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Paige: Pay-for-play? Area college football coaches are on board

By Woody Paige
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Steve Fairchild, Troy Calhoun and Jon Embree don't necessarily agree about the best college football team in Colorado. But the three coaches do agree that the players should be compensated beyond scholarships.

"I think we've got to help the student-athletes (financially)," said Fairchild, the Colorado State coach. "Those decisions, though, fly way above a coach's head."

Embree, the Colorado coach, and Calhoun, the Air Force coach, have similar specific plans that would reward the players.

"I would give the student-athletes \$50,000 if they graduate in five years," Embree said.

Although Calhoun hasn't spoken with Embree about the topic, his recommendation would be "two-layered. Upon graduation in five years, the players would receive \$40,000, and all their children's tuition would be covered in the future."

I phoned the coaches Thursday afternoon and asked their reactions to South Carolina coach Steve Spurrier's recent proposal that players be paid \$300 on a per-game basis, by the college coaches themselves.

"I get a kick out of Steve Spurrier. He makes me laugh a lot," Fairchild told me.

The three didn't seem inclined to open their own wallets, but had very thoughtful answers to this hot-button topic.

At the recent SEC coaches meeting, Spurrier addressed his far-fetched idea with the media — 70 players (out of 85 on scholarship) would be provided a total of \$21,000 a game throughout the season — and six other conference coaches actually signed his Declaration of Disbursement.

Obviously, his purpose was to stimulate discussion, and coaches — including Jon, Troy and Steve — are talking.

"I don't want to pay the student-athletes while they are in college. We don't want to declare ourselves a professional development league for the NFL, but, frankly, I think you have to do something," said Calhoun, who had devised an alternative proposal. "It's kind of an old Bear Bryant thing. At Alabama they had a program to provide scholarships for the players' kids and always keep the generations close to the school."

Embree was in Los Angeles Thursday for his older son Taylor's graduation today from UCLA. The

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wide receiver has earned two degrees in just three years, but will have one more season of eligibility. Taylor would earn a diploma and \$50,000 under his father's NCAA proposition.

"We're demanding so much out of these kids to win one for dear old State U, and too many times the education is not as important," Embree said. "Let us motivate the student-athletes who risk their health and so much time and effort, if they will get that degree — even if they don't stay on the team."

When Fairchild played quarterback at CSU (1978-80), "my family wasn't that well off, and I scraped by. I had a summer job on a construction crew. It isn't the same. We put more demands on the student-athletes during the school year, and we ask them to do community service in the summer.

"I'm glad there is dialogue now about getting the student-athletes some assistance," he said.

At the recent meeting of the Big Ten Conference (just before Ohio State's turmoil over players selling and trading memorabilia, and the resignation of coach Jim Tressel), the subject of paying players a stipend was debated. Conferences are signing ever-increasing TV contracts worth billions of dollars, and there's a cry that the young participants should collect a small share.

"I'd be prepared for that (paid players) to happen because the income from television is on such an upswing," said Embree, who believes there will be "screaming" about the problem from people concerned about rising higher education costs but "want their team to win."

Calhoun is in a unique situation because he coaches at a military academy. But he believes there could be significant changes in how major college football will do business in coming years.

"I could envision the top five or six conferences

— 52 to 60 of the schools that bring in incredible amounts of revenue — deciding they'll form their own association and possibly split from the NCAA," he said.

Conference and schools are negotiating deals with the major networks and creating their own football networks. An amalgamation might allow the Ohio States, the Alabamas and the Southern Cals to set their own regulations, hold their own national championship playoff and pay their players.

"There are so many issues about (pay for play) involved, I don't even know how they'll wade through them all," Fairchild said. Title IX and federal tax laws, for instance.

Embree, hired as the new CU coach in December, said he would "bring my plan to the Pac-12 coaches, but I probably should wait until I've been a coach for a year."

Embree, Fairchild and Calhoun played for the schools they coach — and received scholarships, but no pay.

In 1972, the NCAA stopped allowing schools to give student-athletes \$15 in laundry money.

Spurrier did get that cash.



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