

SATALIA: Allen Sack welcome to the conversation.

SACK: Oh it's great to be here. It really is. You played on Notre Dame 1966 national championship football game so you know first hand what the demands are on student athletes.

SATALIA: Give us an idea of what it was like to play for Coach Ara Parseghian.

SACK: First of all that first hand thing is I know first hand 40 years ago. And I

SATALIA: Things have changed.

SACK: And I know second hand from the point of view of now. And the changes are absolutely incredible. Playing for Ara a real professional gentleman someone I still respect. He wrote the forward to my book. It was very nice of him. I stay in somewhat contact. Playing football at Notre Dame then with I am privileged. I feel incredibly privileged to have played with some of the finest college arguably some of the finest college football players who ever played the game. Allen Paige my friend and he was a defensive end now an associate justice of the Supreme Court in Minnesota. And Rocky Bleier who played for the Pittsburgh you know Steelers and let's see Terry Hanratty and I can go on and on. I don't want to leave anybody out. [] Lynch and it was just a wonderful opportunity for me. And I started off as I am sure you are aware. I started off almost not playing at all being kind of a recruiting mistake as a quarterback. And to say what it was like for me to be able to go from the bottom I mean like maybe never getting a uniform on at Notre Dame and then ended up playing and starting about three three games in my senior year on a national championship football team. That's truly an incredible experience for me.

SATALIA: And the reason you weren't cut was because when you played a scholarship was a four-year commitment on the part of the university.

SACK: It was a commitment to me as a student meaning that when when recruiters came to my house and they said that they are going to give me a scholarship they say they tell me mother and my father it was a four year scholarship and if I had ended up being not as good as perhaps they thought I was or if I were injured my scholarship was guaranteed for four years. Even though I didn't really work out for them. So they were committed to me as a student really regardless of what happened on the athletic field and that has turned around totally from that. So that was I feel that's a privilege that young young kids today do not have and I am not too sure why they shouldn't have the same privilege I had.

SATALIA: You say that the turning point really in terms of college football becoming counterfeit amateurs was in 1973. What happened in 1973?

SACK: 1973 was very important. I went to Notre Dame and I often times talk about this when I go to do talks like this. When I went I chose Notre Dame over those other schools and they offered me the four-year scholarship. I had a four-year scholarship. I got to Notre Dame. And if I had been injured or if I had been a recruiting mistake I still had my scholarship and they were committed to me as a student. As we said earlier. In 1976 or 1967 in 1967 this is this is a one year after I graduated it was during that really turbulent times in terms of the political atmosphere on college campuses. After the 1968 Olympics when John Carlos and Tommy Smith had done the black power salute, that lead to an uprising on college campuses among especially among Black athletes African American athletes. Some of whom such as the University of at Syracuse University boycotted playing for Ben Schwartzwalder I guess was the coach they had. They were still using things like calling Black athletes boy. They still had no cheerleaders who were Black although a lot of Blacks were on the football team. So at that particular point in time, there was a lot of ferment on college campuses and players were actually boycotting leaving teams. Therefore the NCAA I think changed the rules at that point. I am not going to say this is a total explanation for it. But it did influence the rule. In 1967 it was called the Fraudulent Misrepresentation rule. That meant that if you voluntarily withdrew from sports. I could have voluntarily withdrawn arguably and still have my athletic scholarships but now in 1967 it said if you voluntarily withdraw from sports you lose your scholarship or if you do not follow the directives of your coach. That struck me as something that was hitting directly at these athletes who were protesting during the time. You could lose your scholarship. So a little more control was coming in there. I wasn't that much controlled and certainly before 1956 when they had athletic scholarships at all the athletes could do whatever they want. My sons went to like Division III kinds of schools and I know for a fact that if they decided not to play they leave they don't lose any financial aid. 1973 comes along the 1967 rule allowed you to take the scholarship away from a voluntarily withdrawn kid or someone who had violated some of the rules of the coach. 1973 went a step even much further. It said that your scholarship was one year renewable and could be taken away for athletic ability and athletic performance. Right as well as for injury.

