**Student athlete personal branding and the impact of name, image, and likeness (NIL)**

**legislation.**

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**Abstract**

This study integrates perspectives from professionals working within college sports as well as student athletes to provide a deeper understanding of the aspects that comprise and impact athletes' individual branding efforts at the collegiate level. In addition, the study offers insight into how the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) proposed name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation will affect personal branding among student athletes. The data was collected through a series of one-on-one virtual interviews with both student athletes and current/former employees within college athletics. Different interview guides were developed for the two subgroups of interviewees. Also, a handful of questions were tailored to the interviewees based on their background and particular role within their sport or athletic department. Overall, the questions touched on personal branding efforts, social media use, education surrounding the name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation, personal branding, and the impact of personal branding and NIL on recruiting within college athletics. By combining the two perspectives, this study offers insight into athlete personal branding at the college level and how athletic departments have responded to the rise in prominence of individualized branding among college athletes. Furthermore, the interview data and analysis further advance the definition of a brand and the elements that comprise a personal brand.

**Keywords:** brand, personal brand, (name, image, and likeness)

**Introduction**

The debate surrounding whether or not student athletes should to be compensated in some form for their involvement within athletics has been an ongoing discussion in college sports for nearly a decade. Some of the larger events, such as the NCAA Tournament for men's basketball and the College Football Playoff, draw thousands of fans each year and even more tuning in on television. Even without television and media revenue in play, the NCAA profits from a 4-billlion-dollar industry based solely on licensed college athletic merchandise. Replica jerseys, posters, and video games are a few examples. Although the NCAA's institution members and the colleges and universities gain significant revenue, the student athletes themselves, "who's names and faces drive those sales" are left with nothing to show for it monetarily (Wong, 2010). While NCAA student athletes are technically labeled as amateur or non-professional, they are the primary force behind the multibillion dollar entertainment industry that is college sports. The NCAA Tournament alone between ticket sales and television agreements generates about $700 million (as of 2014), of which 40 percent the NCAA keeps and the other 60 percent is essentially divided between the participating schools depending on how far they advance in the tournament (Hobson, 2014). Furthermore, "Americans wagered an estimated $8.5 billion in 2019 on the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship" (the formal name for the NCAA Tournament). In addition, television networks paid an estimated "$1.1 billion to broadcast the games" (American Gaming Association; NCAA.org). Even though the debate is a polarizing one, there is no question who the primary beneficiary is from these collegiate athletic events, and it is not the student athletes.

In April of last year, the NCAA responded to the growing support of compensating student athletes, through supporting rule changes that would allow student athletes to financially

gain through endorsements and promotions "both related to and separate from athletics" (NCAA.org). Although formal legislation has yet to be passed at the federal level, the evolution of the proposed legislation and how it will impact student athletes and athletic departments is important to study because it will shape the landscape of college sports for the foreseeable future. Endorsements and promotions, although they don't allow an athlete to profit directly from the institution they attend, often times have more lucrative potential than annual income or a salary. This can be illustrated through professional golfer Tiger Woods, who, following his first Masters tournament victory at age 21, became the "first athlete to hit the billion-dollar mark in career earnings. In 2008, Woods earned almost $100 million, about $93 million of which came from endorsements and promotions separate from his athletic accomplishments (Wong, 2010). The Woods' example showcases the power of endorsements and promotions exists for athletes regardless of athletic performance, which is why studying the impact of the NCAA's proposed legislation will be essential to understanding how and why both student athletes and athletic departments react the way they do in response to the imminent legislation. Moreover, the impact will extend beyond the initial response to the name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation, because to gain endorsements, whether or not they are associated with an athlete's performance within their sport, requires effective self-promotion or personal branding. Therefore, the study of both personal branding efforts from student athletes and athletic departments as a whole in addition to the NCAA's proposed NIL legislation is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the landscape of college sports will evolve over time.

## Literature Review

This literature review combines previous research surrounding personal brand development both in general and from an athlete specific perspective. Furthermore, the review will explore

previous findings regarding the concept of name, image, and likeness and how NCAA legislation surrounding that concept has evolved over time to impact student athlete personal brand development. The combination of both student athlete and college athletic employee perspectives will allow for a more complete study of both points of view. In addition to secondary research, in depth, one-on-one interviews were utilized to gain insight into student athletes education and knowledge base surrounding NIL and personal brand development. Futhermore, including the perspective of athletic department staff should provide insight into what different departments currently do and are doing to position their programs and individual student athletes to capitalize on the NIL legislation once it's passed. One of the larger implications is that the passing of the legislation will likely sway student athlete recruiting decisions based on an institution's preparedness to put their athletes in a position to grow their brand and financially gain from it. In addition, the conversation surrounding NIL has been a catalyst for teaching self-promotion and brand development within collegiate athletics. One of the other implications has been the student athlete educational effort from a NIL point of view and personal branding perspective. This study integrates the student athlete point of view and college athletic employee perspective to provide insight into how student athlete self-promotion and the educational effort from athletic departments further advances the understanding of brand and a personal brand. The study also analyzes how the proposed name, image, and likeness legislation from the NCAA will affect student athlete personal branding and the education on the side of athletic departments in regard to self-promotion and brand development.

**Defining a brand**

Brands are something that human beings encounter constantly in their everyday lives. Whether they are aware or not, people are repeatedly being exposed to a countless number of

brands in nearly every moment of their life. Yet, from a conceptual perspective, the idea of a brand is extremely difficult to grasp. Human beings are all consumers regardless of the role they occupy in the workplace. Perhaps the aforementioned idea offers insight into why the dictionary definition of a brand interprets the concept from the perspective of a conscious consumer. The Oxford Languages definition of a brand provided by Google is "a type of product manufactured by a particular company under a particular name." This definition provides an idea of how human beings as consumers view the concept of a brand. However, the idea that brands are always tied to a particular product or service and company is misleading.

