

# **Myron Rolle Testimony**

## **Introduction**

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Thune, and Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure and a blessing to have this opportunity to be in your presence and present my thoughts on a compelling matter concerning college athletics. Let me first thank you and your wonderful staff for the invitation.

In the confines of academia, I am what is commonly referred to as a “Scholar-Athlete.” I wear that mantle proudly and I strived each day to be an outstanding person, student and athlete. As my career has transitioned, I am today striving to be the best medical student I can be at The Florida State University College of Medicine with a view to being a pediatric neurological surgeon. I used the values my parents, Whitney and Beverly Rolle, instilled in me at an early age and in my brothers, as the foundation for my growth and the light to the path of life. In our household, education superseded sports and our Christian faith superseded all. The message was very clear and understood. My parents taught me how to value life, education, respect authority, treat others as you would like to be treated, respect our elders, serve our community, set lofty goals and never say never. These principles have made me who I am today.

## **Academic and Athletic Background**

Before I address the collegiate athlete compensation issue, let me briefly recap my academic and athletic careers as this may shed light on my thoughts on the subject matter of concern.

In primary, high school and college, I took an active role in student life outside of athletics. I served as a student leader in all levels of my academic life. I was Student Council President in both Primary and High School. I served as Vice President of our Student Athlete Advisory Council at FSU. I was editor of my primary and high school newspapers. I played the baritone saxophone, participated on Brain Bowl Teams and played the lead role of Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof. I spent hours visiting the elderly in Absecon Manner in Galloway, New Jersey, where I grew up and served Habitat for Humanities in Florida and West Virginia during my high school years at The Peddie School and The Hun School.

My athletic career started on the playing fields at Gabriel Fields and basketball courts throughout South Jersey. I was athletically gifted and participated at a high level in Baseball, Basketball, Track and Football. By the time my high school career was over, I was ranked the Number One High School Football Player in America by ESPN.

At Florida State University, I started at strong safety on a full athletic scholarship throughout the three years I spent at FSU. I earned both academic and athletic All-American honors. We will discuss FSU later in this conversation.

In 2010, I was drafted in the sixth round of the NFL draft by the Tennessee Titans and remained in the NFL for three years.

I recently completed my first year as a full-time medical student at Florida State University College of Medicine.

## **Influences**

At an early age I felt I knew what I wanted in life. I wanted to serve. Today, I envision myself as a combination Servant and Transformative Leader.

At the Smithville School in Galloway, New Jersey we studied the nervous system. This intrigued me to the extent that my older brother bought me a book “Gifted Hands” by Ben Carson. I completed this book in 3 days and I was hooked. I knew I wanted to be a neurosurgeon. My parents encouraged me and allowed me to participate in a very valuable program – The National Youth Leadership Forum on Medicine - where I spent time during my high school breaks at LSU and Tulane University shadowing doctors and being exposed to the medical profession as it truly is performed.

Another life changing episode in my young life happened while at The Hun School of Princeton. The Hun School is minutes away from Princeton University where one of your former colleagues, Senator Bill Bradley was an outstanding All-American Basketball Player and also a Rhodes Scholar. While I did not have definitive plan as to how to accomplish what Senator Bradley accomplished, it set my thoughts in motion. During my recruitment by all of the major Universities, I emphasized education was my priority and football would be secondary. Florida State University accepted this condition and I was allowed to pursue my academic endeavors without hindrance and thus my connection to the Office of National Fellowships. The relationship with the Office of National Fellowships allowed me to make the dreams that Senator Bradley’s accomplishments instilled in me to become a reality and my earning the Rhodes Scholarship in 2009.

Serving my community was indeed an active part of my life. As I grew and matured, I wanted this aspect of my life to continue. Using the platform that my FSU career and the Rhodes Scholarship provided, I along with my family, formed The Myron L Rolle Foundation whose mission statement embodies my very being – “Dedicated to the support of health, wellness, education and other charitable initiative throughout the world that benefit children and families in need.” We have annually hosted for five years the Myron Rolle Wellness and Leadership Academy at Camp Blanding, Starke, Florida for foster children in the State of Florida. We have conducted the “Our Way To Health” program for Native Americans in Florida, New Mexico and Arizona, Rhodes to Success program in Florida and now a Bahamas version of the Myron Rolle Wellness and Leadership Academy.

## **College Life**

I spent three full years at FSU immersed with the football program and players with the exception of a six week period that I spent in Europe at FSU’s London Study Centre Abroad. I graduated magna cum laude from FSU in two and one-half years and won the Rhodes Scholarship in my final year. As a member of the football team, we trained during the off-season and during the season together, we spent much of our down-time together, enjoyed off-campus life together, we studied together and generally lived together. During this period, I was able to participate in student life as a normal student by being involved in extra-curricular activities including pledging for my Fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, participating in human mesenchymal stem cell research and serving an executive role in Seminole Student Boosters.

