

NIL Is an Opportunity. Build Beyond the Game.

Preparing young athletes for the business of sports - and for the education, career and identity that continue beyond competition.

By Dr. T | Strataa PLLC

For today's young athlete, the conversation has changed. It is no longer only: What school are you going to? Are you going Division I? Can you make it to the pros? Families are now also talking about NIL - Name, Image and Likeness.

Athletes may earn income through sponsorships, appearances, social media, camps, endorsements and other opportunities tied to their personal brand. That can be exciting. But NIL should be part of the plan - never the entire plan.

NIL IS A BUSINESS

Once money becomes involved, being an athlete can also mean becoming a young businessperson. Athletes and families need to understand contracts, taxes, recordkeeping, brand reputation, financial management and applicable NCAA rules.

Current NCAA guidance notes that NIL income is generally taxable and encourages athletes to maintain accurate income and expense records. Current Division I rules also include reporting requirements for certain third-party NIL agreements; under the current framework, agreements or payment arrangements totaling \$600 or more are subject to reporting requirements. [1,2]

BEFORE THE FIRST DEAL	Learn to read the agreement, identify deliverables, keep records, ask questions before signing and know when legal or financial advice is appropriate.
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YOUR TALENT OPENS DOORS. WHAT ARE YOU BUILDING ONCE THEY OPEN?

Your sport can create incredible opportunities. But your sport is something you do. It should not have to become everything you are.

Research supports developing multiple dimensions of identity in athletes. A 2026 study examined student-athlete identity profiles and post-career adaptation, including perceived social support and career concerns. [3] A 2025 study of 495 adolescent student-athletes examined athletic and academic identity and discussed identity foreclosure - committing heavily to one identity without sufficiently exploring alternatives. [4]

Preparing for life beyond competition isn't doubting your athletic ability. It's protecting your future.

BUILD TWO PLAYBOOKS

Athletic playbook: training, recovery, nutrition, performance goals, recruiting, film and competition.

Life playbook: education, career interests, financial literacy, communication, networking, entrepreneurship and a reputation that has value beyond statistics.

NCAA Division I core guarantees include access to resources related to academics, career development, life skills, financial literacy and NIL education. [5]

Parents: Don't Just Ask About the Offer

When an NIL opportunity appears, everyone naturally wants to know: How much are they offering? Families should also ask:

- What exactly is my athlete agreeing to - and for how long?
- Who owns or may reuse the content being created?
- Are there exclusivity requirements or conflicts with other deals?
- What happens if the athlete transfers, is injured or stops playing?
- What are the tax and recordkeeping implications?
- Does this opportunity build something sustainable beyond a one-time payment?

An internship, professional relationship, business connection, education opportunity or partnership that teaches a marketable skill may continue producing value long after the original NIL payment is gone.

MONEY DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY MEAN PREPARED

The NCAA Student-Athlete Health and Wellness Study surveyed approximately 23,000 NCAA athletes across all divisions; academics, planning for the future and finances were among the stressors examined in relation to student-athlete well-being. [6]

Financial education can start early: taxable income, budgeting, saving, emergency funds, contracts, reputation and planning for what happens when a deal ends.

THE GOAL IS BIGGER THAN NIL

Train hard. Compete. Build your brand. Take the NIL meeting. Explore the endorsement. Dream about playing professionally. But while you're building the athlete, build the person too. Learn something. Earn your education. Develop a skill. Build relationships outside your sport. Understand money. Explore careers.

Your greatest asset isn't your NIL valuation. It's your ability to create value long after the uniform comes off.

- Dr. T | Strataa PLLC | Sports Medicine • Athlete Development • Performance • Education

Sources

[1] NCAA. Name, Image and Likeness. ncaa.org/student-athletes/name-image-likeness

[2] NCAA Legislative Services Database. Division I NIL reporting framework. web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi/search/proposalView?id=109538

[3] Seo Y, Reifsteck EJ. (2026). Examining the Impact of Identity Profiles on Postcareer Adaptation in Student-Athletes: A Person-Centered Approach. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*. PubMed PMID: 41765014.

[4] Identity and motivation of adolescent student-athletes in school and elite sport. (2025). *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. doi:10.3389/fspor.2025.1625068

[5] NCAA. Student-Athlete Core Guarantees. ncaa.org/student-athletes/student-athlete-experience/core-guarantees

[6] NCAA. Student-Athlete Health and Wellness Study. ncaa.org/what-we-do/research/studies/student-athlete-health-and-wellness-study

Educational note: NIL rules, school policies, state laws and tax obligations can change. This publication is educational and is not individualized legal, tax or financial advice. Confirm current requirements with the appropriate compliance office and qualified professionals.