

## **Social Media's Impact On NIL**

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Before the first Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) laws, there were many debates about whether college athletes should get paid. This debate started in the late 2000s, especially after a lawsuit about paying athletes for their names and images in video games. California led the way by passing the "Fair Pay to Play Act" in 2019, becoming the first state with an NIL law. After that, 31 more states followed, and now there are 32 states with NIL laws. Even in places without these laws, athletes in college sports can still look for NIL opportunities without breaking the NCAA rules or their school's policies. The whole NIL thing has been a big discussion, and now student athletes are starting to use it to make money from their names. It's changing how people think about athletes getting compensated for their image and brand.

### **Social Media's the Driving Force for NIL**

The emergence of NIL is a game changer for the collegiate sports world. NIL stands for Name Image and Likeness and it was introduced around 2020 and hasn't stopped growing since. Since the move towards NIL, social media has become significantly more appealing to student athletes, providing them with increased opportunities for personal branding and connecting with their audience. Social Media is the major driving force for NIL, as approximately 70% of NIL activities is posting content on social media platforms. Social Media is crucial for a student athlete to best monetize their name, as most people think it is only the top 1% of athletes who receive NIL deals. This is true to a certain extent, the top 1% of college athletes have a better chance to receive NIL deals and most likely the big money deals, but Social Media has opened the door for the other percentile of college athletes to monetize their name as a creator or influencer. Athletes across all divisions and sports are now building their own unique personal brand to grow followers and best monetize their names. *Purdue's Assistant Director of counseling and sports psychologist, Kelsey Dawson expressed, "NIL opened the floodgates because now social media is going to be one of the primary ways in which student-athletes are promoting themselves."* Not only are student athletes promoting themselves, many schools are

now promoting their athlete's social media links on their online rosters. The growth of NIL alongside the popularity of social media is changing how student athletes connect with their fans, fostering more personal and authentic relationships. This shift has also led to the rise of NIL agencies, specialized organizations that help athletes navigate the opportunities that come with NIL and social media. So, not only are athletes building their brands by engaging with fans, but they now have expert guidance to make the most of these new opportunities in the world of sports marketing.

### **Rise of NIL Agencies**

With the rise of NIL, there's a surge in agencies like Athletes First, Octagon, Postgame, Excel Sports, and Icon Source. These agencies play matchmaker, helping athletes land beneficial NIL deals. It's not just these big names; many other agencies are out there, offering support to student athletes, guiding them on how to make the most out of their social media presence. These agencies act as middlemen, simplifying the process and ensuring athletes get the best opportunities to cash in on their online popularity. As more athletes explore the world of Name, Image, and Likeness, these agencies serve as essential guides, making sure everyone gets a fair shot at turning their social media game into a win-win for both athletes and brands. When I reached out to Postgame, they shared some really helpful information about how agencies link up brands with athletes in the Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) game. They went into details about the content that brands are interested in and gave me some overall useful info to grasp the whole NIL concept better. It's not just about connections; it's about knowing what kind of content and athletes brands are targeting.

### **Postgame Interview**

The first question that was asked is how do they (Postgame) connect brands with recognized college athletes? Their answer was very insightful as it is assumed other agencies operate similarly. Their reply was as follows, "When we first start working with brands we try to get an idea of what type of athlete these brands are looking for. Brands may only want to work

with tier 1 athletes such as starting quarterbacks, star basketball players or even a player with a large social media following. Or they might want to work with a specific sport, gender or even school. Other brands want to do more of an at scale play with all types of athletes from a variety of schools and followers. There are other times when the brands trust our expertise to find the right athlete to fit their brand.”

The next question asked was, what is an effective way for an athlete to develop their social media brand to be more appealing to NIL campaigns? Agencies like Postgame look for athletes who can create high quality content and be trustworthy, as they replied, “we look for somebody that has a positive image on social media. Brands want to work with somebody that they can trust, somebody they know will help to promote their brand in a positive light. One thing that helps a college athlete to be selected for a campaign is to have high quality images/ videos. We know that not all players have access to a videographer but little things such as good lighting can go a long way.” Some agencies may offer trial NIL campaigns to see if the athlete is a good fit for their agency. For example Postgame offers a shirt representing their agency and then will proceed with more inquiries from there. “One thing that we do here at Postgame is we give all athletes new to the Postgame app an opportunity to partake in a Postgame promotion, and for some, this is their first NIL deal! We send athletes Postgame shirts and have them create content while wearing the shirt. Players can create content working out or while practicing their sport. This can be a great first way to show not only Postgame but also brands that you can post in a timely manner and also create good content.

Another question I was able to ask Postgame is how do they use a wide cast of athletes for NIL campaigns to create more spreadability and exposure for both the athletes and brand? Their reply offered insightful information, “Postgame is able to run large at scale campaigns with thousands of athletes at a time and track all posts to make sure we are meeting deadlines in a timely manner. Our capability of getting the starting quarterback at Alabama to show up at a CVS store to sign autographs and take photos with fans while also being able to get hundreds

of fans to show up for an hour given a small time frame is something other agencies cannot do and it hasn't been done before. We also make sure that not only does the starting QB show up to CVS but that they also post on social media promoting the brand while we are tracking all posts for all players at events like this.”

The last question Postgame answered is how they promote creative content creation with their athletes, as they said, “when a player is selected for a campaign they are sent campaign instructions going over everything they need to create content successfully. Here, we give ideas for content creation which can spark creativity amongst players. We also share with the players examples of content that we loved from past campaigns to help give them some ideas.”

### **NIL Athletes More Appealing to Brands**

With the rise of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) rights, brands are increasingly teaming up with student-athletes on social media. These athletes, known as NIL influencers, bring authenticity and engagement to brand endorsements, boosting awareness and potentially driving sales. Collaborating with these hardworking students helps brands grow online and reach wider audiences. Partnering with NIL influencers makes sense for brands. NIL campaigns are cost-effective, and the authentic content created by athletes resonates well with followers. Athletes usually have highly engaged audiences, bringing in new viewers for brands. Brands use various strategies on social media to partner with athletes, including sponsored posts, brand ambassadorships, affiliate marketing, giveaways, co-created content, and showcasing event appearances.

### **Conclusion**

To put it simply, NIL is a big thing in sports marketing, and it's here to stay. Social media is super important for athletes who want to build their brand, and best monetize their name. When brands team up with athletes, everyone wins – it's like a smart and long-lasting trend in the world of sports marketing. It's cost-effective for brands and helps athletes get the spotlight.

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So, whether you're a brand looking for exposure or an athlete wanting to shine on social media, jumping on the NIL train seems like a smart move that's not fading away anytime soon.

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