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SHOULD MINOR LEAGUE MEAN MINOR PAY? A STUDENT ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE

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Abstract

Historically, and at the time of this study's project, many minor league baseball players in the United States were paid below the federal minimum wage, which has been recently circulating in the media and has been a source of ongoing controversy (McDaniel, 2022). This article is a write-up to the first author's end-of-term course project, which was supervised by the second author. The objective of the present study was to perform a historical and philosophical analysis of the public debate on minor league pay as well as describe ethical arguments within the debate. This should guide future debates on labor rights and fairness within sport, including professional leagues. Methods for a single-artifact descriptive case study (March 2021) were used to describe opposing views on the issue of minor league pay in baseball, which were then analyzed using historical and philosophical perspectives. The case study material was a 2019 popular press article of journalism covering both sides of the debate. Two modes of qualitative research were used: qualitative critical analysis and discourse analysis. Qualitative critical analysis entailed comparing discourse within the case article to information within one peer-reviewed research article, which presented historical and jurisprudence discourse and research on why Major League Baseball team-owners have been allowed to legally pay minor league players below the federal minimum wage cut-point. Fourteen parsimonious concepts from one undergraduate course on physical activity perspectives were used to describe and analyze data extracted vis-à-vis the qualitative critical analysis, followed by a discourse analysis of the extracted data. We discuss the study results, then present recommendations for future research. We conclude with a reflection from the first author about her project experience.

Keywords

athlete activism, career exploration, kinesiology, labor rights, undergraduate research

Peer Review

This work has undergone a double-blind review by a minimum of two faculty members from institutions of higher learning from around the world. The faculty reviewers have expertise in disciplines closely related to those represented by this work. If possible, the work was also reviewed by undergraduates in collaboration with the faculty reviewers.

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The authors did not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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April 24, 2023. The article has been updated to reflect current developments.

Introduction

Historically, every year hundreds of baseball players participated in Spring Training, yet only some were paid. A *Sports Illustrated* article published in February of 2022, discusses both sides of the debate while analyzing whether minor league players who are invited to Spring Training should be paid or not. Elise Bloom, the legal representative assisting Major League Baseball, argued:

It is the players that obtain the greater benefit from the training opportunities that they are afforded than the clubs, who actually just incur the cost of having that training... During the training season, the players are not employees, and would not be subject to either the Fair Labor Standards Act or any state minimum wage act (McDaniel, 2022, para. 4).

Garrett Broshuis, a lawyer for Korein Tillery, is a former minor league player who is also the legal representative for the players. Broshuis pushed back on Bloom's assertion:

All of a sudden, they aren't employees during the time periods where we call it 'training,' even though they're operating under the same employment contract that requires them to perform services, quote, 'throughout the calendar year' (McDaniel, 2022, para. 7).

Major League Baseball has been exempted from antitrust laws since 1922, which eradicated all other professional baseball leagues (Williams, 2019). With only one league to play in, baseball players were faced with a dilemma: quit baseball or endure possible unfair conditions and exploitation. For a century, minor league baseball players have been left without a way to advocate for themselves due to the lack of a union. Minor leaguers were left without a union from Minor League Baseball's founding in 1901 until September 14, 2022 when the Major League Baseball Player Association (MLBPA) decided to integrate minor leaguers into their union after much political pressuring from minor league baseball player and their advocates (ESPN.com, 2022).

Scholarship like the present article is important for exposing students to controversial topics that relate to their interests and by offering students an opportunity to explore debates using various perspective-taking activities (Williams, 2014). Philosophy, or "lover of wisdom," is an important part of this process; in order to understand the debate and gain wisdom, it is critical to use philosophy as a guide. Those interested in the sporting industry should be equipped to critically explore topics related to their personal, and or, career interests in sport—using historical and philosophical perspectives (Chodzko-Zajko et al., 2018; Kosma & Buchanan, 2018). Professionals receive a multitude of opportunities to promote experiences in sport and exercise settings – e.g., *it is in the job description* – but it may be seldom that professionals in sport and exercise settings are challenged to examine their personal course of action to promote experiences and opportunities in those settings (Russo et al., 2021; Smith et al. 2022; Thomas et al., 2021a) – certainly not using historical and philosophical perspectives (Ross & Thomas, 2022; Massey & Whitley, 2021). Yet, both knowledge domains are crucial to the future viability of the application of kinesiology in the sporting industry (Gill, 2007).

According to the American Kinesiology Association (AKA), kinesiology is the academic area focused on studying the myriad of ways physical activity relates to society, health, and life satisfaction (i.e., quality of life, AKA, n.d.). This definition extends knowledge from the academic disciplines of physiology and anatomy, psychology and sociology, history and philosophy, and art and literature to human movement pursuits and experiences (Kretchmar et al., 2017e). In the United States (US), kinesiology has been widely adopted as the inclusive term to all disciplines which study aspects of human movement in a lab and a cultural context (Kretchmar et al., 2017e). Athleticism and how to teach (and encourage) it are not the only subjects studied through kinesiology. Given their ramifying impact on subjective experiences in sport settings and objective opportunities to participate (and have a career through sport), laws, organizational policies and managerial practices also fall under kinesiology (e.g., Berman & Friedman, 2021; Desjardins et al., 2022). According to

Kretchmar and colleagues (2017e), historical and philosophical knowledge of sport topics will aid people in making ethical decisions in sport (and related settings) concerning controversial issues, such as the public debate on minor league pay illustrated in this article's introduction.

