing what I estimate to be \$2.2 billion annually** from black football and men's basketball players to predominantly white administrators, coaches, and non-revenue sport athletes. Permitting athlete pay would begin to balance the ledger.

"And if this league takes off, this is an opportunity for people to be general managers, to work at all different levels of a sports enterprise," Schwarz says. "So it's not just black coaches being involved, it's a lot of staffing in a league that's based within the HBCU community and doesn't have the impediments we sometimes see to African-Americans getting those jobs.

"It's not that you'll have to be black to work in the league, it's just that you won't have to be white."



The proposed HBCU league is looking for socially conscious investors. Photo by Cary Edmondson-USA TODAY Sports

It won't be cheap. League co-founder and attorney Volante estimates a total start-up cost of between \$30 million and \$50 million—roughly

can recruit high-end talent."

To fund that, Schwarz and Volante say, the league will require sponsors as well as private investors. For the former, Schwarz envisions athletic shoe and apparel companies, which already spend millions outfitting athletic departments in order to put their logos on college athletes.

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"Imagine it's Adidas," he says. "They probably have their eyes on someone who is going to be a one-and-done NCAA player two years from now. They might say to him, 'If you go to Kentucky, we can't talk to you commercially until they say you've left for the NBA. But if you go to Prairie View A&M in our league, we can pay you tomorrow to be in our stuff!'"

Their ideal investor, meanwhile, would have deep pockets, a love of sports, and a desire to effect larger social change. Maybe someone like retired NBA star and television commentator Charles Barkley, who last year donated \$2 million to a pair of HBCUs. Or perhaps current NBA star LeBron James, who recently gave \$2.5 million to the National Museum of African-American History and Culture.

"We're looking for people who have an interest in bettering the lives of minorities and others who haven't had a voice in college athletes," Volante says.

The league also will have to land a broadcast deal. That could mean a traditional cable network like ESPN or FOX Sports, or a digital programming provider such as Netflix or Twitter.

"We don't want to reinvent the wheel," Volante says. "Historically, most leagues' success has been driven by their broadcast deals. Day one, we're not competing with the NCAA's billion-dollar broadcast agreement. Major League Soccer and mixed martial arts started off in the \$5-to-\$10 million range. If we can recruit talent, we think it's possible to get a higher value than that."

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Beyond money, Schwarz believes, the biggest obstacle to making the league a reality may be getting buy-in from the schools themselves.

institutions generally don't have much clout in state legislatures when compared to larger PWIs.

Suppose North Carolina A&T joins a pay-for-play HBCU basketball league. And suppose the school begins beating out the University of North Carolina and North Carolina State for top-tier recruits. How will powerful, politically connected Tar Heels and Wolfpack alumni and fans react?

"It would be difficult for a president at a public [HBCU] to think about trying this out without considering that they might have some backlash," says Caviel. "The larger state schools enjoy a great deal of benefit from being aligned with the status quo. Millions and millions of dollars. They have a lot of sway in terms of NCAA legislation, and state and federal legislation to support what they think is important.

"So now you're talking about smaller entities which presidents often put in place by legislatures or governors going back up against the same legislative machine? That's going out on a limb, and going up against vested interests. People won't look at this in terms of equality. They will look at it in terms of what they're losing."

**F**or now, the league is just a concept, [a 22-page outline that anyone can read online](#). Cash, schools, and athletes are the essential elements, but it also needs lawyers, marketers, operations staff, an entire professional infrastructure. More of everything.

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Schwarz and company would like to recruit a team of HBCU business school students to build out the plan as part of a master's degree project; they'd love to get NBA Players Association involved, as well as current and retired professional players. They're currently putting out feelers with HBCU decision-makers and attempting to meet with a school president. In December, they plan to make the rounds at the Celebration Bowl in Atlanta, which pits the MEAC and SWAC champions against each other and is essentially black college football's national championship.

people who can make this happen way better than I can. It's like how Ray Kroc stole the McDonald's idea. We are actively seeking a Ray Kroc."

**Why HBCUs?**

We view this plan as a way to change the existing paradigm that allows the only way for college sports to succeed is for 100% of the college to commit capital from their sports funds and sponsored by African American men - (described as "black labor") and to use the historical value to create all types of sports (soccer and sports of women) which had disproportionately in the hands of people other than those African American men.

One of the factors following that process is a change in which market conditions that college sports can thrive more with your athletes. The traditional NCAA requires that a national agreement not to pay athletes, which is necessary to prove that it is needed to protect college sports at all levels to ensure that it is in the strength of the League. It would be like that NCAA rule -- NCAA is in sufficient to make "College Sports and the "proving thing" or "transition" work.

