

The Effect of NIL on NCAA Men's Basketball Recruitment Strategies

Sterling Johnson

Committee Chair:
Dr. Jerald Walz

Committee Members:
Dr. Gary Snyder
Alix Guynn

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Background and Setting

It is commonly known that tens of millions of dollars are being spent by college athletic programs to compete at the highest of level and to put their teams atop of national rankings and standings (Henderson, 2018). The National Collegiate Athletic Association, also known as the NCAA, was created for student athletes to compete and represent their respected universities under the law of amateurism (Yen, 2022). Originally defined as partaking in sports without the expectation of receiving financial benefit, the progression of college athletics has changed the mindset of thousands of athletes throughout the world (Landry, 2023). In the paradigm of American college sports, it is taken for granted that collegiate sports can be considered amateur in nature, as some sports have generated revenues for the NCAA totaling billions of dollars (Stocz, Schlereth, Crum, Maestas, & Barnes, 2019).

In men's basketball, the NCAA makes most of its money in two ways: television and marketing rights for March Madness, the annual men's Division I college basketball tournament, and ticket sales for the other college athletics championships (Poulin, 2023). Due to athletes competing at a high level throughout the tournament, it brings in much revenue to the NCAA, proving that student athletes are the backbone of what is driving revenue for schools and their athletic programs (Forstein, 2024).

NCAA and March Madness

Athletic programs serve as the public hallmark for colleges and universities throughout the United States (Vaughan, 2019). Because of this, people will do just about anything in support of their school (Landry, 2023). By attending games, sporting the newest gear, and/ or watching their teams play on tv, college athletes rank as some of the most entertaining people in the world (Penrose, 2013). Since 2011, the March Madness Basketball Tournament typically brings in \$11

billion in revenue for the NCAA (Felix, 2023), tallying to 90% of the NCAA's total income, mostly from television contracts with CBS and Time Warner's TWX Turner Networks (Vaughan, 2019). While television advertising revenue gets dispersed to each Division I conference from these lucrative contracts, Power Five conferences receive the most money (ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, SEC) due to their well-known likeness and popularity (Henderson, 2018). In 2016, the NCAA raked in \$1 billion in revenue from the three-week March Madness tournament, which was followed up by a \$220 million pot being delivered to the qualifying 68 teams and conferences in which they belonged to in 2017 (Vaughan, 2019).

With the large profit the NCAA has been making from the event, they first allowed college athletes to profit off their NIL in 2021 (Felix, 2023). With this, it was permitted that student-athletes can benefit from the use of their, name, image, and likeness (NIL) (Kunkel, 2021). Although the NCAA would not be paying its athletes directly, NIL opportunities would help athletes make money without them having to exert eligibility or end their college career by going pro (Yen, 2022). There is no equal playing field or salary cap on who should get paid and how much (Stocz, Schlereth, Crum, Maestas, & Barnes, 2019), and when examining what sports are benefiting most from the endeavors of NIL, men's basketball players triumph vastly compared to other varsity sports except football (Zimbalist, 2023). The most famous name players have the potential to bring in a lot of money due to being a household name, which can lead to the chance for players to have more power in the team dynamic (Felix, 2023). Because the main ingredient in winning championships at the college level is through recruiting, sometimes these players are being compensated before stepping one foot on campus (Kinard, 2024). Therefore, once recruiting is brought into the equation, coaches seem to have lost power due to NIL influence over prospects (Landry, 2023). The will to adjust is absolute in order for

success in men's basketball at the power five level, and the way it has changed the sport is impactful to everything, especially recruiting (Henderson, 2018).

Although before 2021 the NCAA claimed that it was unlawful for athletes to receive financial benefits (Wynn, 2022), there had been discussions over the years, driven by both current and former athletes for college athletes to be paid due to the financial gains of colleges and universities throughout the country (Landry, 2023). It started with Ed O'Bannon, who filed a class action lawsuit against the NCAA due to a basketball video game using names of basketball players without any player compensation (Stocz, Schlereth, Crum, Maestas, & Barnes, 2019). Additionally, the Northwestern football team failed a petitioned lawsuit against that NCAA that classified them as employees of the university in 2014 (Grimley, 2023).

