

Passive aggressive: International student athletes' NIL strategies

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Abstract:

The plight of international student-athletes as it relates to their exclusion from NIL opportunities has been well documented. In response, legal experts and athletic department employees have diligently worked to level the NIL playing field for international student-athletes through group licensing and passive income opportunities (Wittry, 2023).

Recognizing the need for more proactive measures, collectives such as Penn State University's Success With Honor have initiated campaigns geared towards allowing international student-athletes to monetize their brand through NIL. For example, in Canada, Success With Honor used billboard promotions to highlight four Canadian student-athletes on the football team, showcasing the potential to leverage their international appeal. Another major actor in the NIL space, Student Athlete Name Image Likeness (SANIL), extends its reach globally with similar initiatives in France, Indonesia, Ireland, England, and Australia. Through their collectives such as Knights of The Raritan at Rutgers University, the company aims to engage international student-athletes in either passive promotions or more active marketing in their home countries. These types of engagements offer promotional benefits for both the athletes and their respective universities and serve to level the playing field between international student-athletes and their American counterparts (Crabtree, 2022).

There are over 22,000 international student-athletes, from 206 different countries, competing at the NCAA Division I and II levels (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022). The significance of addressing NIL rights for this demographic becomes increasingly pronounced as the post-COVID numbers of international student-athletes have grown and the transfer portal has streamlined the internal movement of student-athletes in general. This instrumental case study undertakes an in-depth analysis of the ability of international student-athletes to both passively and actively capitalize on their NIL without jeopardizing their visa status. By identifying and examining these success stories, the researchers aim to uncover pathways that could serve as game-changers for high-profile international athletes seeking to leverage their NIL.