SATALIA: So if you made a mistake.

SACK: If you made a recruiting mistake you could run them off and that was legal under NCAA rules. Or I would say you could fire them. Fire now I start getting very very legalistic about this whole thing and I believe what I tried to write in my book there are tons and tons enough books to fill probably a football locker room on commercialism and the impact that it has on college sports and that's very true. But there are only a handful of books that are written about professionalism. Meaning paying college athletes. Right and my book is among those and the former book that I wrote with Allen Staurowsky. We argue very clearly from a legal point of view not just as a figure of speech. We're saying literally in 1973 the college athletes became employees

SATALIA: Employees.

SACK: Of the university.

SATALIA: And coaches employers.

SACK: Yes and universities as employers yes. I really believe that that happened at that particular point in time.

SATALIA: Now you mentioned just a moment ago coaches' salaries. You talked about corporate sponsorship. Of course there's also the issue of playing regular season games on weekdays. What of what is happening do you find most disturbing. What motivates your current activism?

SACK: Well that one point you just made about the games being played. I forgot to mention that earlier. At Notre Dame we played ten games in the season. Now they are playing twelve and perhaps thirteen games of football. I teach at a Division II school. We have ten games in football and believe that it's so healthy. I've actually seen this semester where some of my football players who are in my class. After that ten games those ten games are over around Thanksgiving whatever, they are different kids. They come in. They are not falling asleep. Now I have to throw things at football players once in a while to keep them awake. After that their whole attitude toward what's happening in the classroom changes. That's what I had when I was at Notre Dame. So what keeps me going on this whole thing you asked me the question why did I stay on this thing for forty years. I am very very upset about the it's intellectually dishonest to call today's big time college athletes amateurs when in fact they have nothing to do with amateurs whatsoever. And that's what bothers me more than anything. In fact it's universities and I walk around the university. I walked around yesterday with my wife here at Penn State and you look at the tops of the buildings with the concrete or granite and carved in these granite things are integrity, truth, justice, you know knowledge and so forth. And here we have something a total mythology a total myth that big time college athletes are amateurs and we are not questioning it as faculty and we are not questioning it as a nation and that amateur label allows the universities in my estimation to exploit the athletes in a variety of ways.

SATALIA: The-

SACK: I think that's unconscionable and that's why I keep writing these books.

SATALIA: The NCAA would argue that the student athlete is the amateur but the athletic program is not amateur.

SACK: Very that's a fine fine point. And it's one of the points I agree with Myles Brand who has just recently passed away. A fine man. We disagreed about everything. Not everything but just about. I had a wonderful experience of interviewing him for for my book. And Myles Brand was the president of the NCAA for listeners who may not realize that.

SATALIA: He was the university president so kind of an unlikely the first university president a philosophy professor.

SACK: A philosophy professor. And he made the point that you just made. He said amateurism defines the athletes not the enterprise.

SATALIA: Not the program.

SACK: Very interesting statement. Many Americans don't realize that I agree with Myles Brand on that. In other words amateurism and the amateurism and and commercialism are different things. Amateurism really refers to whether or not the athletes are being paid in some way or other. Commercialism has to do with how much money you are making at your university. You are making billion dollar deals that commercialism. If you are paying the athletes that that's professionalism. Where Myles Brand and I disagreed and we had a nice discussion about this back and forth on the phone very subtle discussion about it. And from his point of view he was very very bright. I disagree that the athletes today are not paid. He says they are not paid. I say that they are paid. And that's where we he says room board tuition and fees really not a contractual relationship with the university. I would say room, board tuition and fees which are conditioned upon your being on the athletic field and performing well. And and you can be fired if you can't. That constitutes a quid pro quo an offer an acceptance and a consideration. Every definition of a contract I've ever heard about is there in addition to the control factor that seems to be a legal defining characteristic of work. Of employment. 1989 I started that that survey and I had been working with the National Football League Players Association. What I found though that sixty seven percent of the players who were in the NFL who had played in the southeast conference admitted taking money under the table. In the southwest conference it was about the same. That doesn't exist anymore. They've broken up into the Big 12 and they are all over the place. But it was the southwest conference. I actually had one player when I asked them did you take money if so what kind of things did you get. Most of them say hand what they call them handshakes where they had an alumni would give you a hundred dollars with a handshake after a game. This guy had been offered a part interest in an oil well you know. And there were some people who were getting quite a bit of money back then. So large percentages. I concluded there was a vast underground economy in college sports of under the table payments from alumni. I believe it's still there and probably has increased and I think that the agents have probably more involved than ever before. And I got a few flights back and forth from Notre Dame from Leonard Tose and I have to admit we also had a little trip down to New Orleans and I would I would go in and I would write to Leonard Tose. In the beginning I used to say Dear Mr. Tose could you mind if you would give me some spending money to fly home for the vacation. That was it the promise. After four years it was like Mr. Tose send \$400. But he was a nice guy.