Dr. Upendra Kumar Maurya, an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Department of Management Studies at Indian Institute of Technology Madras, argues "brands are omnipresent; they penetrate almost every aspect of our life: economic, social, cultural, sporting, even religion" (Maurya, 2012). This means brands extend beyond the tangible goods and intangible services, they encapsulate emotion, biases, behavioral tendencies, mental prototypes and imagery among others that intertwine with aspects of human nature. Maurya builds upon the idea of a brand being defined from the perspective of the consumer when he says, "in postmodern societies" people want to "give name to their consumption" (Maura, 2012). Revealing the underlying reasoning as to why, from the human perspective, brands exist provides further insight into how narrow the definition of a brand is from the conscious consumer point of view. Brands serve as a label to differentiate consumption of the variety of goods and services.

While this is one reason why brands exist, it is far from a comprehensive definition. Leslie De Chernatony, a philosopher and former brand management professor based in the United Kingdom, and Francesca Dall'Olmo Riley, a professor of brand management at Kingston University Business School define brand through separating the idea into 12 different categories.

A handful of the dozen classifications focus on the intangible parts of a brand and how the concept is integrated into aspects of human nature. Riley and De Chernatony separate the definition of brand into the following subsets: brand as a logo, brand as a legal instrument, brand as a company, brand as a shorthand, brand as a risk reducer, brand as an identity system, brand as an image in the consumer's mind, brand as a value system, brand as a personality, brand as a relationship, brand as adding value and brand as an evolving entity. The 12 aforementioned categorizations touch on both the visible and invisible characteristics of a brand. A brand's visible aspects, such as "brand as a logo" and "brand as a company" offer insights that fail to stretch beyond the conscious consumer perception, which guides the dictionary definition. The rest of this section will focus strictly on the invisible facets of a brand within Riley and De Chernatony's 12-category definition in order to add to the consumer definition and in turn provide a clearer picture of all the elements that comprise a brand (Riley & De Chernatony, 2010).

One of Riley and De Chernatony's 12 classifications is "brand as an image in the consumer's mind", which was alluded to earlier building on Maurya's statement with respect to a brand's "omnipresent" nature. The human brain organizes information into different mental frameworks, or schemas they're referred to in psychology. In order to store and retrieve information efficiently, the brain arranges data into different categorical structures, not unlike Riley and De Chernatony's 12-part brand definition. Within those different mental structures are what's known as prototypes, which are the initial and complete examples that come to mind when retrieving stored information. Prototypes serve as mental representations for the multitude of concepts that make up human intelligence and are critical to how human beings make sense of the world around them. Here's an example, the concept of "going out" is something almost

everybody is familiar with and on a basic level it means leaving the home to do something. However, the mental image or prototype can be drastically different person-to-person, which ultimately impacts the understanding and perception of the concept. For some, going out presumes you're leaving the house to go do something enjoyable that involves social engagement and interaction. For others "going out" carries an unpleasant fear or anxiety perhaps due to past experience. As it applies to brands, the mental image or prototype is how consumers not only view brands, but also view the different categories that brands exist within. The typical example of a prototype is McDonald's within category of fast food. However, just because someone uses McDonald's as their prototype for fast food, doesn't mean the mental image is the golden arches, nor is it inherently a good thing for the McDonald's brand. Oftentimes the prototype evolves over time based on knowledge that was taught or learned through experience. Typically, the prototype constructed is a byproduct of many mental images gained through encounters with a particular brand (Riley & De Chernatony, 2010).

Brand as a personality is another category that comprises Riley and De Chernatony's brand definition, which helps to link the concept of a brand to human nature. Similar to the mental image and prototype concept, brand as personality refers to a brand's ability to represent or symbolize something for the consumer that extends beyond the product or service itself. More often than not when a consumer arrives at a brand's website, they're able to see the brand's mission statement, or what the brand aims to deliver for its consumers, and its values which are essentially the brand's morals or what it holds important. Through this presentation, the brand begins to emulate human characteristics, which allows the consumer to establish a relationship and start to develop an emotional attachment or associated feelings. Seth Godin, author and former business executive said in his book, *This is Marketing*, "People don't want what you

make. They want the way it will make them feel, and there aren't that many feelings to choose from (Godin, 2018)." Not only does this quote touch on the importance of emotional attachment in a consumer's relationship with a brand, it also indirectly emphasizes that, as a human being, there's a limited number of associative feelings to select from, which makes that initial emotional connection that much more important. The next aspect of Riley and Chernatony's brand definition is brand as a relationship, which builds further upon the link between brand and human attributes (Riley & De Chernatony, 2010).

Maura describes Riley and De Chernatony's brand as a relationship definition as a "logistical extension" of brand as personality. Furthermore, Maura adds that brand as personality is a "prerequisite" for brand as a relationship (Maura, 2012). Brand's must be able to be personified in order for the consumer-brand relationship to form. The brand relationship bridges the gap between the consumer and the company with which the brand is associated. De Chernatony, Malcolm McDonald, former marking professor at Cranfield University School of Management and chairman of Malcolm McDonald International, and Elaine Wallace, Associate Director of Whitaker Institute and Associate Head of Research at J. E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics at National University of Ireland Galway, collaborated in the book *Creating Powerful Brands, 4th Edition* which reiterates the importance of the intangible elements of a brand. Chapter one references a figure entitled "The Components of a Product" (Appendix C) which illustrates the tangible, intangible, and service components that comprise a product. The figure consists of multiple concentric circles which include different product aspects within each. On the outer edge of the circles sits the "product surround" elements, which include value perceptions, quality perceptions, organization, brand name, other user recommendations, corporate image, and reputation. De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace use

the figure to emphasize the importance of intangible assets. "Recent estimates of companies in the USA and in the UK show that over 80 percent of the value of companies resides in intangibles. "This product surround (which consists of exclusively intangible elements) can account for as much as 80 percent of the added value and impact of a product or service (De Chernatony, McDonald, & Wallace, 2011). This reinforces the importance of defining a brand in a multi-faceted fashion, extending beyond the aspects visible to the consumer. In order to unite both the tangible and intangible assets and provide a comprehensive definition of a brand, an added category, brand as experience, to Riley and Chernatony's 12-part definition is needed. Why? Because human experience is the driving force behind the intangibles.