Purpose statement. The present article reports on an empirical investigation of the public debate concerning the pay of minor league baseball players, using historical and philosophical perspectives. Specifically, the present article was based upon the undergraduate-student author's alternative final exam (first author; University of Michigan, 2020). The final exam's learning objective was for the student to demonstrate ability in performing a comprehensive analysis of a present-day issue in kinesiology, using historical perspectives and Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives taught in their course. Thus, the prevailing purpose of the present article was to demonstrate ways in which breadth of perspective, grounded in history and philosophy, can stimulate undergraduates in thinking both critically and differently about controversial issues in sport.

Research questions. The present article is about minor league baseball players and how much they are paid. We will be exploring the following questions investigated by the first author through their alternative final exam: (a) Is the pay that minor league players receive fair? (b) If not, how much more should minor league players be paid? At the time when the first author asked the research question, there was controversy and lawsuits within the US on whether minor league baseball players receive fair compensation for their work—some of which are still ongoing (Brown, 2022).

Methods

Procedures

This article is a write-up to an end of term project (i.e., alternative final exam; University of Michigan, 2020), which was carried out in partial fulfillment of one introductory undergraduate course on perspectives in physical activity (January-March, 2021). The project was carried out by the first author and supervised by the second author. Specifically, the first author was assigned the task of locating case study material to analyze, which met the following criteria: (a) it was a recent popular press article focused on a kinesiology issue and (b) the article was published within three years of the course (i.e., between 2019-2021). Prompts of the alternative final exam tasked the student to analyze how the case study article relates to both the history and philosophy of physical activity (with representation of Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives employed). After choosing the topic of minor league salaries, the goal was to develop a research question that the project would look to answer. The first author searched for a case study article that would help answer her research question or questions (George Mason University, 2018; also required for the alternative final exam). The case study that the first author chose was a popular press article titled, "The MLB Makes Millions on Minor Leaguers. It Refuses to Pay Minimum Wage," by Pat Garofalo (2019). The case study article focuses on the pay that minor league baseball players receive, which the author argues is not livable by any means. The first author chose this popular press article (henceforth referred to as "the case article") because it did a satisfactory and credible job of summarizing opposing views (i.e., discourse) on the issue, breaking down the economics that underpin the issue, as well as it provided personal testimonials and up-to-date commentary. As required by the alternative final exam, the first author then located one relevant scholarly article from the peer-reviewed literature, which was used to help her interpret and critically discuss the opposing perspectives in the case article. The student chose the scholarly article titled, "Major League Baseball's Indentured Class: Why the Major League

Baseball Players Association Should Include Minor League Players” by David Williams (2019) and published in University of San Francisco Law Review in the same year as the case article. The student’s rationale in choosing the scholarly article by Williams (2019) was because it provided a historical and legal analysis of MLB policy and US Law allowing minor league baseball players to be legally compensated below pay standards for minimum wage as of the date which the present article was submitted for publication.

Plan for Analysis

For the purpose of generating a critical discussion on the controversial topic of minor league pay, a qualitative critical analysis was performed in order to summarize ways that key ideas presented in the case article had compared with one peer-reviewed article located for the end of term project; comparisons were also made to definitions of 14 glossary terms from the course selected apriori to the collection and analysis of data (see Table 1). The term definitions were paraphrased in the first author’s own words. The terms were obtained from two textbooks required for the course: (a) History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity (Kretchmar et al., 2017, 1st edition) and (b) Classic Asian Philosophy: A Guide to the Essential Texts (Kupperman, 2007, 2nd edition).

Secondly, a discourse analysis was then performed on the results to the qualitative critical analysis. As thematic analysis employs the identification of trends in the discourse, the first author was less concerned with the quantity of messages, but rather the significance of messages identified (McMullen, 2021). Qualitative discourse analysis requires messages to be deconstructed, then analyzed using historical and situational factors (McMullen, 2021; e.g., awareness of broader trends, type of power dynamics that characterize a relationship; Cooky et al., 2021). The goal of this study was *not* to produce exhaustive comparative or thematic accounts about messages in the select case article, but rather to conduct an exploration for deeper understanding (Hathaway, 1995). In other words, the present study was a preliminary step toward the generation of theoretical knowledge and was planned to provide direction for future research (Scheel et al., 2021).

Multiple appraisals were used to study the case article carefully and thoroughly, and at each stage, the first author took notes documenting key ideas, perspectives, conclusions, and evidence contained in the case article (Thomas et al., 2021b). In totality, she read over the case article three times. The first time she read it, she just read through the article to get a general idea of what it was about. The second time reading through the article, the first author took notes on concepts and ideas that she discerned as important. After this, the first author reviewed her notes to see if there were any commonalities between her bullet points and her glossary terms, as well as key points she extracted from the select peer-reviewed article. The first author read the case article for a third and final time. This time she was looking for trends in the discourse vis-à-vis the annotations she generated during the previous stages of critical appraisal. The notes from the second read-through were helpful when conducting the qualitative critical analysis, and the third read-through was essential for pulling out trends in the discourse. The second author performed an independent review of the select material examined for study (Lee & Yoon, 2020); he confirmed the results and interpretations presented by the first author were veracious and therefore trustworthy (Lee & Yoon, 2020).

