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Sports Marketing Symposium: Momentum Strong For Paying College Athletes

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Desser suggested player compensation would actually boost interest in the game

The momentum to pay college basketball and football players has become so intense that it's likely to happen soon, according to every panelist in an afternoon session yesterday at the '14 CSE Sports Marketing Symposium titled "College Sports: The Changing Relationship with Athletes and the Implications on Sports and Sports Marketing." The panelists agreed that there's no question that the college sports business model will change based on the O'Bannon and Jenkins antitrust court cases. The only question is how much it will change. **Desser Sports Media President Ed Desser** predicted that 30 years from now, people will look on this era of college sports as being as quaint as the way that people view the college sports era of the early 1980s. Saying that paying athletes will hurt college sports "is more of a visceral reaction to change than anything based in fact," Desser said. "It's almost amusing that we're debating what players should get. College

sports has been so successful, there's a bounty of money that was unthinkable 30 years ago." Desser, who was called as an expert witness during the O'Bannon case, said a review of court documents showed how the NCAA is operating as a professional sports league. Desser: "There's no pretense at the NCAA that the revenue side of college athletics is anything but a professional operation." National College Players Association President **Ramogi Huma** said college football and basketball "are not amateur sports. They are pro sports. ... Amateurism (in college athletics) is not a moral issue. ... it's a financial issue."

SHOW THEM THE MONEY: Huma said NCAA rules need to be reformed, pointing to Louisville basketball player Kevin Ware, who broke his leg during a Final Four game in 2013. Huma said Louisville had the option to not pay for the player's medical expenses and could have stripped his scholarship. "We've been fighting for basic protections for [college athletes] for over a decade." Huma said colleges could find money to pay athletes by putting a portion of media revenue in a trust fund until athletes complete their degree. He

dismissed criticism that paying college basketball and football players would hurt women's sports and non-revenue sports. He predicted women's sports would wind up with more funding. Huma said, "Title IX is the law of the land." He also suggested that college athletic departments have plenty of areas where they can cut costs, from paring travel for non-revenue sports to pulling back on construction plans. Huma: "Don't build facilities with waterfalls, trap doors and slides." Winston & Strawn Partners **David Greenspan** said players should be compensated in some way. "Revenues are being generated," he said. "Games on TV are being watched largely because of the kids playing the games." **Desser suggested that relaxing some NCAA rules, like allowing players to do local endorsements, would boost interest in the game.**



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