Today, athletes can be financially compensated for the use of their name, image, and likeness (NIL). (Landry, 2023). NIL has and will continue to have a profound impact on college athletes, recruiting efforts, and programs (Yen, 2022). While this has transformed the way college sports are operated on the court and field, teens in high school are considering schools based off the amount of money and incentives they think they can earn also (Landry, 2023). Although the idea of the NIL has been around for a while, the application of the concept is new.

Recognizing the Problem

Over the last five years the NCAA has had major changes in both the way it is operated and its everchanging rules and regulations. In 2021, the NCAA made it possible for student-athletes to receive benefits from their name, image, and likeness (NIL) (Felix, 2023). As many predicted the changes that would arise in student-athletes from the NIL, there was much more of an impacted then previously speculated, which includes changes in the college admission process, tuition, college campuses and facilities, faculty members, and administrators and

coaches who are perceived to be mentors to these 18 to 24-year-olds (Lovell & Mallinson, 2023).

While keeping these modifications in mind, the athletic recruiting process seemed to outweigh all. As a current coach, looking ahead of how the coaching profession is constantly changing is fascinating. Therefore, deciding on the effect of NIL on NCAA Men's Basketball Recruiting Strategies stood out.

Methodology

For this project, I chose to complete a review of the existing literature relevant to my topic, the effect of NIL on recruiting NCAA men's basketball team members. A literature review is a strong element of any research project. Its purpose is to gain understanding of existing research to a particular topic of study, while presenting the information discovered by way of a written report. When completing a literature review, the ultimate objective is to synthesize and gain valuable knowledge revealed from other research studies (Machi & McEvoy, 2022). As a clear description of the research design, this section also provides an outline of the steps taken to address the study of a theory or research question.

The methodology explanation of a literature review is one of the most important pieces of context in research (Machi & McEvoy, 2022). It refers to the approach used to evaluate, analyze, identify and draw conclusions about existing research on a particular topic. The methodology section delivers an account of how information and data was found, while also highlighting existing research on a specific subject (Machi & McEvoy, 2022). While giving readers a direct outline for transparency, it also can point out relevant gaps for future research as well. In the context of a literature review, this section is notably responsible for confirming that research is accurate and done fairly (Machi & McEvoy, 2022).

This study uses qualitative research to examine secondary data to understand the effect of NIL on NCAA basketball recruiting strategies. When it comes to the NIL, it is very important to understand the impact it has on college, the NCAA, and college sports as whole. While studying the effect of NIL on NCAA Men's Basketball Recruiting Strategies, the methodology section emphasizes where and how evidence of the NCAA, recruiting, and NIL was found. Though researching relevant topics in regard to collegiate sports and its recent and constant alterations,

the literature review will consist of prevalent research in the form of scholarly articles, books, and other academic publications that may be significant (Machi & McEvoy, 2022). Specific searches along with exact dates will be mentioned to give a more precise time of when information discovered.

Literature Search

When first conducting research, a comprehensive search for books and articles in the Virginia Tech and Blacksburg library was performed. In particular, an intense search on Google Scholar was used which pertained relevant information. Searches included the following keywords or terms: "NCAA men's basketball," "NIL," "recruiting strategies and NIL," "student-athletes being paid," "college basketball players and NIL", "how is NIL changing college sports," "college basketball with NIL," "college athletics with NIL," and "new NCAA rules and compensation." While conducting these searches, multiple reports and articles were discovered with relevant information. With the assistance of Virginia Tech faculty, applicable articles were discovered as well.

Literature Survey

Although there was a plethora of information on how NIL has affected college basketball recruiting strategies, everything discovered was not used due to irrelevance. Instead of using every article and book that related to collegiate athletics, the sources were reduced to the materials that were relevant to the research question. Although themes and patterns that were post 2021 pertaining to recruiting were used, many articles written prior to the NCAA's major changes and alterations in NIL and student-athlete compensation involved speculation and not facts about the current effects and changes to NIL policy. Therefore, being strategic and using the latest information was something that was intentionally performed when doing research.

