



The Cartel: Inside the Rise and Imminent Fall of the NCAA

Taylor Branch

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“College athletes are not slaves,” writes Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Taylor Branch in “The Cartel: Inside the Rise and Imminent Fall of the NCAA.” “Yet to survey the scene—corporations and universities enriching themselves on the backs of uncompensated young men, whose status as ‘student-athletes’ deprives them of the right to due process guaranteed by the Constitution—is to catch the unmistakable whiff of the plantation.”

Branch, best known for his award-winning trilogy about the civil rights movement, “Parting the Waters,” argues that decades of greed and self-interest have finally caught up with the NCAA and that the organization is poised to collapse under the weight of its own hypocrisy.

From Reggie Bush and Cam Newton to Ohio State and the University of Miami, it’s been one big sports scandal after another. But the true scandal, argues Branch in this gripping, deeply reported narrative, is the parasitic structure of college sports, a business that generates billions of dollars in revenue every year yet fails to provide even workers’ compensation for its young performers. The outrage, he writes, is “not that students are getting illegally paid or recruited, it’s that two of the noble principles by which the NCAA justifies its existence—‘amateurism’ and the ‘student-athlete’—are cynical hoaxes, legalistic confections propagated by the universities so they can exploit the skills and fame of young athletes. The tragedy at the heart of college sports is not that some college athletes are getting paid, but that more of them are not.”


A portion of “The Cartel” was first published in different form in the October 2011 issue of “The Atlantic,” and it set off a firestorm of controversy and an avalanche of praise. “Sports Illustrated’s” Frank Deford, speaking on National Public Radio, said Branch’s story “may well be the most important article ever written about college sports.”


Now the full, landmark story is available. “The Cartel” is classic investigative journalism of the highest order, by one of America’s most admired historians.

“The Cartel” is published by Byliner through a partnership with “The Atlantic.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Taylor Branch is the author of the three-volume history of the civil-rights movement, “America in the King Years,” for which he won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Among his many other books are “The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President” and “Second Wind” (with Bill Russell).

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