



WALK-ON U™
THE INCLUSION PETITION
INTO THE NCAA
Second Edition

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THE INCLUSION PETITION INTO THE NCAA

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[Walk-On U, LLC](#), is gathering nationwide support from college coaches, athletic directors, athletic department support staff, conference officials, current and former student-athletes (male and female), parents of current walk-ons, and general sports fans across America.

This Inclusion Petition into the NCAA is seeking change to rules that segregate, are unjust, unsafe, and unreasonable to the “collegiate walk-on student-athlete.” Spanning five decades of rejection every time a member institution stood up for the walk-on players, they were met with denial and rebuffed by the NCAA cabinets, committees, and executive boards.

The mission of the NCAA is to protect and care for the well-being of all student-athletes. Directly from the 2014 – 2015 **NCAA Division I Manual: 2.2 The Principle of the Student-Athlete Well-Being**. Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes who choose to participate... Each member institution should also provide an environment that fosters fairness, sportsmanship, safety, honesty and positive relationships between student-athletes and representatives of the institution. (2.2.1 – 2.2.6)

From their website **NCAA.org, Healthy and Safety**: “The NCAA was founded in 1906 to protect young people from the dangerous and exploitive athletics practices of the time. Today, student-athlete health, safety and well-being remain among our top priorities.”

According to the [2014–2015 NCAA Division I Manual](#) (August 2014 version) by definition, **(12.02.12 Student Athlete, page 58)**, walk-on’s become *official student-athletes* once he/she “reports for an intercollegiate squad that is under the jurisdiction of the athletics department.”

But, is that *really* true for walk-on student athletes? Shockingly, some of the vital care, well-being, and protections are *not* extended to “Walk-On Student-Athletes.”

SUMMARY

It is a proven fact, a universal truth, that proper nutrition is critical to the athletic development, performance, and *safety* of athletes. Today, thousands of meetings, media interviews, and

analytical articles are revealing the realities of player safety and the importance of nutrition. The topic of player safety is at an all-time high at this very moment and to deprive any athlete of the utmost protection is incomprehensible. Providing some athletes with all the tools necessary to succeed, but forcing other athletes to pay for the necessities required to perform at their peak level, or to keep them from being as safe as possible, is absolutely unacceptable in 2014.

Thankfully, in 2014 concussion care organizations met on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC and with the United Nations organization in New York. These discussions were and are vital and the immediate importance is monumental. However, missing from these historic conversations is the plight of the collegiate walk-on. Not because these organizations do not care, but because they have no idea these things are actually happening today. This ***Inclusion Petition*** will be sent to them.

Regretfully, the all-too-often isolated and disrespected *walk-on student-athletes* are forgotten and cast by the wayside. They are desperately needed for practice, but they are not truly taken care of behind the scenes. The playing field is not level and they do not have a voice.

FOUR CHANGES NEEDED IMMEDIATELY IN THE NCAA MANUAL:

- 1) Overturn the current training table rule **16.5.2 (C)** and allow ALL student-athletes, in ALL sports, male and female, to participate in all meals and snacks (including training table) without having to pay for it. (see details below, **CHANGE NUMBER ONE**)
- 2) Make mandatory NCAA Bylaw **16.4 Medical Expenses** that all member institutions cover the medical insurance of all their student-athletes who have officially made and joined the team, *including walk-ons*, while they are under the jurisdiction of their athletic department. (see details below, **CHANGE NUMBER TWO**)
- 3) Revise Bylaw **14.5.5** to allow walk-ons, who are without athletic department aid for tuition, books, and room & board, to freely transfer schools without the penalty of having to sit out a full year. (see details below, **CHANGE NUMBER THREE**)
- 4) Similar to the Collective Bargaining Agreement where NFL players are limited to the amount of *live* hitting in practice, the NCAA should limit the number of “full go” practices during the year in contact sports which would reduce the amount of injuries, especially head trauma, for all athletes. Then the NCAA and Member Organizations could truly stand behind their rules, **2.2 The Principle of the Student-Athlete Well-Being** and **2.2.3 Health & Safety**. (see details below, **CHANGE NUMBER FOUR**)

CHANGE NUMBER ONE: TRAINING TABLE 16.5.2 (C), in NCAA Manual.

On April 15, 2014, the NCAA voters passed a Reform to Training Table Rule 16.5.2 (C). Acknowledging consistent, proper nutrition was vital to an athlete’s peak performance, the new

rule, 16.5.2 (D), stated institutions *may* provide meals and snacks to student-athletes as a benefit incidental to participation in intercollegiate athletics.

HOWEVER, the old rule 16.5.2 (C) (which states walk-ons “may purchase one training table meal per day...”) STAYED in the Manual unchanged and the NEW rule 16.5.2 (D), was added.

This created confusion for athletic departments trying to interpret the new rule (D) vs. the still existing rule (C) and essentially opened the door to the “flexibility” and “discretion” of interpreting the new rule to their preference.