Analysis

I conducted my data analysis in three steps outlined below. These steps are suggested by Machi & McEvoy (2023). First, I assembled the publications I found relevant to my topic, then I organized the publications according to identifiable sub-topics that addressed similar concepts, then I analyzed the data for specific ideas I wanted to draw upon in this paper.

1. Assemble the Collected Data – Gather all relevant information in regards to the NIL and men's basketball recruiting.

- NCAA reports from governing body
- Information and data from before and after NIL legalization
- Articles & reports from coaches and athletes
- Academic articles on NIL policies

2. Organize the Information – Once all of the data is collected, the next step is to organize the information thoroughly.

- History of the NCAA – brief history of the NCAA and how we got to the point of NIL.
- NCAA Guidelines – The NCAA's past and present policies, in particular on student-athlete compensation.
- Social Media's Impact – Emphasizing the importance of social media and its importance when it comes to NIL significance.
- NIL & Recruiting– Explaining the meaning of NIL and its intentions to what it has become while also highlighting the changes in recruiting strategies.
- Implications & Uncertainties – Highlighting some of the major uncertainties in college basketball when it comes to some of the NIL parameters.

- Retention & Strategies- Elaborating on strategies college men's basketball programs are doing in order to be competitive.

3. Analyze the Patterns of the data

- Shift in Recruiting Priorities
 - Financial incentives: Schools with stronger NIL resources have a higher chance at landing top recruits over schools who do not.
 - Brand building: Athletes are choosing schools where they can build their individual brand.
- School Adaptions:
 - Universities are now investing time and money into NIL initiatives to help better compete on national levels and for championships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, conducting a literature review involves a step-by-step process to identify and summarize the best research on the effect NIL has on NCAA basketball recruiting strategies. By following these steps, the process revealed a breakdown on how the NIL is shaping the NCAA and modern-day college basketball. It provided an understanding of existing research with the support of over thirty scholarly articles.

Literature Review

The developing landscape of NIL rights has drastically impacted men's basketball recruiting strategies, requiring a comprehensive examination of its modifications. This paper intends to explore the effects of overall team dynamics within the context of NCAA guidelines concentrating on recruiting and roster retention through intensive research from scholarly articles, books, and personal discussions. The literature review will further cover the historical context of the NCAA, followed by social media impact and uncertainties under the scope of NIL as well. By analyzing these topics, the study seeks to provide an understanding of the current landscape of men's college basketball recruiting strategies and its potential long-term implications for men's basketball programs across the country.

History of NCAA

Participating in intercollegiate athletics has been an integral part of many student's experiences on college and university campuses for over a hundred years (Grambeau, 2020). At the National Collegiate Athletics Association's (NCAA) inception in 1906 (then the Intercollegiate Athletic Association), college sports were not heavily regulated, and the students and some faculty oversaw the majority of athletic competition (Wynn, 2022). While more prominent colleges prospered, smaller universities needed help to keep up with the rising costs of college athletics and a shortage of donations (Felix, 2023). The NCAA's authority over collegiate athletics continued to grow as it sought to balance the commercialization and increased profitability of intercollegiate athletics, administrative investment in the success of the institution's athletic programs, as well as accusations of unfair enforcement against the institutions and their athletic departments (Wynn, 2022). Because smaller schools couldn't compete with bigger schools, the NCAA divided all schools into three categories: Division I,

Division II, and Division III. These divisions were based on school size and budget, which allows colleges and universities to be competitive with peers in their separate divisions (Felix, 2023). Today, the NCAA is comprised of a group of universities and colleges united to establish and enforce rules that regulate the conduct of both student athletes and the various colleges and universities that fall under the NCAA's jurisdiction (Zema, 2018).