The present project and its write-up did not require pre-approval from an institutional ethical review board. The study involved a comparative case analysis of print material, which was obtained from public domains of the internet, and which involved no interaction with people.

Table 1. *List of Glossary Terms from the Course Used to Evaluate the Fairness of Minor League Salaries*

Term	Description
Tool value	The valuing of motor skills, strength, and physical activity more than any other factors; measured based on utility (Kretchmar et al., 2017b)
Jewel value	The valuing of an activity itself can be good and appreciated for its own sake; measured based on intrinsic worth (Kretchmar et al., 2017b)
Dutiful work	Work that is necessary and has few or no redeeming features beyond those promised by the prudential contract (Kretchmar et al., 2017a)
Enjoyable work	Work that provides internal satisfaction rather than simply being done to accomplish something (Kretchmar et al., 2017a)
Panathenaic Games	A nine-day long ancient Greek athletic contest in honor of the goddess Athena that occurred every four years in the city of Athens; winners were awarded lavish prizes such as sacred olive oil (Kretchmar et al., 2017c)
Chrematitic athletic festivals	Festivals that provide the winners with lavish, cash-like prizes; the Panathenaic Games is the greatest example of chrematitic athletic festivals (Kretchmar et al., 2017c)
Ludi Romani	Meaning “Games of the Romans”; Ludi Romani typically refers to the three Roman martial sport spectacles of munera (gladiatorial combats), naumachia (mock naval battles), and circuses (featured chariot racing as an event) (Kretchmar et al., 2017d)
Munera	Gladiatorial combats that were featured as one of the three Roman martial spectacles; they often ended in death of one of the combatants (Kretchmar et al., 2017d)
Ludiones	The participants in Roman festivals that involved games, parades, or theater (Kretchmar et al., 2017d)
Upanishads	Metaphysics, ethics, and basic cultural documents written in India during 8 th -6 th Century BCE that were featured as the main texts of Hindu religion (Kupperman, 2007a)
Atman	A person’s underlying core that typically includes thoughts and bodily nature; does not change over time (Kupperman, 2007a)
Brahman	Everything; the absolute reality (Kupperman, 2007a)
Bhagavad Gita	A Hindu text that is concerned with leading a truly gratifying and high-quality life (Kupperman, 2007b)
Confucius	The founder of Confucianism who lived from 551 BCE to 479 BCE; taught young men how to be great leaders; created virtue ethics that displayed how to be a good person (Kupperman, 2007c)

Note. Following the first author’s growing expertise on concepts throughout the undergraduate course, she identified certain ideas and concepts that would be critical in analyzing discourse on the fairness of minor league salaries. This list of glossary terms was generated in order to clarify, discuss, and highlight important concepts that relate minor league salaries with knowledge from the history and philosophy of physical activity.

Results

Qualitative Critical Analysis

Discourse from the case article. As reported in the case article, aspiring professional baseball players either get drafted by an MLB (Major League Baseball) team and placed in the minors, or they go undrafted and decide to sign a contract with a minor league team. Either way, most players end up in the same boat: they have to spend time in the minor leagues. Historically, one notable difference was that some of the players who sign with an MLB team were under a major league contract rather than a minor league one, meaning they received the union protection of a major league player by being part of the MLBPA as well as were guaranteed a much larger—and livable—minimum salary. Regardless of signing with a major or minor league team, minor league players are paid by their minor league’s MLB affiliate team. While in the minor leagues, most players are left to pursue their dreams while being significantly underpaid.

Jeremy Wolf, a former minor league player, explained “I’d work 70 hours a week, and I would get paid \$45 per game, so that comes out to like \$3 an hour” (Garofalo, 2019). Three dollars an hour is far below the federally required \$7.25 minimum wage (Garofalo, 2019), which puts all of these players below the poverty line in terms of annual income. At the time which the present article was submitted for publication, many minor league players made around \$7,500 per year (Garofalo, 2019). The minor league organizations can get away with this because of the *Save America’s Pastime Act*, which only requires players to be paid for a 40-hour workweek, despite the players putting in more hours than this (Garofalo, 2019). Historically, many players participate in unpaid workouts, spring training practices, and batting practices in order to hopefully reach the MLB one day.