Brand as experience takes pieces of all three of the aforementioned brand-defining categories from Riley and Chernatony's 12-part brand classification. In reviewing the literature, Josko Brakus, a professor of marketing at Leeds University Business School, Bern Schmitt, an international business and marketing professor at Columbia University's business school, and Lia Zarantonello, a professor of marketing at University of Roehampton, found three parts that comprise brand experience: the product experience, the shopping and service experience and the consumption experience. "Product experiences occur when consumers interact with products—for example, when consumers search for products and examine and evaluate them" (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2002). As it applies to brands, product experience dictates the consumer's first impression of the brand tied to that particular product. Whether or not it is a tangible good or intangible service, product experience carries influence over not only the consumer's first impression of the product or brand, but also the initial emotional consumer-brand association. That initial association is important because it often impacts the consumer's memory and mental image linked with the individual product and therefore, the overall brand.

Shopping and service experience is an aspect of brand experience developed through looking at brand's through the eyes of the conscious consumer, which, as was discussed earlier, looks at a brand as simply the company associated with particular goods and services. Although the shopping and service experience part tackles the brand concept from a specific point of view, it's important to understand that for brands associated with consumer goods, brand as a relationship plays a larger, more critical role in determining the brand experience. For example, Apple's notoriety as a top tier technological company goes beyond the physical iPad or MacBook. Everything from the presentation of the packaging when a customer purchases a new iPhone to the experience of walking into one of Apple's retail stores contributes to the consumer's perception of the company as superior relative to its competitors. Two aspects of Apple's shopping and service experience come to mind that positions it uniquely within the marketplace: Apple's "Genius Bar" and the layout of its retail stores, which offer an unconventional, interactive experience for every shopper who enters the store.

The Genius Bar is a technological support and educational resource for Apple product users. In addition to personalized technological and troubleshooting support, the Genius Bar offers educational classes on how to use their products as well as how to work through common roadblocks when using their products. Apple's Genius Bar fulfills the service aspect of a brand as a shopping and service experience. If you've ever walked into an Apple store, you are aware of the experience associated with shopping within one of their retail locations. The store is divided into two parts, one is the aforementioned Genius Bar and second is space dedicated to everyone from the prospective Apple customer to the brand-loyal software engineer who brought his three kids to his Genius Bar appointment. Every Apple product imaginable is available for potential customers to use and evaluate or for kids to pass the time playing games and taking

selfies. It's a destination for both a productive visit or a way to kill time while you're waiting for a restaurant reservation.

The final part of brand as an experience is consumption experience. Consumption experiences are "multidimensional" and oftentimes can occur within both the shopping and service experience and product experience (Brakus et al., 2002). If the product being consumed is a service, such as a chartered fishing or guided rafting trip, the consumption experience occurs within the product experience. For brands who offer services like this, the selling point is not a product, but rather the experience as a whole. Therefore, the end result for the consumer takes the form of an emotion or memory associated with the experience after the fact. Consumption experiences can also occur through advertisements, which can impact the mental image and retrieval cue linked with the consumer. Brand as a relationship is closely related to the consumption experience because it showcases brand as a catalyst for developing the consumer-brand emotional attachment. All in all, brand as experience impacts multiple aspects associated with Riley and Chernatony's 12-part definition, which makes it an essential piece to the puzzle when trying to assemble a thorough definition of brand.

**Defining personal brand**

So, how does the general concept of brand differ from personal brand? The answer doesn't differ significantly from the overall brand definition and the marketing strategies for both are similar as well. Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy, professors of marketing within Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management argue brands and personal brands can both be marketed in similar ways citing employees natural desire to impress their boss or politicians' objective to win the support of the general public as two examples where human beings use self-promotion to enhance and develop their image within the eyes of others (Kotler and Levy, 1969).

The relationship between brand and personal brand is very close because from the consumer perspective, a brand represents both a relationship and personality as was discussed by De Chernatony and Riley in their 12-part definition.

Personal brand separates itself because it's a representation or persona of a human being rather than a company, product, or service. Matthew Thomson, a professor at Queens School of Business defines human brand as the "persona, well-known or emerging, who are the subject of marketing, interpersonal, or inter-organizational communications" (Thomson, 2004). Furthermore, the brand-like nature of human beings is based on two primary aspects: 1) humans similar to brands, "can be strategically managed" and 2) humans also "have additional associations and features of a brand" (Close, Moulard, & Monroe, 2010). An example of this is personality and relationship, two key parts in defining a brand which are features or aspects of life found in human beings as well as brands. The close association between the two means everyone has a personal brand, whether they realize it or not, the power of perception is ever present in the world regardless if the subject is a brand or human being.

**Defining the concept of name, image, and likeness (NIL)**

Name, image, and likeness or the acronym NIL as it's commonly known within the world of college athletics, refers to the three concepts that comprise right of publicity. In "Protection of a Persona, Image, and Likeness: The Emergence of Right of Publicity, Paula B. Mays states that the right of publicity may be better understood as the "right of protection from the unauthorized publicity of one's name, image, created image, or likeness" (Mays, 2007).

Expansion of intellectual property rights has led to the right of publicity and privacy laws to protect against the improper use of one's name, image or perceived character: their persona, in addition to the protection of physical property. The evolution of right to privacy surrounding the

protection of one's persona falls under the category of "an offense to one's personal dignity and rights" (Mays, 2007). Initially, the courts forced the complainant to prove "mental distress or other injury" associated with the misuse of a person's name, image, or likeness. However, Cox Broadcasting vs. Cohn (1975) determined that because the improper use of an individual's persona or image is a "recoverable injury" and "subject to liability", it is not considered a "tortuous" crime (i.e. assault), but rather the "unauthorized 'commercial use' of the person's identity" (Mays, 2007).