NCAA Guidelines

In 2019, the NCAA handbook of rule 12.5.2: stated that a student athlete is ineligible if he or she accepts remuneration for advertisements and promotions, media activities, or endorsements, which prohibited the athlete from accepting payment or permitting the use of his or her name or the picture in connection with the sale or use of a commercial product or service (Grambeau, 2020). Aside from their athletic scholarship, this bylaw meant that student athletes could only be compensated with an athletic scholarship, including living expenses such as campus meals, team gear, books, room and board, and other miscellaneous living expenses (Medic, 2005). However, with increasing annual revenues from basketball tournaments and football bowl games and associated revenue from selling television broadcasting rights, student athletes have felt that the NCAA could afford to pay its players (Dwyer, 2019). Inversely, due to expenses required to maintain a wide variety of collegiate sports, athletic departments would drastically be affected if this were to happen (Landry, 2023). Colleges and universities make money from these four elements:

1. The demand for television broadcasts rights for live programming;
 2. Large, stable game attendance;
 3. The desire of many universities to maintain ties with alumni and other constituents;
- and

4. A cartel agreement among universities to limit compensation for the essential input required to stage games, namely the players (Vaughan, 2019).

Social Media Impact

With the development of communication technology, social media, have attracted public attention in both academic and professional fields (Penrose, 2013). As an athlete, having social media is a way to not only establish connections with other athletes, but also a way to brand and market oneself for business inquiries and potential opportunities to earn compensation (Smith, 2022). While this has such a profound effect on NIL, it is known that 72% of college athletes use some sort of social media outlet to gain notice (Carter, 2023). Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok provide athletes an opportunity to showcase their personality and off-court interests. While it is a way for athletes to feature their athletic accomplishments as well, it is also a way for them to be seen in another light without any expectations of them making a field goal or scoring a touchdown (Penrose, 2013). While the need for a strong online presence is continually growing, the once extra-curricular hobby is considered by many to be a focal point in an athlete's career for the sake of NIL value (Carter, 2023).

The popularity of social media sites has grown among college students due to the opportunity to connect with other people (Penrose, 2013). Additionally, high profiled athletes use social media as a way for recruiting services and college recruiters to track their recruitment process. They update their social media accounts by announcing the schools that are recruiting them until the day they make their final commitment to their school of choice. This type of branding can generate excitement for fan bases, which typically leads to increased attraction and followers for the athlete (Landry, 2023).

Analytical data shows that athletes with larger social media followers are more attractive to companies willing to partner with student-athletes than those who have minimal or less followers (Landry, 2023). Engagement rates and follower count is a way for businesses to measure impact and return on investment (Penrose, 2013). Therefore, whoever has a chance to get their product seen by the most eyes are the most valuable individuals to a company. Former University of North Carolina basketball star Armando Bacot finished his college career as a two-time first team national All-American. With 2,347 points, the second leading scorer in Tarheel history was recently reported to earn over \$2 million in NIL earnings after playing five years of college basketball due to his individual accolades, social media presence, and follower count of 170,000 on Instagram (Bromberg, 2023).

Generally, the players who play the most have the most followers, but this is not always the case. Current University of Delaware basketball player John Camden has used his social media influence to help gain NIL success without the help of anticipated on-court achievement. The three-time Division I transfer grew a TikTok following of 107,000 and has generated NIL partnerships with Brita Water Filter and Roots Natural Kitchen (M. Young, personal communication, 2024). While Camden's social media following has allowed him to prosper off NIL retributions, it has been shown that any men's basketball player can benefit from the NIL with the help of social media by consistent follower engagement and consistency (Smith, 2022).

Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL)

The NCAA's primary method for ensuring the amateur characteristics of college sports was (and remains) an extensive collection of rules reflected in the NCAA Constitution and Bylaws prohibiting institutions and athletes from engaging in pay-for-play or other practices that would undermine amateurism (Yen, 2022). Due to the lack of compensation, players have been