So, what happened? Many universities jumped at the chance to “care for the well being” of *all* their student athletes, including walk-ons, by leaning on the new rule 16.5.2 (D), while other universities choose to continue to follow 16.5.2 (C) so they could carry on charging walk-ons money to pay for their own training table meals.

The result; some Division I programs cover all meals and snacks for all their athletes, male and female, because they can under the new rule. And some Division I programs force walk-ons to *pay* for their nutrition because they can under the original rule that never changed.

Without the NCAA making the new rule crystal clear and mandatory that all Division I programs care for the nutritional needs of all their athletes representing their institutions, it can be presumed that universities charging money for some athletes to fuel their bodies are essentially allowing walk-ons to tear their bodies down in full support of their program, but they do not feel it is their obligation or duty to protect walk-ons by aiding them in building their bodies back up – contradictory to the NCAA mantra: ***Our Commitment to Student-Athlete Well-Being.***

Student-athletes are provided training table meals to fuel their bodies in preparation to represent their schools through sport. Yet, it is a little-known fact that almost all people associated with athletic programs get to eat for free. The scholarship players, the coaches, the equipment managers, the student managers, the medical trainers, the student-trainers, athletic department personnel, practice day referees, and invited local media staff can attend training table after practice for a hearty meal without opening their wallet.

However, the minority group of players, the walk-ons, who spend equal time preparing, going to the same meetings, working out in the same weight room, and practicing on the same field, suffering brutal hits, cuts and bruises, from head to toe, must pay for the privilege of eating their nutritious training table meal (with their own teammates) to heal their bodies. Walk-ons must look after their own ***Well-Being.***

CHANGE NUMBER TWO: MEDICAL EXPENSES 16.4 in NCAA Manual

The NCAA states in section 16.4 of their manual that an institution *may* provide medical and related expenses and services to a student-athlete. The word *may* should be changed to *must*. Is it not just, right, and noble for every institution to cover the medical insurance needs relating to athletic participation of the very student-athletes they desperately rely on to bring fame and

fortune to their universities? Unfortunately, based on economic interests, most member institutions take advantage of the term *may* and force walk-ons to pay for their own insurance. Rule 16.4 should be revised to read; Institutions are *required* to provide athletic insurance to all student-athletes representing their athletic programs. An athlete becomes “covered” at the point they check into the athletic facility until the time they check out for the day. Institutions may not build their team around walk-ons, but upon the walk-ons’ backs they build their team.

CHANGE NUMBER THREE: FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE TRANSFERS 14.5.5 in NCAA Manual

The NCAA’s transfer rules were implemented to deter high profile scholarship student-athletes from jumping from school to school and joining the teams with the best records or the best chance to play. While that rule is a hot topic of discussion within today’s media about the validity of keeping the rule, it certainly should have no bearing on walk-ons.

We know that walk-ons receive zero finances from the athletic department and are completely on their own to fund their entire existence at school.

Typically, walk-ons are rarely considered game-day capable due to preconceived notions by coaches, and their desire to play the scholarship elite they recruited. Walk-ons are almost always sent to the scout team (practice squad) with little to no chance of ever playing in a real game. Unfortunately, too many schools don’t even list walk-ons in their media guide. Or, if they do, they may just list their name and position. Many walk-ons were All-Stars in high school with dozens of accolades to their credit. Yet, unlike the scholarship players with the full page biographies, even the recruited or preferred walk-ons get little more than a mere mention of their existence in the media guide.

The NCAA has no interest in a walk-ons’ academic achievements as we know from **3.2.4.4 Academic Performance Program**, page 9 in NCAA Manual. Member institutions must submit compliance data to the NCAA showing the Academic Performance Rate (APR), the Academic Performance Census (APC) and the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). Interestingly enough, this academic program is only for student-athletes receiving financial aid (scholarship players).

To recap; walk-ons receive no money, pay for everything, are indefinitely treated as a practice only players, are not worthy of more than mentioning the city they are from in their programs, and the NCAA has no interest in their academic performance. Yet, when walk-ons want to transfer schools they are penalized as though they *are* a scholarship student-athlete. This is absolutely nonsensical.

CHANGE NUMBER FOUR: 2.2 Student-Athlete Well-Being, 2.2.3 Health and Safety

Never before in the history of the NCAA has the discussion of head trauma and concussions been more prevalent than it is today. The topic of discussion often falls with examples of former NFL players, now dead, with systems relating to Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE.

We hear about Jovan Belcher, Ray Easterling, Cookie Gilchrist, Chris Henry, Terry Long, John Mackey, Dave Duerson, Ollie Matson, Junior Seau, Scott Ross, Andre Waters, and Mike Webster, among many others.

Forgotten from the discussion of those who died or are still suffering serious life altering injuries are the thousands of walk-ons nationwide who give their bodies up in live hitting drills for the betterment of the team. While most walk-ons suffer in silence, they will never be reported about in the newspaper. Until now... We have learned of the tragic death of Ohio State walk-on football player, Kosta Karageorge, who has apparently taken his own life with a gunshot to his head at the end of November, 2014. It has been reported that Karageorge complained and suffered from numerous concussions.