Discourse from the peer-reviewed article. As emphasized in the peer review article, unfortunately, those who do not receive a major league contract—which is a majority of minor league players—were historically left without a player union, making it harder to advocate for their wage rights (Williams, 2019). At the time which the present article was submitted for publication, minor league players at the AAA level (highest minor league level) played 144 games over a five-and-a-half-month season, but, on average, only made between \$11,825 and \$14,850 per year with a travel per diem of \$25 per game (Williams, 2019). Because these players historically receive low pay and were only paid during the season despite training year-round, many of the players took various jobs during the offseason to be able to make ends meet (Williams, 2019). Economically speaking, however, MLB teams could afford to pay minor league players better without taking a big hit to their own profits. A decent fourth outfielder on the free-agent market could cost close to \$7.5 million (Williams, 2019). This same amount could pay 250 minor league players \$30,000 more (Williams, 2019), tripling the players’ salaries by paying them \$45,000 annually instead of the approximately \$6,000 to \$15,000 they are currently making (Williams, 2019).

At the time which the present article was submitted for publication, there had been several attempts by various minor league players to start their own union; however, they had never succeeded. Historically, many players were hesitant to join unions because it could have affected their shot at making it to the MLB (Williams, 2019). Going against the MLB could have caused teams to overlook players, despite their ability. Players could have been labeled as outcasts or selfish, which would make MLB teams more likely to pass over them and look at a different prospect. Additionally, many players were optimistic they would make it to the MLB shortly, so they did not want to ruin those dreams by joining a union (Williams, 2019).

Discourse Analysis of the Popular Press Case Study

After analyzing the observations in the qualitative critical analysis, three trends in the discourse were ultimately identified: (a) disparate attitudes towards minor league wages, (b) the number of hours players report working, and (c) the amount players get paid on average and its fairness (for further detail, see Table 2). First, the various cultural perspectives that one can take in life can impact whether one believes if minor league players should be paid at all—let alone be paid more. This is displayed clearly when addressing how minor league players know they will be pursuing a long and hard road, yet some of them do it because they may truly love baseball, whereas others do it to reach the MLB one day. Their motivations are different, and their expectations might be as well. Additionally, discussion about livable versus legal wage was present throughout the case. At the time which the present article was submitted for publication, the MLB had taken the position that they were technically not at fault because they were paying their minor league players what they were legally required to pay them; however, the understanding that this salary is not livable is brought up continuously in lawsuits and advocacy groups. This brings up the discussion of ethics and whether the MLB should raise the minimum salary for minor league players, even if, historically, they legally were not required to do so.

Table 2. *Results of the Discourse Analysis of the Popular Press Case Article*

Trends in the Discourse	Representative Annotation
Disparate attitudes towards minor league wages	Attitudes towards the issue vary drastically. Some may view the players are being paid fairly because they <i>are</i> receiving a <i>legal</i> wage, as well as a chance to one day play in the Majors. On the other hand, some may view the players are not being paid fairly because they are <i>not</i> receiving a <i>livable</i> wage.
Number of hours players report working	Players often put in more hours than they are getting paid for, since they only are required to be paid for a 40-hour week (Garofalo, 2019). These extra unpaid hours can be attributed to the fact that the players need to work out and practice more than 40 hours as well as the fact that they need to travel for games.
Amount players get paid on average, by range, and the level of fairness in the two estimations	Players only receive approximately \$6,000 to \$15,000 each year, compared to their MLB counterparts who make a minimum of \$545,000 annually (Williams, 2019).

Discussion

Historical and Philosophical Perspectives

When evaluating whether minor league players are receiving fair pay, it is important to look at what the expectations are. Minor league players are expected to play for their respective team so they can achieve their dreams of reaching the MLB. When the MLB is evaluating what the purpose of minor league baseball is, it is so the best players can become a part of their organization one day.

Because of this, MLB team-owners find the **tool value** of baseball more important than its **jewel value** (Kretchmar et al., 2017b). Rather than having the players participate in the minor leagues because it can be appreciated for its own sake, they have the players participate for their physical ability and their skill. They are not going to pay players based on how much players appreciate baseball, but rather how good the player is at playing baseball *and* their projected financial viability (Williams, 2019). At the tool end of the spectrum, players would be expected to persist even in the absence of fun; whereas, at the jewel end of the spectrum, players would be expected to push through inconvenience to experience life to the fullest (Kretchmar et al., 2017b). Ultimately, the MLB places minor league players closer to the tool end.

Additionally, the MLB may consider **dutiful work** and **enjoyable work**. They might expect players to see playing in the minor leagues as dutiful work. Specifically, players should not expect their participation in the league to have any redeeming features besides what is in their contract (Kretchmar et al., 2017a). This means players are expected to be okay with low pay and hard work because it is clearly laid out in the contract that the players are there to work hard to eventually reach the MLB; and by signing it, players are agreeing to be fine with the terms.