choosing alternative routes instead of going to college to gain compensation or receive unauthorized compensation for their names, images, and likenesses at their respected college/university (Kinard, 2024). In 2019, California became the first state to pass legislation prohibiting postsecondary educational institutions and athletic associations from enforcing rules or regulations that would prevent or punish a college athlete for receiving compensation from the use of their name, image, or likeness (NIL) in economic activities (Dwyer, 2019). While many other states proceeded to adopt California's legislation, it was the court case, *NCAA v. Alston*, that was decided by the US Supreme Court that transformed the landscape of the NCAA for good (Landry, 2023). Followed by *O'Bannon vs. NCAA*, which proved that the NCAA was benefiting from student athletes name, image, and likeness, Alston argued at the Supreme Court by stating that antitrust laws were being violated by the NCAA's undermining of athletic scholarships (Kinard, 2023). The former West Virginia running back proved that educational benefits for student athletes were in violation of federal anti-trust laws (Kavanaugh, 2021). He stated that these laws prevented student athletes to receive fair compensation for their talents and labor (Yen, 2022). Consequently, after defeating the NCAA in the Supreme Court on June 21, 2021, Alston's case allowed athletes to be compensated only through sponsorships and NIL (Dwyer, 2019). The significance of this case is that it gave momentum to student athletes in a plethora of ways (Landry, 2023). Most notably, it allowed them to receive additional benefits beyond athletic scholarships, which led to eligibility parameters including multiple time transferring and name, image, and likeness (NIL) (Kavanaugh, 2021).

NIL and Recruiting

Recruiting at the college level is almost a sport in itself, where it has become paramount to overall success to college basketball (Henderson, 2018). It has proven to be the priority of most college basketball coaches because that is where most of their time and resources are spent (Stocz, Schlereth, Crum, Maestas, & Barnes, 2019). When it comes to men's basketball, recruiting consist the biggest budget, the biggest offseason priority, and the single most matter on how a program will be judged outside of winning actual games (Fambrough, 2013). Head and assistant coaches know their livelihood depends on successful recruiting (Wood, 2010).

While student-athletes would once celebrate receiving an athletic scholarship, today an athletic scholarship is not only enough when choosing a college (Henderson 2018). Over the last 20 years the recruiting landscape has changed immensely, and over the last three years it has changed even more due to student athletes deciding on which college to attend based on what schools will offer them greater NIL benefits or compensation (Felix, 2023). While the indication of "amateurism" was once the focal point of NCAA sports, many people today would say there isn't much of a difference from the college athlete to the professional athlete (Poulin, 2023). According to, *Name, Image, Likeness, and its Impact on College Athletics* by Dominique Felix, "What it has turned into is a pay-to play, to some degree, and a recruiting mechanism for those who are smart enough to put together a collective for their schools" (Felix, 2023, P. 10). Although once unauthorized and considered a violation of the amateur spirit of the NCAA, coaches and administrators are now forced to raise more money to help collectives compensate players to be competitive (Yen, 2023). Therefore, the list of stakeholders that are involved has increased: the student athletes, coaches, athletic support staff for individual teams, athletic administrators, institutions, the communities that encompass the universities, fans, all the athletic

conferences, and the NCAA (Landry, 2023). Because NIL in men's basketball recruiting is still relatively new, amendments will continue to alter the way the NCAA regulates the new norm (Grambeau, 2020).

Implications & Uncertainties

The NIL landscape has presented many implications and uncertainties. One of the most talked about controversies of the era is the transfer portal, a digital database that helps student-athletes manage their transfer process between other NCAA members (Smith, 2022). According to NCAA research, the total number of Division I athletes entering the portal in 2021 was 9,806; in 2023 that number totaled to 13,025 (NCAA, 2023). Due to updated NCAA regulations, the transfer portal has allowed student-athletes to leave their school an unlimited amount without any legal penalty (Landry, 2023). As a consequence, this has taken away loyalty in most programs.

Another key issue in team recruiting and comradery is the major increased financial opportunities for students-athletes. (Henderson, 2018). High school recruits are considering NIL earnings when making their enrollment decisions, forcing recruiting to become almost entirely financially based on prospective possible earnings (Yen, 2022). Additionally, not all players are generating the same amount of money, which can cause bias and division in locker rooms (Landry, 2023). For example, former USC point guard Bronny James reported to be the highest paid NIL athlete in college sports last season, earning an estimated \$7.3 million in sponsorship and collective earnings (Johnson, 2023). Other former college basketball players like Rob Dillingham from the University of Kentucky and Hunter Dickinson from Kansas also benefited immensely from their NIL earnings that resulted in approximately over \$1 million (Bushard, 2024).