SATALIA: The niceties

SACK: The niceties had

SATALIA: Disappeared.

SACK: Gone away but now it's \$230,000 with Reggie Bush allegedly.

SATALIA: And Chris Weber.

SACK: Chris Weber from the University of Michigan.

SATALIA: University of Michigan.

SACK: Yeah my God I think it's widespread. It's widespread and I think it deserves an investigation.

SATALIA: You have said though that while they are being paid under the table realistically you don't think paying student athletes. You think it's prohibitive. What then is the solution?

SACK: How's allowing an athlete go out and make a talk about his experience at his university and making money for that. How does that really hurt the university or hurt? How does that hurt women's sports? How does that take away revenue? It does not. In other words I think that the college athletes are now professionals anyway should be able to engage in the same kind of entrepreneurial behavior that their celebrity coaches do. I see now reason why they should not be able to do that. Other than that they'd be violating amateurism and they are not because they are not amateurs anyway. And that I guess that's as well as I can sum up my my position on that. I'd like to see the whole thing go back to need based financial aid and everybody's playing like the Ivy Leagues but it's not realistic.

SATALIA: You talk about a collegiate model and so the only way you could fire a student is if they didn't perform academically so if they drop below a 2.0 GPA, then they could be let go but they wouldn't be let go because of poor performance on the field.

SACK: Thanks for bringing that up. That would be my first symbolic. It's not going to change the entire. It's not going to revolutionize college sports but it would be in a moving in a direction of what the NCAA proclaims its purpose is to maintain athletes as an integral part of the student body. I always come back to that mission statement now whenever I get into discussions like this. If you ask me about should there be a playoff or should there be should the Big Ten expand to fourteen schools or one hundred schools or what have you, the first thing I would ask is how does that contribute to the mission of the NCAA which is to maintain athletes as an integral part of the student body. The suggestion I am making with regard to if you take an athlete and you recruited that athlete and given that athlete a scholarship they should be able to stay for

until they get their degree. The only way they can leave is if they did not perform academically. It would be a lot like what I had when I was playing at Notre Dame. However, there's already the fraudulent misrepresentation rule that's in there from 1967. I am getting a little arcane now. But listen to this for a second. I wouldn't touch that. That would mean the student walked away voluntarily or if they started becoming totally outrageous in terms of their behavior relative to a coach perhaps you could go to a committee on campus and that that student could lose a scholarship. But you would not I cannot imagine a mother and father in the country today who has a daughter or a son about ready to go to a large big time college program who would disagree with this. I can't imagine it. I think that your son or daughter should never be have their athletic scholarship taken away because they are injured. First that should be done tomorrow. The NCAA should put that in legislation tomorrow just on principle. Just on general human principle and academic integrity. Okay. And secondly your son or daughter should never lose their scholarship because they ended up being less of an athlete than the coaches thought they were in the first place.

SATALIA: As long as they continue to show up for practice and contributing to the team.

SACK: One should show up and contributing.

SATALIA: I am wondering how much time are they investing in what you are calling a job. Is there enough time left over to really take advantage of their payment which is this college degree?