Additionally, the MLB might hold cultural beliefs similar to the ancient Greeks and Romans in terms of how they regard athletes. Greek sporting events have parallels to baseball in many ways. Greek athletes would train for many years to earn the opportunity to display their athletic prowess (Kretchmar et al., 2017c). In a similar way, minor league baseball players compete for many years to hopefully get a shot in the MLB. In the **Panathenaic Games**, winning athletes were given lavish prizes and were practically worshiped after winning (Kretchmar et al., 2017c). Winners of these **chrematitic athletic festivals** (“valuable-prize games”) could be compared to MLB players, whereas losers of these festivals could be compared to minor league players. Just like the winners of the Panathenaic Games, MLB players receive lavish salaries and are idolized by fans. On the other hand, minor league players are not paid well and gain no recognition—just like the losers of the ancient games. On a similar note, minor league players can be compared to the participants in **Ludi Romani** (“Games of the Romans”), which included **munera** (gladiatorial combats). Most Roman citizens did not participate in Roman games; instead, criminals, slaves, and captured enemies participated in these *sacrificial* games (Kretchmar et al., 2017d). Just like the **Ludiones** (participants in the Ludi Romani), the minor league baseball players can be seen and treated as unwanted baseball players. Additionally, the minor league baseball players *sacrifice* years of hard work to hopefully succeed by making it to the MLB similar to how the Ludi Romani participants were sacrificed during the games to send a political message—unless they won (Kretchmar et al., 2017d).

On a different note, cultural lessons from the **Upanishads** can be taken regarding how we view minor league players. The Upanishads emphasized the fact that **Atman is Brahman**, meaning that each individual being and soul is the same as the universal soul (Kupperman, 2007a). A big part of the Upanishads’ teachings is to understand the difference between pleasure and joy. Pleasure is brief and must be renewed whereas joy is intrinsically produced and is related to an uncluttered life (Kupperman, 2007a). Oftentimes, baseball starts out as a slice of joy in someone’s life, whether it be playing tee-ball as a child, going to a baseball game as a fan, or simply playing catch at a park; however, there oftentimes comes a point in a minor league baseball player’s career where baseball no longer becomes centered around joy. Rather than playing as a way to clear the mind and lose sense of reality, minor league players have a shift in thought caused by the stresses of making a living. Due to the unfair wages they receive, many minor leaguers have unnecessary stressors put in their life (i.e., economic hardships, travel, etc.) that hinder their ability to declutter their mind and unlink from worldly desires, according to an Upanishad perspective. These hinderances occur as players worry if they will eventually make it to the major leagues. Moreover, the Upanishads suggest we, as a society, stop attaching labels to ourselves and take ourselves less seriously as well as promote joy rather than

pleasure (Kupperman, 2007a). Because of this, the Upanishads would suggest that minor league baseball should be disbanded if its main purpose is to produce future MLB players—which comes with fame, excessive money, and pressure.

Like the Upanishads, the **Bhagavad Gita** would suggest caution towards the minor league system and its intent. As stated before, the current purpose of the minor leagues is to produce players that could compete in the MLB. The Bhagavad Gita would have cultural issues with this, because the philosophy is more concerned with the journey rather than the end destination (Kupperman, 2007b). As a complement to an Upanishads' perspective, a Bhagavad Gita perspective would caution factors which reduce an ongoing or uninterrupted immersion with role activity, as becoming “lost” in activity promotes spontaneous joy and resolve (Kupperman, 2007b). Additionally, the Bhagavad Gita places a large focus on attitude. Along the lines of this philosophy, minor league players should be less focused on becoming an MLB player and more focused on playing baseball because they love it (Kupperman, 2007b). As stated previously, the weight minor league players bear as they strive to reach the major leagues can thwart their love for baseball as situational factors entice these players to emphasize baseball as a medium for gaining future wealth. This hinders players from appreciating the present journey they are on; rather, the fixation to reach the majors and secure an exorbitant payday festers. The work conditions perpetuated by MLB policy and related actions taken by owners, administrators and their surrogates all combine to create paths-of-least resistance (Johnson, 2014), which incentivizes minor leaguers to see their experiences and career through a utilitarian lens (Kupperman, 2007b; Twietmeyer & Johnson, in press). According to Kupperman (2007b), a Bhagavad Gita philosophical perspective would suggest that coercion to define one's efforts by desires or external outcomes increases psychological risk of ill-being (suffering) rather than well-being due to the added pressures brought on by pleasure seeking behavior (Massey & Whitley, 2021). As reported in previous news reports and in William's research article (Garofalo, 2019; Williams, 2019, these pressures include financial insecurity, career instability, and seeding athletes to adopt (or maintain) socially-oriented perfectionism (e.g., motivated by fear of work-place rejection and devaluation, Wilding, 2021). With this logic, those applying a Bhagavad Gita philosophy would suggest restructuring the minor league system so there is less pressure on players to make money.

It could be helpful to consider the viewpoint and cultural ideas embedded in **Confucianism**. According to Confucius philosophy, there are two crucial steps for promoting virtues among the masses. Virtues are principles and values that lead to moral excellence within a person (VirtuesForLife.com, n.d.). The first tenet is that people require a good role model (Kupperman, 2007c). In other words, to have a virtuous society, the ruler must display good virtues herself or himself. The second part is people must have enough food to eat (Kupperman, 2007c). Confucius argued that making sure everyone had enough food to eat was *most important* to creating a virtuous society, even before education and tradition (Kupperman, 2007c). If evaluating the MLB by Confucius philosophy, then they are failing. Namely, they are not being a good “ruler” because they are not ensuring their minor league players have enough food to eat, which is a result of the MLB's compensation policies (i.e., many minor league players may have a prevailing sense of food insecurity; HealthyPeople.gov, 2020). According to Confucianism, it would also be questionable if MLB team-owners and managers are being good role models, given their emphasis that the minor league system is a means to achieving external goals and rewards. Leadership which encourages pleasure-seeking (which is always a form conditional happiness) and which emphasizes the pursuit of external objectives hinders those under their influence from developing virtues which permit continuous joy, resiliency, and enlightenment (Kupperman, 2007c). Thus, and in accordance with Confucianism, the historical management practices of the MLB are unable to produce a virtuous society, or, in this case, a virtuous league (Williams, 2019).