Before NIL (2016-2021 NBA Draft Classes), each draft had an average of 154 early entrants. In the NIL era (2022-2024 NBA Draft Classes), the average dropped to 117 early entrants, a roughly 24% decrease (Henderson, 2024). In the spring of 2024, Illinois transfer Coleman Hawkins decided to commit to Kansas State University for \$2 million in NIL compensation, becoming one of the highest earners in the country (Marks, 2024). As he was one of the most sought out players in the transfer portal, he decided to use up his collegiate eligibility as he figured he would make more money through NIL than he would as a lower-ranked NBA draft pick or member of the G-League, the NBA minor and development league affiliate (Henderson, 2024). While those players who would be exploring NBA options are staying in college longer it makes it more difficult for incoming freshmen to not only get recruited but to develop. The reason being is because it has reduced the amount of high school players being recruited, forcing players who once were considered Division I athletes to consider lower levels of play at junior colleges and Division II schools (Kinard, 2024).

Although bigger schools with larger NIL resources generally have an advantage for attracting some of the top tier talent opposed to other schools, this is not the case in every scenario (Henderson, 2024). When it comes to the transfer portal, some players are transferring from larger universities to smaller schools where they believe they can become the face of the smaller school's program. This past season, the Charlotte men's basketball program finished first in Conference USA and lost four of their five starters to the transfer portal, including their top rebounder and scorer (M. Young, personal communication, 2024). While the benefit to make more money is at the forefront for most athletes, transferring to a smaller school is another opportunity for players to then transfer back to a larger school for the chance to receive more money than before if their individual accolades meet recruiters from bigger school's standards

(Kinard, 2024). Although this method can help smaller schools compete for high profiled recruits for short term gain, the overall trend still favors larger institutions, making it consistently more difficult for small schools to compete for recruits (M. Young, personal communication, 2024). Because of this, there is a large competitive disadvantage and lack of fair play competitively.

Furthermore, complex dynamics when it comes to Title IX plays a factor in gender equality when it comes to NIL. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") prohibits discrimination in educational programs and activities on the basis of sex (Zimbalist, 2005). Where female sports have typically received less notoriety, NIL commendations have also mimicked this tactic (Curry, 2024). Due to this, it can undermine monetary gains for not only women's basketball but other non-revenue generating sports. Non-revenue sports typically involve women sports, whereas men's basketball and football generate revenue (Jessop & Sabin, 2021). As a result, NIL collectives allocate a disproportional amount of funds to men's basketball and football (Curry, 2024). Inversely, because NIL agreements are third party contracts between the athlete(s) and business, Title IX is not violated (Jessop & Sabin, 2021). Consequently, schools and administrators are left to bring together the division between its revenue and non-revenue sports. Although NIL has helped many women and athletes from non-revenue sports earn money, it can be important that gender biases in the media be minimized so everyone can receive the same benefits (Curry, 2024).

Due to the lack of a fully developed regulatory framework, the NCAA has been unable to control and enforce rules when it comes to the NIL (Fernandez, 2024). Because these policies are constantly shifting, it forces coaches and administrators to constantly adapt also (Seldin, 2024). On April 18, 2024, Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin signed a NIL bill allowing colleges and universities in the state of Virginia the ability to compensate its student-athletes directly through

NIL (DeWispelaere, 2024). While considered the first state to do so, on May, 23, 2024, The NCAA and the Power 5 conferences then came to an agreement under the House v NCAA court decision to pay its student-athletes directly through NIL earnings as well (Jindal, 2024). The settlement now allows schools to share its revenue from TV contracts, ticket sales, and other revenue sources (Jeyarajah, 2024), accumulating to an approximate payout of \$20 million for high major schools (Division I) and its athletes (Jeyarajah, 2024).

The House v NCAA decision highlights further scrutiny between student-athletes and the NCAA, as it marks a major turning point in recruiting (Jindal, 2024). Additionally, on July 11, a United States appeals court ruled that college athletes qualify as employees, deserving pay under federal wage and hour laws (Dale, 2024). While this is another advantage for larger schools, this alteration is expected to impact scholarship rules and recruiting practices (Jindal, 2024). For instance, the NCAA is considering removing scholarship caps for a hope of more flexibility (Jeyarajah, 2024). For men's basketball at the Division I level each school has a limitation of 13 scholarships per program (Wright, 2015). Eliminating the number of scholarships per team can change recruiting drastically, where it then can allow a program to offer more scholarships (than 13) or an opportunity to reallocate scholarship funds (Norlander, 2024).