Because of the unique position in which I placed myself at FSU, I was able to see both sides of the student-athlete challenges, conflicts and now the controversial positions relative to compensating college athletes.

I can appreciate the traditional arguments from the University perspective that they are providing one a full-four year scholarship that values in excess of US\$250,000.00 or the claims from non-athlete students that the athlete is taking a position that a more qualified non-athlete student should have occupied. There are many legitimate arguments to support the University's and non-athlete student's positions. However, there is an equally compelling argument from the athletes.

Let me talk about a few scenarios that I have personally experience and one shared with me second-hand.

Playing football in a major university program is almost like a full time job. There is very little margin for error in managing your time. Typically during the season, your day begins with either a 5:00 or 6:00 AM work-out in the weight room or a study session at the football facilities. This is followed by getting dressed and breakfast between 7:00 and 8:00 AM. After breakfast, most players have morning classes that can take you through the morning and up to 1:00 PM. Lunch is normally at an on-campus restaurant or cafeteria. There may be a little down-time between lunch and the time you must be at the facilities. If you have an injury, you make every effort to get that treated during this down-time. Around 2:30 PM or 3:00 PM, players report to their section meetings dressed. Around 4:00 PM players report to the field for practice that can last anywhere from 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. After practice the players shower and clean-up for supper that is around 6:30 or 7:00 PM. Depending on the situation, there may be position meetings after supper or study sessions. A player normally could leave the facility between 8:00 PM and 9:30 PM and return to his dorm or apartment where he must study his films as well as his class work. Bed time could be any-time between 11:00 PM and 1:00 AM. At 5 or 6:00 AM the process repeats itself. As you can see a significant portion of the football players day is consumed by football and at the football facility.

The University provides a small monthly stipend to the athletes to cover food and rent at a minimal but acceptable living standard. Many of my team mates struggled to make ends meet on a monthly basis. Why you may ask? Many of the athletes come from deprived economic backgrounds where they must support their families back home so that the family could survive. Many of them take a portion of their allowance and send it home to support their family. If by chance an unplanned child is involved, the athlete must provide for that child as best he can. With the schedule delineated above there is no possible chance the athletes can take a second job to supplement his monthly stipend.

Here are some of the issues and challenges the athlete and University face. The vast majority of the athletes are not prepared and ready for the rigorous and regimented life style of college football. In high school they were promoted socially and not provided the tools to navigate their way through an intense college curriculum that will provide for them once the college or NFL careers come to an end. The vast majority of college football players' careers end when their college eligibility ends. There are a few and a small select group who manage to make it to the NFL and survive where they can create financial security for their family. The universities are pressured to accept marginal students in order to remain competitive and share in the enormous wind-fall of bowl and television revenues.

While many athletes enter college ill-equipped, the universities have excellent educational support systems that manage to keep the athletes eligible. The universities provide the opportunities for the athletes to change the trajectory of their and their families' lives. Some embrace this opportunity and others do not. My argument with universities is that they should evaluate each case on its own merit and develop a program where the individual's dreams and passion are channeled into the direction where once a course of study is completed the athlete becomes a productive citizen maximizing his or her skills.

### **Compensation to Athletes**

Compensation to athletes is an administrative nightmare but time has come to walk through the door and in the words of Spike Lee "Do the right thing". I am a proponent of compensating athletes. All college athletes should be compensated but not at the same level. However, I believe athletes in revenue generating sports should be compensated more than those in non-revenue generating sports.

There are many who struggle with the idea of paying college athletes. Maybe a Managed Fund should be set-up that will be available to the athlete upon graduation or some criteria that demands some level of academic accomplishment from the athlete. This Managed Fund could be an outstanding way to fiscally support the continued education of the student-athlete once their playing days cease. A portion of the overall revenues generated from the product within which the athletes participate should fund the Managed Fund. A certain portion for non-revenue generating sports should also be set-aside.

It is my view that there should be a mechanism in place to address the immediate needs of the athlete who struggles with the standard monthly stipend. Maybe the monthly stipend needs to be increased or a means test be developed to ascertain the economic immediate needs which could carefully be deducted from the Managed Fund.

Paying college athletes is the right thing to do and now is the right time to do it. Once we sharpen the mechanism in which to deliver this novel system, I believe we will see more successful student-athletes making significant contributions beyond the playing field.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering your questions.