Right of publicity gives an individual the ability to "control and profit from the commercial use of his/her name, likeness, or persona." Because there isn't a uniform federal protecting an individual's name, image, or likeness from being unfairly exploited, laws vary from state. Consequently, there is variation surrounding who is protected and to what degree they are protected. For example, in some states the protection only applies to celebrities or people of public interest (Findlaw, 2016). Broadcasting vs. Cohn (1975) and Zacchini vs. Scripps Howard Broadcasting (1977) helped to differentiate the right of privacy and right of publicity. The two aforementioned cases aided in the evolution of the right of publicity into a separate extension of the right of privacy. While the right of publicity "provides the individual with a property right in his/her identity, the right of privacy protects an individual from the emotional anguish resulting from the publication of private facts that are embarrassing, intimate or portray someone in a false light that is highly offensive" (Findlaw, 2016; Mays, 2007).

As it applies to college athletes, under current NCAA law student athletes are prohibited from receiving compensation for their name, image, likeness. In addition, they are unable to enter endorsement contracts or agreements as collegiate athletes. What this means, as it stands currently, student athletes essentially sacrifice their right to publicity associated with their sport

when they sign their letter of intent to participate in college athletics. However, in late April of 2020 the NCAA Board of Governors began the movement toward compensating student athletes for "third party endorsements both related to and separate from athletics." Furthermore, the NCAA would support "compensation for other student-athlete opportunities, such as social media, businesses they have started and personal appearances..." (NCAA.org). Since the NCAA's Board of Governors' decision to back the idea of compensating student athletes through endorsements relating to their name, image, and likeness, formal legislation has been drafted and in spite of recent delays it feels like just a matter of time before formal regulations are officially put in place.

The overarching goal of the study is to uncover a deeper understanding of the where student athletes and college athletic employees stand as it relates to individual athlete branding and the different elements that comprise personal brand development at the college level. What is the current mindset of student athletes in regard to developing their brand and what are they doing or have they done to try and build their brand, if at all? How does the student athletes' point of view overlap and differ from what college athletic employees are doing to position their athletes to be successful in their brand development efforts? Where does the student athlete educational effort fit into this picture and how does NIL play a role in shaping the future of student athlete personal branding? All the aforementioned questions help to advance the current understanding of the concept of a brand and personal brand and provide insight into what goes into the developmental process when building a brand. Because the two groups of people (student athletes and college athletic employees) present different desires that need to be met in order for the brand development effort to be considered successful, the combination of the two points of view will provide further insight into why brand as an experience is a necessary

addition to Riley and Chernatony's 12-part brand definition and a driving force behind a brand's intangibles because it deepens the tie between a brand and human nature, through an emphasis on the importance of identifying student athlete desires and effective communication and education.

**Procedure**

The study is exploratory in nature, so one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted either through video or voice call with four student athletes and five employees either currently or formerly employed in college athletics. The interview scripts were similar for each category (student athlete and industry employee) with slight variation in the follow-up questions that were asked based on the individual's general background, experience, and presence on social media.

The data that was collected in the initial part of this study was interview answers to open-ended questions regarding how student athletes have started to brand themselves via social media, if at all, prior to the new name, image, and likeness rules going into effect. In addition, student athlete interviewees were asked about their expectations, perspective, and background knowledge on how they think the name, image and likeness rules will impact them as an individual athlete and their sport as a whole. This allowed for a "baseline" of background knowledge to be established and analyzed in order to provide more educated insight to athletic departments bracing for this large change within college athletics. The student athletes were selected and interviewed based on availability and willingness to speak on the issue, in other words from a convenience sample. As far as tools to be used, the interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom or over the phone.

For the college athletic employee portion, the data that was collected was interview answers to open-ended questions surrounding the reaction from different athletic departments in

response to the name, image, and likeness legislation proposal from the NCAA. In addition, questions were asked surrounding how their role and responsibilities have evolved as a result of name, image, and likeness becoming a prominent topic in college sports. Finally, data was collected through interview answers about how, if at all, education efforts surrounding personal brand development has been impacted because of the name, image, and likeness legislation. The current/former college athletic employees were interviewed based on availability and willingness to speak on the issue (a convenience sample). One-on-one interviews lasted at minimum about 20 minutes up to a maximum of 90 minutes. In general, the interviews with college athletics employees lasted longer (45-90 minutes) while the student athlete interviews lasted about 20 to 30 minutes.

## Results

Analysis of interview responses from both populations uncovered three broad themes that explain the status of student athlete personal branding and how it's likely to be impacted by the upcoming NIL legislation. First, the importance of student athlete education. Whether it's in terms of NIL legislation or personal brand development, student athletes lack a comprehensive understanding of how NIL may impact their personal brand development endeavors, outside of their awareness of the basic idea behind the legislation. Although interviews with current and former college athletic employees demonstrated that the student athlete education effort and projecting what the legislation may look like and how their student athletes can capitalize on it is a large part of their role, there is a gap in the level of understanding between the two populations. However, for student athletes, there is an understanding of what makes each of them unique and ideas being circulated on how to use their story to develop their personal brand. This leads into the next theme which emerged: the importance of utilizing both athletic and non-athletic related

interests and endeavors to drive storytelling and personal brand development. College athletic employees explained the need to effectively communicate to student athletes that their platform or athletic influence can be taken advantage of through making your interests and passions outside of athletics a prominent part of your brand in order to foster a stronger relationship with your audience. Within that message, the importance of being genuine and authentic emerged as a vital piece to developing and maintaining an audience. Finally, the third theme that emerged was the importance of entrepreneurial education for student athletes. This theme touches on the idea that as a student athlete, your brand is guided by the understanding of how not only tell your story effectively, but an understanding of how to financially gain from it either through the endorsements and promotions allowed within the proposed NIL legislation or beyond their college athletic careers. Entrepreneurship education was a point of emphasis within all the college athletic employee responses. Furthermore, the desire to start their own business via an external passion or product development existed among all student athletes, a majority tying in with their presence on social media. Overall, the focus remained within the realm of providing productive educational resources for student athletes in order to equip them with the tools needed to succeed in developing their individual brands. College athletic employees presented examples and talked about the resources that were either currently in development or already developed to aid student athletes in the brand development process, all of which hinged on the human element within branding. Therefore, brand as experience, which is an essential piece of De Chernatony's, McDonald's, and Wallace's intangible brand elements (value perceptions, quality perceptions, organization, brand name, other user recommendations, corporate image, and reputation) is a necessary addition to Riley and De Chernatony's 12-part brand definition.