Since being official, NIL has brought about substantial discussions among coaches and administrators regarding NCAA regulations. Effective August, 1, 2024, The Division I Council's acceptance of NIL disclosure and transparency rules now require student-athletes to disclose their NIL deals (NCAA, 24). Noncompliance with the NCAA 2024 NIL requirements can result in significant penalties for both institutions and individuals such as termination of employment, preclusion of post-season competition, and forfeiture of wins. Other enforcement remedies include disassociation from boosters and collectives, probation, fines, and reductions in

scholarships and recruiting privileges (Horvath II, 2024). While many coaches and administrators believe this can cause more fairness, others advocate for even lesser governing, believing that this can hinder potential NIL opportunities as a whole (NCAA, 24). As lawmakers, the NCAA, and stakeholders continue to cope these constant changes, the future of the NIL remains uncertain for potential years to come (Jindal, 2024). Besides, coaches and school administration must adapt strategies to navigate the new wave of college athletics in regard to college basketball as well (Henderson 2018).

Retention & Strategies

One area of major concern for many coaches today is player retention. Prior to the NIL and transfer portal, players chose a college program based off reputation and an opportunity to earn valuable playing time (Grambeau, 2020). Today, players are not only demanding to be recruited to attend their university out of high school or junior college, but also when they're at the school, causing more players than ever to leave their university (Landry, 2023) Due to this, coaches are continually looking for ways to retain their players in an era when retaining them is as difficult as it's ever been.

An approach that has been constant with many coaches is focusing on building strong relationships outside athletics, including investing more time with players' family and their high school coaching staff beyond the recruiting process (Yen, 2022). Florida State's Leonard Hamilton advises players and recruits to take into consideration the coaching staff, their role on the team, and their overall development when choosing a college to play at (Murphy, 2022). Because many other coaches are now adapting this method, more time spent with players discussing their personal and social wellbeing like mental health and personal development is being used when helping players feel more appreciated, creating an environment that is allowing

players to grow off the court (Lovell & Mallinson, 2023). In addition, coaches are communicating with players more respectfully, taking into concern player emotions (Wynn, 2022). It is found that coaches who have shown understanding towards their student-athletes were more likely to retain them (Lupton, 2021). Furthermore, coaches are establishing stronger relationships with former players and alumni as well (Lupton, 2021). To better foster with retention, men's basketball staffs and athletic departments are specializing roles tailored to NIL support, such as adding additional coaches and strengthening administrative staffs (Zimbalist, 2023).

In the spring of 2024, the Virginia Tech men's basketball program lost five of its nine scholarship players to other Division I schools due to NIL interferences and the transfer portal (M. Young, personal communication, 2024). While bringing in three true freshmen, the coaching staff also recruited five transfers from five different schools. Instead of recruiting in all freshmen, the coaching staff felt the need to recruit experienced upperclassmen over inexperienced players, which is another tactic a lot of coaching staffs are adapting when considering roster balance (Henderson, 2024). The strategy of not solely recruiting freshmen creates more competitiveness against competition, while still maintaining cohesiveness with player eligibility and graduation (Henderson, 2024). For example, Auburn Head Coach Bruce Pearl stated that he now only recruits a couple of freshmen a year, targeting freshmen who can only make an immediate impact (Alvis, 2024). This method also allows coaches to build a strong foundation for the future, giving them the opportunity to win games right away.

Furthermore, player development has become a focal point in retaining players. When considering the University of Connecticut and Purdue University, success has been endured with players who were recruited as freshmen (Henderson, 2024). While competing for the national

championship in 2024, Purdue star Zach Edey and UConn star Donovan Clingan proved that transferring schools is not always necessary. Consequently, coaching staffs are managing player development as a way to improve individual skills and team concepts (Murphy, 2022). Coaches are incorporating more individual support such as training camps, individualized coaching, and mental performance training (Marks, 2024). For instance, the University of North Carolina men's basketball program provides their players access to elite trainers and sports psychologists (ESPN, 2019). While the support allows these college players to compete on a national stage, it also prepares them for the opportunity to further their career in the NBA one day.