Although we have shown the ways in which MLB sport culture, particularly its discourse on minor league pay has been similar to ancient Greek and Roman sports cultures and athlete experiences, that discussion was largely done using classic Asian philosophies. Ancient Greek philosophers, however, have also theorized a moral psychology (and in some cases, a systematic process) for sorting unjust laws from just laws (Baltzly, 2019; Ierodiakonou, 2020). By examining what these influential figures would suggest on this present-day debate would be enlightening, given nostalgia towards ancient Greek philosophy of physical culture was a major catalyst used in rationalizing the resurgence of sport as a civic institutional and preparatory experience for the nobility and aristocracy within Western societies (Kretchmar et al., 2017g). Moreover, the ubiquitous way which sport media and professional leagues glorify sport today—that is the persuasive messages that sell overconforming to the ‘sport ethic’ pervading US culture—mirrors prevailing discourse in ancient Greek sport culture; that is, virtue comes from overcoming strife to become the absolute best and that there could be only one *true* winner (e.g., MLB, 2021; for further discussion, see Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Kretchmar et al., 2017c). Like Confucianism, ancient Greek philosophers argue (persuasively) that good leaders, or wise people, care about promoting a virtuous society, or in this case, a virtuous league (Baltzly, 2019; Ierodiakonou, 2020). These philosophers also challenged zealous views to narrowly define virtue in sport as physical achievement and a means to lavish abundance (Kretchmar et al., 2017c). Historically, then, we can see how the present-day debate over minor league pay fits into a larger and ongoing debate on what should be emphasized in sport and to what ends should sport serve (i.e., what is sport in its “best light,” Kretchmar et al., 2017h, pp. 206-209; e.g., Associated Press, 2019; Snyder, 2019).

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, is credited with distilling the formal rules to obtaining true knowledge through logical reasoning, which is widely used to this day (Kretchmar et al., 2017c). Through these rules, Aristotle made contributions to a variety of academic disciplines that last to this day (e.g., biology), in addition to philosophy (Amadio et al., 2023). Aristotle applied his formal rules of logic to answer an array of important questions, including the question, *what law would a just (virtuous) person follow* (Lee, 2014)? According to Mi-Kyoung Lee (2014), Aristotle in his treatises on moral psychology, posed this rhetorical question to legislatures, leaders with organizational responsibility to govern groups of people, rather than individual people to grapple with, because the emphasis of his philosophy is what should policymakers consider to perfect the art of lawmaking. Integral to this focus is the assumption that lawmakers are subject to vice, therefore are tempted to create laws which preserves or expands their power to exploit and coerce others. Because laws prescribe what conduct in a series of relationships is right action, laws and ethics are inextricably linked. Aristotle reasoned the litmus test (i.e., a heuristic or rule of thumb) for any law, and by extension policy used to guide legally compliant relationships, is asking if the law (or policy) would promote virtuous people (Lee, 2014). According to Aristotle, a virtuous person is a just person who does not make decisions out of fear, greed, malice, or efficiency, but rather because the choice made is the right decision, in of itself, not contingent upon what others do or do not do (Lee, 2014).

Our study aimed to apply diverse philosophical perspectives to discourse in favor and against increasing the pay of minor league baseball players. Since the preliminary writing of this work, several developments have occurred which may shift the conversation away from pay standards to other issues affecting the work conditions of minor league baseball players. For example, between August and September of 2022, minor league players in the US were granted the right to unionize through the MLBPA (Passan, 2022; Perry & Anderson, 2022). This means that minor league players will have representation in bargaining the terms which affect their minimum pay and hours worked. However, influential rationalism from ancient Greek culture which has a large influence on modern institution today (even if unrecognized by many members of the public;

Kretchmar et al., 2017c) could still be used to discern if policy the MLB-owners staunchly defended into 2022 (and would likely resist changing in future contract negotiations; Williams, 2019) was unjust or not. The answer concerning the MLB's historical position on minor league pay, according to the writing of Aristotle, is their position and attitude toward the matter was likely unjust. The policy and other actions by the MLB, such as lobbying for a provision in a 2008 Congressional Bill to combat a US recession to state minor league players were *legally* barred from litigating against the MLB using the Fair Labor Standard Act; additional MLB policy includes using exculpatory language within previous contracts with the MLBA to prohibit inclusion of minor league players from MLBPA membership (Williams, 2019). The aforementioned observations (a small snapshot) point to an unvirtuous way of living, legislating, decision making by MLB owners and their administrators (Williams, 2019), especially in the face of raised grievances or debate challenging their rationale concerning the work conditions of minor league players (Greenspan, 2022; McDaniel, 2022).