SACK: Room, board, tuition and fees can go over \$50,000 a year today. That's a lot of money. That is not a small payment. In other words when I get in arguments with people about whether college athletes should be paid. I am not going to argue the issue of whether they are paid or not. They are paid. And I want to engage in that discussion. They are not amateurs. But it is a reasonable discussion to say are they paid enough. In other words we both agree they are paid okay. But how much what's too much and how much should they be paid? If you are getting room, board, tuition, and fees, tuition is a large chunk of this whole thing. And if you are not getting an education then you are not getting that tuition compensation. So therefore you are being totally exploited and are they getting an education? In many universities from what I can tell I would say that the athletes are not being integrated into the student body. They are becoming skilled athletes or segregated more or less.

SATALIA: You call it a vocational education in athletics is what they're getting.

SACK: Yeah it is. They are getting primarily preparation to become a professional athlete. You know they are getting ready to play football on Sundays primarily and even they are not dumb. I don't believe in the dumb jock concept. But I believe that the whole motivational structure of young kids from the age that they even from junior high school and before they've changed their entire attitude toward college and university. At college and a university in the United States has become a place where you go to get prepared

for professional sports. Therefore I've got to give all my time and all my effort not only in high school and in elementary school but once you get to college. Now to answer your question I got up at six o'clock in the morning, at Notre Dame they didn't bother me until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Then they bothered me for about three or four hours maybe through night.

SATALIA: You weren't working on the field forty hours a week.

SACK: No it wasn't forty hours a week and it was not all day long and I wasn't lifting weights in the morning and going to classes half asleep because of weight lifting. It was tough. I mean they really pushed us hard. I can't imagine how modern day athletes survive. And my friends in certain groups like the Drake Group would say how can a college athlete who comes to a university who comes from a disadvantaged educational background who is already terribly behind very low SATs scores. Poor reading skills.

SATALIA: They have the special admit.

SACK: Special admit how are they handling the incredibly demands big time college football and basketball as they stand today and still maintaining eligibility and many of them and I am going to use their term. They would say there is probably some academic fraud going on in here. And they are not blaming the athletes for it. They are saying that the universities I hate to point out using Binghamton as my example. It's just my most recent example. There are many many. They are not alone. I have friends who say that if you did a Congressional hearing on this and they went in and investigated very very deeply into what is really going on in the classroom for a lot of athletes college athletes today. It would be a national scandal.

SATALIA: Would you advocate for the European club system. Education isn't part of it. You are here to be an athlete. Go be an athlete.

SACK: Sure.

SATALIA: Could we do that here?

SACK: I'd advocate for it but but big time college sports commercial sports have become part of the fabric of American culture for over 100 years. It's there as part of our culture. That's not going to change. I think that that will be there so we have to. I think realistically we have to stick with that big time commercialized college sport but try to bring what's happening into the classroom for the students a little back the other direction.

SATALIA: If we did pay athletes a stipend would this eliminate? Would there be bidding wars at college or would there be a cap on how much of a stipend any university could pay and would it eliminate under the table payments by wealthy alums?

SACK: No it would not. No. Walter Byers back in 1956 when he introduced the athletic scholarship did so and he says so in his book in 1995 I guess it's called Unsportsmanlike Conduct a very very fine book. He was the executive director of the NCAA for at least thirty years and he's the one who started athletic scholarships because he thought they'd stop taking money under the table if we gave them scholarships. No way. It just continued on. It's gotten to.

SATALIA: The NCAA didn't really believe in scholarships when they were founded in 1906. It wasn't until I think 1957 where I think begrudgingly they said okay we need to provide scholarships.

SACK: Not only did they not believe in them they felt that athletic scholarships were a blatant violation of amateurism and they were absolutely correct. It is. An athletic scholarship is a financial inducement. The NCAA always was opposed to financial inducements based on athletic ability from 1906 until about as you said 1957.

SATALIA: The Federal graduation rate I think Notre Dame's is somewhere in the 78 79 percent of their athletes graduate. The powerhouses in football have 35 percent graduation rates.

