

**The Center for Athletes' Rights and Education (CARE)**  
**Athletes' Bill of Rights**  
**By Allen L. Sack**

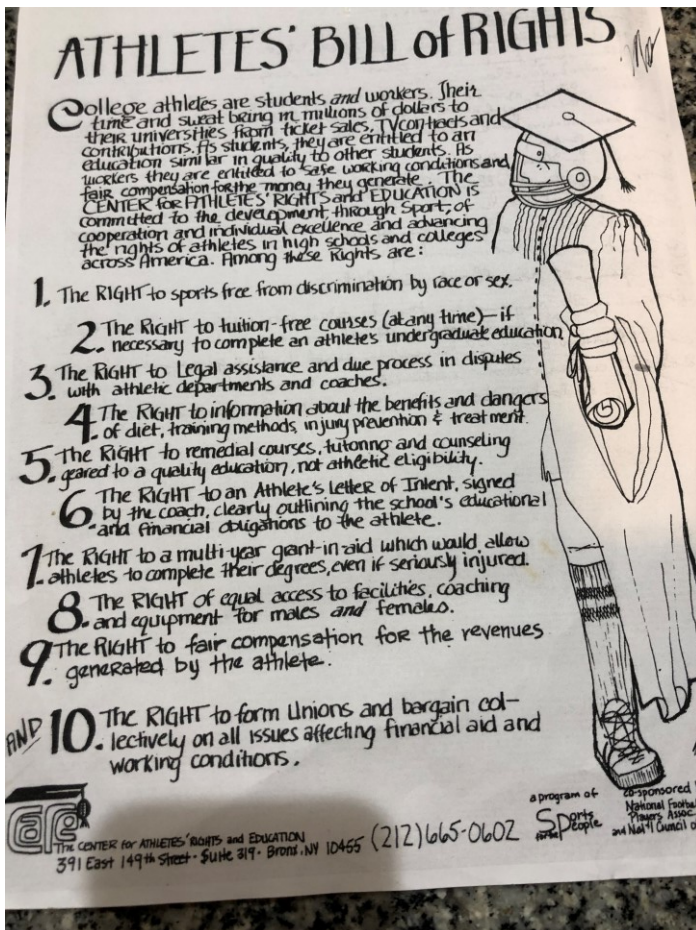


Allen Sack, Director  
Center for Athletes Rights and Education

In 1980, I took a leave of absence from the University of New Haven where I was a tenured professor in the Department of Sociology. I took the leave to serve as the Director of The Center for Athletes' Rights and Education (CARE). CARE was a program of Sports for the People, a community center in the South Bronx. CARE was co-sponsored by the National Football Players Association and the National Council of Black Lawyers. Not long after I became CARE's director, Cary Goodman, the head of Sports for the People, was informed that CARE had been awarded a three-year \$250,000 grant by the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE).

Buoyed by a string of successes, we decided in 1981 to have a major press conference to announce the creation of the Center for Athletes Rights and Education. To insure a major media turnout, we held the press conference in Washington, D.C. at the NFLPA Head Quarters. When the press conference actually began, the room was packed, with standing room only in the back. Among those present were writers from the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, Associated Press, and United Press International. The headline of our press release, "Athletes Rights Group to Organize Nationally: Blames NCAA for Athletic Corruption," had generated substantial interest.

Cary Goodman gave some introductory remarks. He then turned things over to me to present our college athletes Bill of Rights which we displayed on a large poster in front of the room. Our preamble went right for the jugular. "College athletes are students and workers. Their time and sweat bring in millions of dollars to their universities. As students, they are entitled to an education similar to other students. As workers, they are entitled to safe working conditions and fair compensation for the money they generate. The first eight rights focused on race and gender equity in college sports, the right to a quality education, the right to legal assistance and due process in disputes with coaches, and rights that defend athletes from injury and exploitation.



The reporters began scribbling frantically in their notebooks when we proposed in number 9 that athletes have a right to a fair share of the revenue they generate. Number 10 of the Bill of Rights clearly stated that CARE supported college athletes' right to unionize. In retrospect, I must admit that unionization of college athletes was on CARE's radar screen, but we emphasized at the time that neither we nor the NFLPA were prepared to launch such an effort. In fact, we were fully aware that engaging in union organizing with Department of Education grant money was a clear violation of our FIPSE contract.

The NCAA response to the CARE proposals left no doubt that we had struck the central nerve that runs to the very core of the college sports industry. In his book, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, Walter Byers, the former executive director of the NCAA says that upon hearing about the creation of CARE, "there was an immediate red alert. The NCAA staff was to get on this one right away.

As expected, once conservative members of Congress and officials from the newly elected Reagan administration read in the Washington Post that the department of education—a federal agency already under attack by the Reagan Administration—had funded a group from the South Bronx to unionize college athletes, it was clear to me and other members of CARE that we were going to lose the FIPSE grant. Once CARE lost its grant from FIPSE, the organization struggled for a year or two and then flickered out. Sports for the People and its community Center in the South Bronx continued to provide services for local residents whose neighborhoods were often on fire, and whose police precinct was known as Fort Apache.

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