In accordance with Aristotle's theory on forming virtuous law (and by extension policy), consideration should be rightly paid to the actions of policy makers (Lee, 2014). The MLB-owners and those executing their desires historically ignored the financial hardship imposed upon minor league players and their families. Moreover, labor necessary for continuing to historically develop one's skills through travel, training camps, and other means were summarily classified as an individual sacrifice that players ought to willingly take on in order to prove their commitment to athletic excellence (McDaniel, 2022), even though the same work conditions are viewed as payable aspects of the minor (and major league) profession by other sport leagues (Williams, 2019). The contradiction suggests greed and a commitment to power for power's sake has repeatedly driven the decision making of executives, administrators, and managers for the most part (Greenspan, 2022), which are unvirtuous behaviors that cause suffering, waste, and normalize illogical or superficial thinking. Moreover, while minor league players understand that their work conditions are unfair, many for so long have chosen to not butt this system because of fear of retaliation by managers or ostracization by teammates for causing trouble (Williams, 2019), which too are unvirtuous behaviors. Thus, we are able to see how ancient Greek rationalism can be used to evaluate the extent to which law and policy are justified, which is notably in contrast to economic ideology implicitly used by those in favor or against minor league play, namely owners who historically have reasoned privately and publicly using capitalist rationalism (Williams, 2019).

Research Question: A Review and Answer

Once again, the purpose of this paper was to research the following questions: Is the pay that minor league players receive fair? If not, how much more should minor league players be paid? The answer to these questions is not as black and white as they may seem and for that reason, each question will be answered separately. First, is the pay that minor league players receive fair? No, the pay that minor league players receive is not fair. Not only are these players receiving less than minimum wage, but the organization that is paying them could easily afford to pay them more. It is comprehensible that the MLB wants to pay the players based on their tool value, but they do not need to underpay the players. Instead, they should raise the minimum salary of minor league players so that all players are at least receiving a livable wage (i.e., the minimum amount of income to reliably pay for housing, utilities, transportation, and subsistence in a particular region; Ravenscraft, 2019). Then, the minor league players that have a high tool value can be paid more if the MLB sees fit. Finally, how much more should minor league players be paid? Beyond provision of a livable wage, it could be debated how much higher minor league players should be paid. If you take an Upanishad or Bhagavad Gita cultural perspective, you may think the players should not care about the pay and possibly think they should not get paid at all; rather, they should worry about enjoying

baseball, learning from their journey, and seeking joy. On the other hand, if you look at the situation with Confucius' cultural teachings in mind, then you would believe the minor league players should be paid much more because it is the duty of the MLB to take care of their players even if they are in the minor league.

In other words, it depends on what your cultural beliefs are and in what way you view minor league players. With the way the first author looks at things, she thinks they should be entitled to a salary that gives them a livable wage, but she does not think anything more than that should be expected. These players are not as *'athletic'* as MLB players, and they know it will be a tough and long road to reach that point. Despite this, they are willing to pursue their dreams. With that comes the risk that their dreams may not come true. Minor league players have yet to reach the capabilities of what the MLB players have and therefore they should not receive the same type of pay. They should, however, be able to make more money as they progress, and eventually, if they reach the MLB, they will receive the 'payday' they have been dreaming of.

A wrap around: concluding thoughts from the student author (written in the first-person writing voice). Before the capstone course experience, I had been to a handful of San Jose Giants Low-A minor league baseball games, but I never thought about the ramifications of the minor league players being underpaid. Rather, I was more focused on watching a fun baseball game and purchasing cheap tickets. On June 18, 2021—a few months after the capstone course experience—I attended a Round Rock Express vs. Oklahoma City Dodgers Triple-A minor league baseball game in Round Rock, Texas (Round Rock Express, n.d.). While at this game, I had a newfound appreciation for the players that I was watching. After one of the Round Rock Express players hit a home run, a few dedicated fans went around Dell Diamond with briefcases that read "Dinger Dollars". Fans throughout the stadium, including myself, began putting dollars into the briefcase. All the money that was collected was then given to the player that hit the home run. This experience was very humbling. My maturation in the subject matter allowed me to appreciate the fact that fans took matters into their own hands by providing the minor league players with extra income—unlike the MLB. By taking the undergraduate kinesiology course, I acquired a new perspective on how to think about controversial topics like this. Before, I would form an opinion based on any surface-level details that I acquired. Now, I realize that the best solution to evaluate issues like this is using historical and philosophical perspectives. Using these perspectives allows for a more holistic evaluation. As a naïve fan, I would simply think that the "Dinger Dollars" was a publicity-stunted fan idea; however, as a scholar, I am able to analyze the extent of the impact that these "Dinger Dollars" can have on players, as well as to the ways minor and major league baseball relate to one another. Although the "Dinger Dollars" can help players financially, it also reiterates the bureaucratic decision making to meet economic needs. "Dinger Dollars" only provide mobility based on a very unlikely outcome (i.e., the number of home runs they hit; Twietmeyer & Johnson, in press). Hence, the better hitters will earn more money, which also tend to be the same players that will have a better shot of continuing their baseball career in the Major Leagues (e.g., the ones who joined the minors under a Major League contract).