SACK: Yeah I've been following this closely for the last two years. Last year the Oklahoma and Florida played in the championship game National Championship game. They had 36 percent Federal graduation rate rates respectively. Federal graduation rate means the percent that means that 36 percent of the football players who came into the University of Florida as freshmen actually ended up getting a University of Florida degree. Now what happened to the rest? Some of them transferred to other schools. Some of them turned professional. Some of them probably you know transferred on their own. Some of them were probably fired like I talked about earlier. But the point is if you are a mother or a father and you send your your child to the University of Florida in football you are probably saying they are not going to graduate from the University of of Florida. Oklahoma had an identical 36 percent Federal graduation rate. University of Florida as a whole had an 81 percent graduate rate for the general student body. That is a 45 percent gap.

SATALIA: Difference.

SACK: And and what that means to me is you are not maintaining this athlete as an integral part of the of the student body. They are jumping from one school to another. They are transferring. They are being run off and what they are really doing is you are looking for athletes who want to play football on Sundays. You are not looking for athletes who want to get a Penn State degree or a Notre Dame degree as come back to those two. Penn State has a last time I looked it is a an 85 percent Federal graduation rate for the general student body and an 80 percent Federal graduation rate four year graduation rate for its football player. Whatever Joe Paterno is doing it is good. I don't know how he is doing this and he is still winning. I don't. It's a mystery to me. Maybe he

could talk to me sometime. I'd love to talk to him. And we could spread that around elsewhere okay.

SATALIA: And you say there is a link between FGR Federal graduation rate and your success on the field.

SACK: Yeah I think there is yeah. I am just doing the statistics on that yes there is a link but not here. Notre Dame I have to brag about my alma mater. My second alma mater first alma mater. Ninety-five percent general graduation rate for the student body and I would say about an 85 Federal graduation rate for the football team. It's a ten percent gap but still boy you are way up there. And they are. That means that football players are going to Penn State and to Notre Dame for reasons other than becoming professional athletes.

SATALIA: A lot of them do.

SACK: There's something else they see about Penn State. There's something else they see about Notre Dame that makes them say I want to stay in this place. And that's what I am looking for. That's the academic side.

SATALIA: You and some others from the Drake Group say that what we need is Congressional intervention. Others are saying we do not need the government involved in football.

SACK: I think we need reform at the NCAA level but I see no leverage to get them to reform things. Right now they are riding pretty powerfully behind a wave of support by the entire nation in many ways that think they are doing the right thing. The defenders of amateurism. It's a lie. All right. But what we would like to see at the Drake Group. I'd hate I don't know anyone who wants to take away the tax-exempt status of big time college sports. I don't know anyone who wants to do that. What we'd like to see is the threat of doing that. A very real threat from the House Ways and Means Committee for instance have hearings and let's look at big time college sports. Let's get a real good look at the kinds of things that take place in the classrooms at universities throughout the country and get real disclosure disclosing what's going on. I think if they did that that the NCAA would have to quickly reforming itself. You wouldn't have to take away their tax exemption. What you have to do is make college sports truly maintaining athletes as an integral part of the student body not just in rhetoric but for real.

SATALIA: Many people say that what the reforms that you seek are an exercise in futility. Can they happen will they happen?

SACK: It's the issue of leverage. And what we're really push it to that stage. I am a little cynical and I am not I am a little pessimistic about change really taking place. To tell you the truth, what's really going to happen. I think the NCAA will continue to grow. It's going to move on. Bigger conferences. More championship games within the conferences. Big

Twelve will expand. The Big Ten will expand. These things are all for getting more money and more more prestige and bragging rights for various universities. That's the reality and what's going to happen. The athletes are going to organize. They already have. We now have the National College Players Association. I never thought I'd see that thirty years ago. Now we have the players. And when they start seeing their coaches salaries going up to \$8 billion \$8 million a year rather than \$4 million. I think it's the athletes who are going to move this thing within the next couple of years. I hope that's not what happens. I hope the NCAA can really come back to grounding itself in the educational principles we all care about.

SATALIA: Allen Sack thanks so much for talking with us.

SACK: That was great.

END OF INTERVIEW