**Student Athlete Personal Branding**

**The Industry Employee Perspective**

Personal branding among athletes in general is interesting to analyze. Athletes by nature can become beloved or despised overnight solely based on their performance on the field or court. However, there's much more that goes into an athlete's persona than their athletic production when the lights turn on. Now, that's not to say how an athlete performs within their sport has a limited impact on the brand they're able to develop, because more often than not the two go hand and hand, but there are instances where the tie to a specific sports program within a particular institution, regardless of performance, is enough of a spring board as it applies to developing a personal brand through social media.

An interview conducted with Jack, a brand development employee within college athletics located in the South Central region of the United States, shed further light on why athletic performance is a relatively small portion of an athlete's persona, although the platform they have while playing is vitally important to developing their brand. "Athletes have a very limited window of athletic influence. At some point every single athlete is going to hang up the cleats, hang up the hockey stick, whatever it is, they're going to quit playing. Well, you have, being an athlete, a better opportunity than me to turn your athletic influence into a personal influence." Jack gave the example of former University of Florida and NFL quarterback Tim Tebow to illustrate that the length of an athlete's career on the field doesn't determine the influence attached to their personal brand. Tebow, who, following four years at Florida, played in the NFL from 2010-2015 (the latter half of his career on the practice squad) and has 2.5M followers on Instagram and 4.6M followers on Twitter. "Why is that?" Jack asked rhetorically. "Because he used his athletic influence to build what he's passionate about off the field." Tebow

has built his entire persona around the mantra "More than..." He fills in the ellipsis with football, baseball, business, speaking... etc. "It's living a life of significance" ([TimTebow.com](TimTebow.com)). The aforementioned two phrases serve as Tebow's mission statement for his brand and help to communicate the values he upholds. Through this mantra which has guided his personal brand, Tebow has become a three-time *New York Times* best-selling author, an executive producer and actor, a global speaker, an active philanthropist, among others. He's established the Tim Tebow Foundation that reinforces the mantra "It's living a life of significance." through giving back, speaking out, and standing up for causes he supports such as the fight against human trafficking. The foundation "exists to bring faith, hope, and love to those needing a brighter day in their darkest hour of need" ([TimTebow.com](TimTebow.com)). Why is Tebow's personal brand development story important? Because it exemplifies the need for personal brands to be multifaceted and extend beyond the athlete's passion and accomplishments on the field.

**The Importance of Educating Student Athletes**

Being able to communicate to student athletes that the development of your personal brand cannot solely depend on their four-year collegiate career is essential to instill a longer term mindset. Joe, a former college athletic creative director, built a student athlete personal brand development program during his time working with a university in the Midwest United States that evolved from a visually eye-catching pitch for prospective recruits to attend the university into an educational resource for the program's recruiting targets and current student athletes to understand the opportunity they have to build their platform and strengthen their social influence so that it can become an asset for them following their athletic careers. "At first we were kind of just educating recruits," Joe said. "I would present them with concept logos, personalized logos, and how it would look in a whole visual system, merchandise, marketing campaigns, the whole

thing and also on the back educating why it is important to have a personal brand." Joe explained the evolution of the program through the question of after a student athlete leaves school, how do they continue to build that persona and capitalize on their influence? The program was developed in 2008 and therefore wasn't dependent on new name, image, and likeness legislation being passed by the NCAA. Instead, Joe said, "It was more so once you graduate, you have an opportunity wherever you go to build your brand and leverage that platform, maximizing who you are and where you are and building that following, building that influence where you can financially gain from that once you're no longer deemed a student athlete and it's okay for you to do so, " Joe said. The pitch behind the brand development program to student athletes changed from why someone should attend the university to "why it's important to start thinking about your personal brand."

Jack built on the previous example of Tim Tebow and explained how his brand development approach applies to current college athletes. "If you're the star quarterback or star basketball player, or not even the star player, but you have a following and you have a big game, well then go to Twitter, go to Instagram, go to TikTok and as people are following you, what else are they interested in? What else do you do?" Student athletes draw the initial audience through their performance, but it's the story they tell after the fact that will go a long way in determining the strength and influence of their personal brands. Jack continued by saying not only that the strength of an athlete's personal brand is impacted by their story beyond sports, but also the value in it exists regardless of whether an athlete's focus is trying to capitalize monetarily on the upcoming name, image, and likeness legislation through endorsements during their four years, or if they're hoping to open up opportunities for themselves following their athletic careers. "It doesn't have to be in terms of NIL," Jack said. "It could be in terms of trying

to get (into) a career, thinking after sports is the biggest thing. Some of the biggest athletic influences don't play sports anymore." Jack's point illustrates that although it's oftentimes difficult to communicate the importance of longevity in personal brand development to student athletes, those who understand that will have the opportunity to benefit the most.