Today, one of the most crucial strategies in retaining players is leveraging NIL opportunities. According to a study by the National Federation of State High School Association, 65% of high school basketball players believe that NIL opportunities play a significant role in their decision-making process when choosing a college program (NFHS, 2023). To capitalize on this, coaches are continually trying to improve its policies. For high major programs, this may mean offering deals in the upwards of \$200,000 for starters and \$400,000 for a best player; and even more on occasions (Wittry, 2024).

A common method how money is being raised is through NIL collective companies, which are separate entities that schools use to raise money for its players and student athletes (Dougherty, 2024). These collectives are usually considered the "middleman" between the institution and student-athlete, which is commonly made up of alumni, businesses and donors. It is through exclusive events and gatherings like golf outings and auctions where these potential donors have opportunities to interact with players and coaches (Rapisarda, 2024). Since 2021, these collectives have been used to negotiate student-athlete value based off contribution to their respected university and team (Ubben & Demeyer, 2024).

Aside from collectives, schools are partnering with members of their community to raise money. According to a study by the NCAA and SFIA (Sports & Fitness Industry Association), many schools are partnering with local businesses through sponsorship deals to help student-athlete compensation (NCAA & SIFA, 2020). For example, a coach might partner with a local restaurant to offer NIL opportunities for players to promote them on social media. Accordingly, University of Arkansas head coach John Calipari has partnered with various companies in hopes to further NIL compensation for his players (Conahan, 2024). Knowledge on his business-like approach is now being sold in not only his recruiting pitch to potential student-athletes but his current players as well. By demonstrating a clear pathway to financial stability, coaches can both attract and keep their players for short term and long-term program success (Wynn, 2022).

While the most convenient in some cases, social media is used for donations and partnerships for its student-athletes as well (IAAD, 2020). This method not only serves as an opportunity to help fund its existing athletes but recruits as well, demonstrating that the school is maximizing its NIL efforts in many ways as possible. Social media's increased visibility for coaches serves as an easy way to market the program as whole (IAAD, 2020). It allows an opportunity for fans to engage with their favorite players, while athletes can too build their brand ambassadorship. While leveraging these opportunities, it is an essential tool to capitalize on NIL earnings (NFHS, 2023). Coaches are hoping that this approach can promote a positive culture and program loyalty.

Conclusion

Based on scholarly information, the introduction of NIL guidelines has drastically altered men's basketball recruiting strategies in collegiate athletics. The development of NIL collectives

has shifted the focus from traditional recruiting procedures to a more fiscal attitude. This shift has elevated uncertainties about the potential for a "rich get richer" scenario, where bigger schools benefit from an advantage in recruiting due to having more resources in regards to NIL deals. Today, high schools are even allowing NIL, which can have even a bigger shift in recruiting strategies in years to come (Zimbalist, 2023). This landscape has forced colleges and universities to partner with third party vendors to help assist with personal branding for the betterment of athletic teams to provide educational programs. Although NIL has created opportunities for student-athletes, it also has emphasized inequalities between revenue and non-revenue sports. As a current college basketball coach, NIL will continue to have a profound effect on recruiting in college basketball. For reference, college basketball coaches should continue to educate themselves on the constant evolution of NIL and its revolving alterations. I too believe that college athletic departments must invest in their compliance department as these rules continue to take place.

Ultimately, being able to adapt to the climate of college basketball by placing student-athletes in the forefront in all circumstances should equvalate to success in most occasions. This involves attention to not only winning games but educating players on financial literacy, enforcing graduation, and partaking in other miscellaneous undertakings to provide support in any way possible. As the NIL market continues to grow, continued research will be necessary to better understand its long-term effect on both college basketball recruiting and college basketball as a whole. Unfortunately, rapid changes can create difficulty for coaches and universities to adjust.

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