

## Athletes reap 'benefits' of bowl games

Written by Mark Dukes

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It's the most hypocritical time of the year for college football.

The first few of 35 bowl games have been played. We'll be watching them the rest of this year and well into next. Players will be making sacrifices by spending time away from family as they prepare for games, but don't feel too sorry for them.

Every bowl game offers plenty of gifts for players, up to \$550 worth of swag for as many as 125 individuals. Schools also are allowed to tack on another \$400 worth of gifts, bringing to \$950 the value of benefits players could receive.

Do the math. That's as much as \$118,750 per team in benefits and as much as \$8 million awarded to college football bowl participants. A player who goes to four bowl games during his career (as Iowa seniors are doing) can rake in \$3,000 to \$4,000 worth of gifts in a career.

And I emphasize the word "benefits."

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is all about college athletes not receiving "extra benefits," those perks not normally afforded the casual college student. The NCAA scrutinizes coaches, athletic directors and athletic departments, making sure they stay within the rules.

Coaches cannot have their team or a few recruits over to the house for a barbeque. A booster cannot give an athlete money for a dinner or shopping trip. The NCAA rule book is thick and cumbersome, but the governing body expects every individual to walk the line.

Iowa and Oklahoma players involved in the Insight Bowl this week will receive an Ogio Convoy backpack, a cap and a shopping spree at a gift suite. Pinstripe Bowl participants Iowa State and Rutgers will get a choice of gifts at the Sony Style store and a tour of the MTV studios.

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Other gifts at other bowls include watches, souvenir footballs, a \$400 shopping spree at Best Buy, iPods, Kindles, 32-inch flat screen televisions, and on and on.

Oh, those poor college athletes. They claim they spend so much time refining their skills and practicing that they don't have any means of going out for a pizza or a movie. Then after the bowl games, they go back to their campuses, gorge on free meals, seek free tutors and further their free education.

OK, colleges make a lot of money off football, from gate receipts to merchandise sales. But don't tell me the athletes don't get much in return.

And the NCAA? It is often portrayed as The Scrooge of college athletics. But in bowl season, it is the Santa Claus that stops on every doorstep, delivering toys to their boys, naughty or nice.

*(Mark Dukes is former sports editor of the Cedar Rapid Gazette. He is co-host of The Gym Class radio show weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM-AM 1600.)*