HBCUs are the focus of the entire NCAA distribution of money. Creating that for itself is a business, which is a large part because the business and the entire "black labor" market is in front of African American men. It is a business that is necessary to making the HBCU a business of revenue could be long lasting effects, even if the HBCU is currently more in the NCAA rule.

**Mission Statement**

The League mission is to create a thriving, commercial football league focused on improving the educational and career opportunities for African Americans. We also have the goal of changing the landscape of college athletes by providing college athletes with the ability to receive educational opportunities without expending in a collective agreement to provide support for their athletic abilities.

The HBCU's goal is to create a similar goal—the educational and life long career advancement of African Americans. As just one example, the University of Southern California includes these Core Values:

- 1. Excellence
- 2. Leadership
- 3. Service
- 4. Faith

A page from the HBCU league business plan. Courtesy Andy Schwarz

Schwarz expects wariness, at least initially. "I look like a white guy from California who wants to use black people to make a point," he says with a laugh. "I would be skeptical of me, too." But he strongly believes the league can work as an actual business, and not just as a thought exercise. Football requires large rosters and expensive infrastructure. Basketball has a lower cost of entry.

"You only need, say, two or three high-end talents per school to make a league competitive and watchable, keep fans around, and build something," Volante says. The market for high-quality college basketball is already proven, and HBCUs would hardly be starting from scratch in terms of branding and fan interest—Bayne points to the annual Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament in Charlotte, which had **an estimated economic impact of \$55 million in 2015**, as a indication of what's possible. "That awareness can easily be translated to television and other viewing platforms," he says.

most important, Schwarz says, a pay-for-play HBCU league will have a unique advantage over the NCAA, one that previous upstart sports operations such as the United States Football League have lacked.

"The easiest competitive response by a normal incumbent would be to bury us in a salary war," he says. "As a high-schooler, I was a season-ticket holder for the [USFL's] Boston Breakers. That league got Steve Young, Herschel Walker, Doug Flutie, and then they went out of business. So long as the NCAA refuses to outbid us for talent, it will have both hands tied behind its back."

When Schwarz and company use the term "disruption," this is what they really mean: transforming the association's strength into a weakness, and turning the exploitative Hobson's choice currently presented to college athletes—amateurism or nothing—into a real one. "You don't just have to be a high school All-American," Polite says. "Imagine you're playing at Georgetown. There's Howard right across the city [in Washington, D.C.], and those guys are getting paid.

"What would keep you where you are? You'd be like, 'The hell with this. I'm out. I'm going over there.' You could have endorsement deals, have Cadillac giving you a car, you ride around and hand out business cards for the local dealer. Every car sold, you get a cut. I'm telling you, at that point, it's over."

Of course, there's one way NCAA schools could compete: by allowing competition, and permitting players to be paid. Doing so, Volante concedes, likely would put an HBCU league out of business. But that also would be a win. "If you look at NCAA basketball and football, the majority of scholarship athletes in those sports are African-American," he says. "Right now you largely have old, white rich guys making money hand over fist off of them. If all those players start getting paid, our ultimate goal will be achieved."



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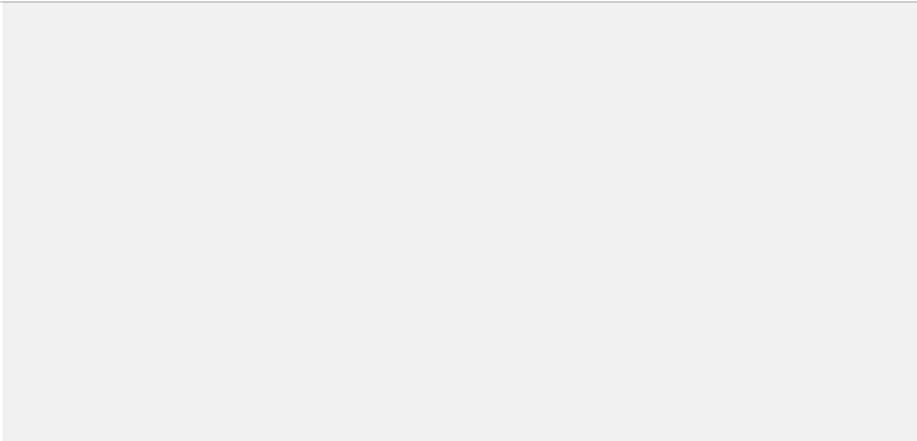
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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# Pay-For-Flay: Why FBS-FCS Beatdowns Will Never Go Away

**On the playground, bullies beat up weaklings in order to take their money; in college football, FBS teams give FCS teams money in order to beat them up.**

By **Kevin Trahan** | Sep 16 2015, 12:55pm



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If you had Boston College beating tiny Howard University on Saturday, then congrats, your not at all bold prediction was correct. Howard, of the Football Championship Subdivision—the lower level of Division I—was absolutely no match for Boston College, of Division I's upper-tier Football Bowl Subdivision, losing 73-0.