Jill, an employee in college athletics who works in the career development sector within the department said her goal initially, prior to NIL becoming a topic of conversation within college sports, was "to develop some kind of career programming for student athletes." Jill talked about the importance of getting student athletes to recognize and take advantage of their distinct perspective because it impacts the story they tell. Jill explained that her objective when developing the program was, "helping student athletes kind of tap into that uniqueness of being a student athlete and then also building a program around their time and schedule too, since it is very different." Jill continued by discussing student athletes' unique schedules and why a big part of her role is to help integrate career development opportunities into student athletes' academic experience. "If you're a football student athlete, in the summer you can't do a traditional internship if you're practicing and going to school. So, just helping them navigate how to still get those career experiences. That was and still is my biggest charge right now for our program. NIL wasn't really on the front burner for us when I first started three and a half years ago, but something that ties into NIL is this education piece and the resources in telling your student athletes' story." Jill's perspective goes to show that although NIL is a prominent topic within college sports at the moment, the primary mission surrounding student athletes' educational workload is to successfully blend career development training into their experience at university, whether it be through internships or providing the necessary learning tools for student athletes within the department. From the personal branding perspective, Jill's point

conveys that the story which student athletes tell and how well they tell is dependent on their learning and work experiences both in as well as outside of athletics and how well informed they are regarding the different aspects that go into business and career development. Ultimately, a personal brand can either be restricted or unlimited depending on the experience and education associated with the person behind it.

All in all, the takeaways as it applies to the educational effort behind student athlete personal branding are two-fold. First, communicate to student athletes that the development of a personal brand extends well beyond the four years they represent a particular college or university. Second, student athletes must recognize whether or not their story is reinforced by success in their sport or even outside hobbies and interests, it's how they tell that story that will ultimately determine strength and level of influence attached to their personal brand.

**The Power of Authenticity**

Authenticity is an integral part of telling a story successfully regardless of whether the story is attached to a consumer brand or a personal brand. When thinking about authenticity from a personal brand perspective, it plays an even larger role because if a discrepancy exists between how one presents themselves in-person versus on social media, it hurts their ability to connect and develop a relationship with their audience whether physically or virtually. John, a former college athletic department employee, who currently works in the NIL sector of college sports, said one of the more difficult things to communicate to student athletes is "ultimately what's going to make them most successful is being authentic and being authentic to themselves. I think a lot of athletes don't actually know that people follow them for them to be themselves." John's response reiterates that the ability for student athletes to connect and relate to their audience is directly tied to the level of influence attached to their brand. The basic premise of authenticity is

being real and genuine and the concept is just as important whether one is building an interpersonal relationship or digital persona.

John also discussed the consequences related to being inauthentic in one's presentation. He mentioned the volatility that can be attached to student athletes' personal brands based on either positive or negative coverage and headlines. "I think it's a double-edged sword; it's high risk, high reward," John said. He brought up New Orleans Saints running back Alvin Kamara's six-touchdown performance on Christmas Day in 2020 as an example of the "high reward" scenario. "If we didn't have social media how would he (Kamara) leverage that audience? The first thing people do when they see someone in a significant moment in time is they go and find them on Twitter or they go and find them on Instagram." John said because of the "high risk, high reward" nature of athletes' personal brands, being authentic both as a person and within social media is the approach to reduce the impact of negative events while enlarging the impact of positive ones. "I think with that rapid growth, or and that at any moment you can catch fire, it's the same thing that happens with negative aspects, which is why I preach authenticity," John said. "Don't be someone that you aren't. Don't represent someone that you aren't on social media and that is minimized."

Common issues that arise are scandals, either related to or separate from athletic involvement. Problems that emerge hurt the athlete's and therefore their brand's reputation. Jack brought up the example of former Ole Miss offensive tackle Laremy Tunsil's descent during the 2016 NFL Draft. Tunsil's story puts the rapid spreading potential of social media content on display. The former Ole Miss Rebel was once projected to be a potential top five overall selection in the 2016 NFL Draft leading up to the event. It wasn't until draft day on April 28 just before the draft began at 6 p.m. MST where things took a turn for the worse for Tunsil's draft

stock and campaign as one of the top offensive lineman coming out of college. A video surfaced on Twitter minutes before the draft started of Tunsil presumably smoking marijuana out of a gas mask. The 30-second clip came from Tunsil's verified Twitter account and quickly became the talk of the draft just minutes after being posted. Although this example isn't meant to shame the former Ole Miss tackle for his recreational drug use, when it comes to marketing and self-promotion perception is powerful. As an athlete looking to make the jump to the professional level, there's preventive actions that should be taken prior to one of the biggest moments in that athlete's career and life to ensure it becomes an asset for the development of their brand.

　　　　With the focus growing on personal branding among collegiate athletes, preventive actions can and should be taken even earlier. Jack explained the vetting of student athletes' social media presence as a vital aspect when working with them one-on-one on personal brand development. "We also have something called a live five, where we can do deep dives on these kids," Jack said. Explaining to student athletes that anything you ever publish or post online can be brought to the surface no matter how old or irrelevant the information may be. "Look, I can go see what you posted on Myspace in 2008," Jack continued. "Let's clean up, let's vet your social media. Let's make sure everything is clean." If proper precautions are taken the athlete has the ability to better control their persona and how they're portrayed digitally, and in the words of Jack so they can "be who they want to be" both on and off social media. Precautionary measures like this are not uncommon in the world of non-athletes as well. For example, in the hiring process, managers often look to social media first to ensure there aren't any red flags that could prevent a particular candidate from being hired. In the case of Tunsil, proper vetting of his social media and presence online could've saved him from a costly disaster on draft day, as the video posted had been shot over two years prior to the 2016 draft. NFL scouts refrained from using a

top ten pick on Tunsil. Instead he fell to No. 13 to the Miami Dolphins. While the fall may've

not seemed too significant, based on salary projections the difference between being the sixth

overall pick (the Baltimore Ravens had Tunsil as their top target with the sixth pick and instead

selected offensive tackle Ronnie Stanley) and the 13th overall pick cost Tunsil and estimated

eight million dollars and dropped his signing bonus from $13.1 million dollars at No. 6 to $7.2

million at No. 13 (Belzer, 2016). The plummet for Tunsil didn't end there after the video came

out text messages surfaced of Tunsil appearing to ask Ole Miss athletic director John Miller for

money (Schilken, 2016). Consequently, not only was the individual athlete impacted negatively,

all of the sudden the reputation of the Ole Miss athletic department and in turn the university as a

whole, was tarnished. Stories like Tunsil's are not uncommon and as a result, unless proper

resources are dedicated to closely examining student athletes' presence online, the individual's

reputation, along with the reputation of their team and school is potentially at risk.

