

## Junior Achievement Essay Contest Winning Entry

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**Essay Question:** Many of today's student athletes eye multimillion-dollar contracts and extravagant lifestyles while weighing the risk of leaving college early. Some athletes who choose to leave before graduation make it big; most do not. Should professional sports teams and leagues require college degrees of their players? If not, should they require some college credits before an athlete is considered eligible for play?

Imagine all your life you dream of playing baseball for the Boston Red Sox. You are the best player in your hometown, and your high school coach just knows you will "be famous someday." You are one of an elite few high schoolers in the country to be scouted, recruited and ultimately chosen by the team of your dreams. Your life could not be better. You play professionally for almost one season before suffering a catastrophic injury. The crippling injury prevents you from ever playing again; and, because you turned down that college scholarship in twelfth grade, you have few options.

Every student athlete should go to college. The temptations of professional sports are massive, but college sports give players opportunities to explore more than the fame and money side of athleticism. While professional players get paid for what they do, college athletes receive an education; and, it can be argued that a quality education is priceless. As one ages, a sport may become harder to perform. With an education, you can dust off that degree earned long ago and pursue a meaningful career.

College sports offer exposure to a more realistic world. In addition to time-consuming workouts and games, college athletes must often juggle academics, community involvement and sometimes family responsibilities while discovering a sense of self. Additionally, sports like football or basketball allow a player to grow accustomed to media attention. Many athletes are consumed by earning money, but they need a backup plan. College is the perfect path.

Unfortunately, most professional teams do not require college degrees, thus dooming some players for failure no matter how wealthy they are. Teams should require proof a player can survive beyond sports, whether that be proof of a degree from the local community college, or a diploma from Yale.