Amazingly, that score was probably too close, as the advanced stats show. **Howard had a 0 percent success rate.** Zero percent! They couldn't run a single **successful play** in the entire football game!

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Of course, Boston College isn't the only FBS program feasting on inferior FCS competition. So far this season, Georgia Tech has thumped Alcorn State (69-6), Ole Miss has thrashed Tennessee-Martin (76-3), Cal has seen Grambling State driven before it (73-14), and Clemson has heard **the lamentations** of Wofford's fan base (49-10)—and that's just Week 1. Year after year, most FBS teams will play at least one FCS team, which raises an obvious question: Why the hell are these teams playing each other in first place?

Technically speaking, FCS and FBS teams are in the same National Collegiate Athletic Association division, so their games against each other count for regular season standings and statistics. Only through

**Competitive balance does not exist among FBS teams**, or even power conference teams, and it certainly does not exist among all of Division I. Howard is not getting the recruits New Mexico is getting. New Mexico is not getting the recruits Boston College is getting. Boston College is not getting the recruits Alabama is getting. And so on. In reality, for some semblance of parity, **the Power Five conferences should probably only play each other**, the Group of Five conferences should only play each other, and FCS teams should only play each other.

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While the best FCS teams can beat mediocre Power Five teams from time to time—**looking at you, North Dakota State**—those groups are not in the same league, and top 10 FBS teams are 103-1 all time against the FCS (**hi, Michigan**).



Life imitating the scoreboard during a game Ole Miss and Tennessee-Martin. --Photo by Justin Ford-USA TODAY Sports

So, back to our original question: Why do these games exist? Money. Money. Did I mention money? Every decision in college athletics comes down to money, not what's best for athletes or fans. And the FBS-FCS ritual sacrifices are no different.

FBS teams need home games, so in order to attract non-conference teams to play them, they will pay those schools "guarantees." The guarantee system goes all the way down the college sports ladder, **and FCS teams will even pay schools that aren't really schools to come play them.**

Guarantee fees often aren't cheap, but they're worth it for teams to get an extra home game's worth of ticket revenue. Payouts vary based on how prestigious the opponent is, and moneyed schools wind up paying a lot more for a team from the Mid-American Conference or the Sun Belt than they do a team from the FCS—**often \$300,000 to \$500,000 more.** For a business—and college teams are certainly

of an additional few hundred thousand dollars.

Enter FCS schools, which are willing—nay, motivated—to get their asses kicked. **Power Five schools often lie** and say they aren't making money—they are—but sports can be a seriously expensive endeavor for FCS programs that don't have the fan bases or the huge TV deals that FBS programs do. Even the best FCS schools have problems making money. Northern Iowa, which has been an NCAA Tournament at-large team and a regular FCS football playoff contender in many years, **can barely afford to fund its athletic department.**

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So UNI and schools like it make money by playing teams in their region, such as Iowa, Iowa State, and Wisconsin, making up to \$600,000 on each game. Without those games, UNI would have to make massive athletics cuts, so it will gladly **take a thumping (or even an occasional win!)** in order to fund the rest of its season against teams at its level.

Starting next season, the Big Ten plans to **ban its members from playing FCS teams.** Will that become the norm for Power Five schools? Don't count on it. While the most elite of the Power Five teams would likely be OK with paying up for bottom-rung FBS teams rather than FCS guarantees—Notre Dame, UCLA, and USC already don't play FCS teams—the vast majority will continue scheduling FCS teams, arguing (somewhat correctly) that a bottom-rung Sun Belt team is just as bad as a top-rung FCS team. More important, FBS-FCS games make too much financial sense for everyone involved—which is why **some Big Ten teams already have pushed back** against the upcoming ban.

Barring a dramatic restructuring of the college sports economy, expect to see more beatdowns every September. The blowouts aren't personal—they're just business.



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