**Why a brand is dependent on story-telling not just visuals**

When referring to the personal brand development program he constructed while working

within college athletics, Joe said he asked one question repeatedly when teaching student

athletes. "What I would always ask them is like, 'what is a brand?'," Joe said. "And I would just

say that, when you hear the word brand what you think of? And nine times out of 10, they would

(say) Nike swoosh, Jumpman logo. Yep, (the) logo is probably the first thing that comes to mind.

But, that's just the tip of the iceberg." Michael Jordan's "Jumpman" logo and the Nike "swoosh"

logo are examples of prototypes within the brand category in the minds of those student athletes.

More often than not a logo should be top-of-mind because "logos are what's attractive. It's

something tangible that you can see and feel. So it's definitely important to include because that's

the eye candy, Joe said." A logo serves as a mental retrieval cue but is only as strong as the brand

that stands behind it, which is unaffected by how its portrayed visually. Instead, it's most profoundly impacted by the story behind an athlete's performance, hobbies and interests outside of sports and how well they are communicated, values and morals the individual holds close, personality both on and off the playing surface, among others.

Take Michael Jordan's "Jumpman" logo as an example. The emblem itself and the "Jumpman" name is built upon Jordan's reputation as one of the most athletic and high-flying athletes to ever play basketball. One of the prototypes that serves to reinforce this notion is Jordan's iconic free throw line dunk in the 1988 NBA All-Star game. Therefore, the brand's tie to athletic performance is clear, however, Jordan's free throw line leap just the beginning. Perhaps, the biggest lift to Jordan's brand was the story behind Nike's "Air Jordan" campaign. Prior to being selected in the 1984 draft, Jordan played at North Carolina and was voted College Player of the Year. In addition, he guided Team USA to a gold medal at the 1984 Summer Olympics. Nike had the new "Air Jordan" shoe line prepared to debut when Jordan played his first game as a member of the Chicago Bulls. Unfortunately (but actually fortunately for Nike and Jordan), the shoe's design didn't conform to the NBA's guidelines regarding uniformity of dress. Consequently, the NBA banned the shoe. Despite the ban, Jordan kept wearing the shoe, and former NBA commissioner, David Stern fined the newest member of the Bulls repeatedly throughout his rookie season. The ban essentially turned into a massive marketing campaign for Nike and the Bulls' rookie. Jordan said, "It would have cost millions of dollars to come up with a promotion that produced as much publicity as the league's ban did." After Jordan mentioned he was uncomfortable with the whole situation and expressed concern for his image, Nike told Jordan the company would pay for all the fines Jordan accumulated. The NBA's reprimands ultimately led to multiple campaigns surrounding the banned shoe. Now, "Air Jordan" is the

most recognized basketball shoe and basketball brand in the history of the sport (Weixlmann, 2008).

Nike's "Air Jordan" campaign helped to communicate Jordan's personality and values on and off the court through a refusal to conform and fearlessness surrounding outside perception of his image. The campaign and the story behind it is one of many examples that positioned Jordan as a polarizing figure, which ultimately worked to his advantage. This particular example is worth mentioning because despite the fact Jordan is arguably the best basketball player of all time, performance alone could not have garnered that degree of attention and elevated his reputation as much as the story behind it, and that's an essential message I hope all athletes can take from the anecdote. Another aspect of Jordan's brand development story that was an integral part of its success was Jordan's lack of concern regarding outside perception. Polarization and external voices can be an asset because they generate extra attention. Furthermore, the spotlight can shine even brighter if an athlete can remain largely unaffected by the outside chatter because it allows the polarization to work as a benefit rather than a liability. Jayden, a student athlete who's spent time at multiple division one athletic institutions and will be transferring for his final year of eligibility, offers an example of an athlete who's developed a successful personal brand by using his platform as a way to advance his passion off the field, in addition to taking advantage of negative outside perception.

**The Student Athlete Perspective**

**Jayden's story: why the strength of your brand doesn't hinge on athletic performance**

Jayden's story as a student athlete incorporates a multitude of key pieces within personal brand development. Number one, paraphrasing the words of Jack, Jayden has successfully used his platform and influence as an athlete to advance his interests outside of sports. Number two,

through furthering his passions outside of sports, he's developed a mindset that allows external judgement to work for him rather than against him. Finally, number three he's developed an understanding about the importance of networking and connections.

Jayden began his athletic career at a school where football student athletes weren't even on scholarship. Following his freshman year, he transferred to a midwest school with a bit more athletic notoriety, but never played a prominent role on the field. He totaled three receptions for 22-yards in two seasons. However, Jayden didn't let his minimal athletic performance limit the development of his interests outside of sports. He became active on social media in middle school and began developing relationships with the intention of networking, which ultimately gave way to opportunities in social media endorsements and promotions, modeling, reality T.V., acting, and most recently coming out with his own podcast in college. As far as how it all started, Jayden said he felt like early adoption of the platform gave him an advantage in starting to develop a presence on social media. "Honestly this has all been kind of something that--you can't even really pinpoint a time that I want to say it started," Jayden said. "In terms of my social media presence, I think I was just one of the earlier kids to take advantage of it the same way a lot of kids are taking advantage of Tik Tok today. That's a wave that everybody has jumped on and I think Instagram--when that first started coming out--to me it was just an app (where) I could just post memories or pictures or have my own kind of identity. To me it was always about being able to explore who I was and what I liked because honestly yeah I play football and I had a sports page and my own personal page has mimicked that, but it's allowed me to see what other people are into. It just expanded my horizons at a real early age."