Project Limitations and Directions for Future Scholarship

The present article was written for those interested in inequalities related to physical activity, sporting opportunities, and athletics. It illustrates how we can expose ourselves to new ways of perceiving and understanding a complex topic, using historical and philosophical perspectives (Balido et al., 2022; Haegele & Wilson, 2022). There is immense value in that (Cardinal, 2013). Suddenly, we have more options to consider when imagining ways to provide or support safe, quality, and inclusive experiences and opportunities in sport at all levels (Kingsley et al., 2017).

However, the present article is not without its limitations. A limitation to the present study is the fact that many of the cultural philosophies discussed, such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Confucius philosophies, would not have overlapped with the modern-day issues presented in the case article (Joseph & Kriger, 2021). Because of this, it can only be assumed what their initial proponents would have thought about the topic. Philosophies resulting from the “fallout” of a modernizing society may uniquely aid students in critically appraising the ways leadership in modern sport intertwine with social issues (e.g., Kretchmar et al., 2017f; Rigauer, 2000). Additionally, for future study of this topic, it might be helpful to gain insight from the MLB as to why they do not want to pay the minor league players a livable wage, besides the fact that they might lose \$7.5 million annually—which equates to less than 3% of their revenue (Williams, 2019). Future research could investigate the opinions of administrators resistant to fair labor practices within diverse levels of the organization, given the historical opposition of owners and other managers to fair and equitable pay of minor (and major league baseball players, Williams, 2019). Interviews with personnel inside the MLB organization could prove to be useful in discerning their logic, as well as discerning what cultural perspectives they use to decide and justify their decisions concerning compensation policies for minor league players (Acker, 2006). It is critical to continue investigating the moral reasoning used by team owners and executives as these modern issues continue to change and develop. Finally, it is important to engage with others in debates about labor practices in sport in order to understand different viewpoints and take part in life-long learning.

Conclusion

The aim of the present article was to explore whether minor league baseball players are paid a fair wage. We performed a historical and philosophical analysis of the public debate on minor league pay as well as describe ethical arguments within the debate. The capstone course experience discussed in the present article would be beneficial to any student who wants to evaluate possible injustices in sport, as well as look at historical, cultural, and philosophical aspects of sporting decisions. Additionally, capstone course experiences are high-impact educational practices which allow for students to reflect on their past experiences and observations in sport and apply them to real life scenarios (Hockert, 2022; University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire, n.d.). As the student author of the present article is currently pursuing a sport management career vis-a-vis a long-term internship with a Major League Soccer organization, she is constantly reminded of the capstone course experience that helped cultivate her ability to recognize possible injustices in the administration of organized and professional sport, as well as to evaluate possible injustices critically and holistically. Upon completion of the culminating course project described in the present article, the student concluded that the capstone experience to the course introduced her to perspectives in physical activity and provided her an invaluable experience, because the capstone project enriched her ability to think critically and holistically about issues in and around sport, all of which will be helpful in the student’s future career.

At the time of this writing, minor league baseball players saw a lack of cooperation from Major League Baseball organizations in their fight for equal pay; however, MLB has recently taken instrumental—and long-overdue—steps that provide minor league baseball players with a voice and the ability to advocate for themselves. On September 14, 2022, MLB announced minor league baseball players had the option of becoming members of the MLBPA, and the union would serve as their bargaining representative (ESPN.com, 2022). This pivotal inflection point allowed minor leaguers to unionize and have legal protection to their advocacy for fair compensation and workplace conditions. On April 3, 2023, MLB owners unanimously voted to sign a collective

bargaining agreement (CBA), which extends employment rights to minor league baseball players at all levels (Feinsand, 2023). The five-year CBA will require the MLB to increase salaries, provide free housing, reduce travel, and more. This recent development is historic and may be a sign of positive social change. For example, salaries now span from \$20,000 to \$42,000 annually (Feinsand, 2023), which may bring players closer to earning a livable wage through their profession as minor league baseball players.

While CBAs exist, it does not prevent the MLB from using its political power to restrict or invalidate portions of the agreement. For example, Opening Day 2022 was in contention as major league baseball players united in the second longest lockout in the union's history (Wagner, 2022). After 99 days of lockout, two notable outcomes developed: 1) the minimum salary rose to \$70,000 annually, increasing by \$20,000 each year, and 2) the creation of a \$50 million bonus pool for the top, young talents (Wagner, 2022). The MLBPA is arguably the strongest union in sports, which enables baseball players to advocate for themselves and hold the MLB responsible for any injustices (Williams, 2019). Now that minor leaguers are represented by the MLBPA, they have the necessary protection to begin negotiating fair terms. However, unlike MLB players, minor league players are prohibited from staging strikes (Drellich, 2023); thus, minor leaguers have decreased leverage if financial terms are not being met by MLB owners. As the findings of this project has shown, ancient and modern philosophies could be used to describe and analyze rhetoric from diverse sources in relation to ideals about fairness, justice, and good leadership. Tension will continue to exist between owners and stakeholders of sport, and ancient and modern philosophies could be used to stimulate discussion on how to lead well and resolve conflict in just ways.

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