Perhaps it is time to add a clause into the NCAA Manual similar to what the NFL has in their Collective Bargaining Agreement that will limit the amount of live hitting during the year.

SYNOPSIS

Walk-ons are the minority on each college sports team, yet they are not included in **The Office of Inclusion of the NCAA**. On their website (www.ncaa.org) the **NCAA INCLUSION** states; “We seek to establish and maintain an inclusive culture that fosters equitable participation for student-athletes...”

Inconsistently, walk-ons are not afforded equitable participation in the critically, invaluable nutritious training table meals giving them even less of a fighting chance to defend themselves against the vicious blows they invariably receive.

Illogically, it is not mandatory that each member institution cover medical insurance for the walk-on, the quintessential student-athlete, representing the NCAA and his or her school so valiantly and in exemplary fashion.

Irrationally, with little to no media information or financial aid from the athletic department, and no interest from the NCAA in their academic achievements, walk-ons are held hostage when they wish to transfer schools, losing a year of eligibility and treated as a full scholarship player.

Ironically, walk-ons are *excluded* when they should be *included* (training table, insurance, personal safety) and *included* when they should be *excluded* (transferring).

It is now time for walk-ons to have a fair and just place within the NCAA Manual. It is high time that walk-ons get treated with a little respect. Walk-ons are not seeking a large stipend check each month. Walk-ons are not seeking to unionize or create tension. But, for their admirable dedication to their schools’ athletic program, they just want a little more protection, medical coverage, and a seat at the table, the training table.

The protection of all athletes should be the number one goal of every collegiate athletic program. We know that college football is a brutal and violent game. Keeping most of that action on

Saturday afternoons seems to be a better idea than the continual daily pounding during the week. Do we really need to start a list of dead college football players before we limit the amount of times there is full contact during the week of practice?

FINAL WORD

It is widely known that most NCAA institutions pay their head football (and basketball) coach's seven-figure salaries and their assistants make healthy six-figure incomes. It is also reported the top NCAA executives equally rake in fantastic earnings.

The new NCAA television deals with CBS Sports and Turner Broadcasting will bring in north of \$11.8 BILLION dollars over a 14-year period. The NCAA states they distribute 96% of its revenue directly back to their membership base. There is no question the finances *are* available to cover the added expenses of insurance and training table for *all* walk-ons.

I am not offended by the money listed above. After all college football is big business. We live in an age where there is a race to see who can build the biggest athletic facilities and the largest state of the art stadiums. But, to be running to the bank and writing monster checks at the expense of, or on the backs of those walk-ons who are giving everything of themselves to their universities, yet receiving nothing, is deplorable.

Many schools deeply involved in the activities listed above cite funding issues. I submit if your bank roll is of concern, the problem may lie in proper budgeting, not training table meals for walk-ons.

If you take care of the people at the bottom of the pyramid forming the foundation of your program, everything else seems to fall into place. *Take care of the people who take care of you* is a philosophy that should equally apply to walk-ons. On special teams, walk-ons cover kicks for you, but you can't cover insurance for them?

The time for change is NOW! WALK-ONS in all sports, male and female MUST be taken care of and given the best chance to succeed and stay safe. Because of, and due to their unyielding dedication and services, all walk-ons deserve the same protections and fuel to propel them forward during the daily grind of college athletics' highest level of competition.

Because of the health and safety at issue here, the NCAA board has the right and the obligation to act and vote right away. Once clear language is written on these rules changes should take effect immediately.

The impact from walk-ons is invaluable, but their voice is rarely heard. Collectively, we seek this moment for positive change and we are relying on the NCAA to do the right and just thing. This is a defining moment in the history of the **Well-Being of the Student-Athlete Walk-On** who has been shunned for too long.

Tim Lavin

About the Author: [Tim Lavin](#) wrote and published; [***WALK-ON U: The Shocking Truth Behind Football's Unsung Underdogs***](#). Released in October of 2013, Lavin is fighting for change for walk-ons of today and tomorrow. The plight of walk-ons is carefully detailed along with numerous interviews including the likes of Tom Osborne, Lou Holtz, Terry Donahue, Dabo Swinney, Karl Mecklenburg, Steve Mariucci, and Mike Sherrard. As a walk-on for the USC Trojans, Lavin earned a football scholarship and knows both sides of the fence all too well. He's exposing the truth of the Walk-On World, showcasing the great success stories, and fighting for the end of segregation of walk-ons within the NCAA. The soft cover book and additional information can be found at www.WalkOnU.com and the ebook version is listed on [Amazon](#) and [Barnes & Noble](#).

cc: [Mark Emmert, President NCAA](#)
[NCAA Executive Committee](#) -- [Roster](#)
[NCAA Board of Directors](#) -- [Roster](#)
[Leadership Council](#) -- [Roster](#)
[Legislative Council](#) -- [Roster](#)
[Awards, Benefits, Expenses and Financial Aid Cabinet](#) -- [Roster](#)
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
[Energy & Commerce Committee](#). ([Improving Sports Safety: A Multifaceted Approach, March 13, 2014 Hearing](#))