Jayden explained that his adopted father being previously involved in acting and modeling became a springboard for him to try it, but it didn't come without initial apprehension

and fear of external negative perception from others. "As I got older, obviously I think it kind of goes across the board for everybody, really anybody can say that has a good relationship with their parents, their parents (have) a big influence in a kid's life," Jayden said. "My dad was a model and actor, my adopted dad. He modeled and acted in LA for 20 years or so. That was his lifestyle for a long period of time. He would always bring the idea up to me, but at first, honestly, I didn't want to do it. (I) just didn't want to express that part of me or explore that part because I got a lot of backlash from kids at the time. Think about the negative comments that some people say about kids that take advantage of social media. It created all those stereotypes of 'oh he's cocky, oh he just likes to be in front of a camera' whatever it was, when in reality it was just a fun passion." Learning to accept the outside opinions without letting it deter him from investing in his interests outside of sports allowed Jayden to further grow his brand and develop a passion for understanding others. "It's something that I'm reaping the benefits of something that I just put my passion into ever since I was in middle school and really ever since I got into modeling," Jayden said regarding his social media platform. "And at the end of the day, my pictures and the stuff that I was doing, you can go on my page and you can see paid partnerships and promotions and stuff like that, so, I didn't just make it about posting pictures because I came to the realization where a lot of people would ask me, and I don't know if it's because of my dad and the type of weight he had in the industry and people knowing that, whatever the case is, a lot of people would come to me and ask me whether it was because of my following or my influence to post for them. So, I felt I could just start doing it myself. Instead of (it being) something I did to make money for other people, I just turned my page into more of a business approach, where it was like 'okay, let's be partners, let's collab, let's work on something' so either I can help you benefit while you help me benefit or it's going to be a business transaction. So, that's really what

I turned it into. Then, of course, at the end of the day, I love expressing love for everybody and support (for) what other people are doing. At the end of the day, I think it's about truly building relationships with people. Understand (and) take advantage of the fact that you're able to connect with people from different lifestyles and backgrounds and understand how they operate, what they've learned. It's about building relationships with people who didn't come from where you come from."

Jayden added that his association within collegiate athletics has fostered the development of a unique mindset. One that's overlapped with the advancement of his brand on social media and off the field. "When you're on a team, and that's a great thing about football and sports, you all come from different backgrounds, especially at the college level," Jayden said. "That's what makes a team, a team, that's what gives somebody something to fight for. So, when you understand where people come from and how they operate and how they live, it makes the camaraderie that much closer. I feel like, yeah as much as that's an athlete's mentality or a competitive mentality, that was how I approached life." Jayden's focus on building relationships, whether it be with teammates or people with shared passions, has allowed him to excel and advance his brand regardless of the status of the name, image and likeness legislation. While Jayden made the point that he'll have to be aware of the legalities and restrictions associated with the legislation when it does pass, it's not something he's letting limit opportunities off the field separate from his sport. The growth of his brand on social media has everything to do with the connections Jayden's developed over time. Now, Jayden said those who follow him on social media typically have overlapping interests or can relate to him in some way, which strengthens his connections and in turn, his brand. "It's not necessarily just a random person following me for no reason," Jayden said. "It's maybe they post the same content or they like the stuff that I

like or (there) are other similarities behind it. When people understand you too and you aren't afraid to express yourself and your morals and your values, it creates a comfortability for people that might suppress that a little bit. So now they feel like they have a voice too and that's really what I've always cared about."

Jayden's story displays some of the essential pillars of developing a successful personal brand as a student athlete. Furthermore, the story illustrates that student athlete personal branding does not depend on the passing of the name, image, and likeness legislation by the NCAA. What I hope athletes and athletic department employees take from Jayden's story is there's no need to wait to start the brand development process. Finally, and maybe the most important, the level of influence and strength of your brand can be similar whether you're the projected No. 1 overall pick or a role player on the team. The difference lies in the avenue used to garner the audience to tell your story, whether it be through athletic performance or an outside passion.

## The Impact of NIL

### The Industry Employee Perspective

In response to NCAA's proposed name, image and likeness legislation many college athletic departments have developed programs internally in addition to establishing partnerships with external companies to guide student athletes through the personal brand development process. Whether executed within athletic departments or via external partnerships, the programs focus on the different aspects involved in personal brand development and education. The difference between the two types of programs lie in the role that the employees play in the process. For example, John, an NIL services manager for an external company that partners with athletic departments, likened his role to that of a strength and conditioning coach or academic tutor. "I'm not going to give them the answers to the test, but I can help them study and I can

give them the resources needed to make decisions on their own," John said. Although John's role doesn't involve assisting directly with the creation and publication of content alongside student athletes, it does entail providing them with the resources and education necessary so the athletes can make intelligent decisions about how "they conduct themselves and grow their own brand." When comparing John's job description to Jack's within the NIL programs, Jack's differs in that he can serve as either an advisor or assist with execution of digital content and/or content strategy depending on the athlete's needs. "Each student athlete is different," Jack said. "It's a lot of advising, so I'll have a conversation with every incoming class over the summer to talk to them about building their brand and then just work with them individually after coaches approve."

For the internal programs, Jack said that brand development advising is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the student athlete education effort. For John, one of the primary goals at his position is to provide the educational resources surrounding NIL and personal brand development resources in a more manageable fashion so student athletes are able to effectively understand what's coming and have the ability to pick and choose the areas they want to learn more about and focus less in areas they're already familiar with, whether it be specific to NIL and the legislation or personal brand development strategies. Both employees echoed similar sentiments saying that while these programs are based around the assumption that the name, image, and likeness legislation will ultimately be passed, "building athletes brands and giving them resources on how to improve their social media and improve their personal branding isn't something that's NIL exclusive," Jack said. "Now, NIL is just kind of the kick needed to jumpstart those conversations for a lot of programs."

**A Deeper Look into the Internal and External Programs**

**The External Perspective**

Although Jack once worked internally for multiple college athletic departments, serving as the director of social and digital strategy, since transitioning into a role geared specifically toward NIL and student athlete brand development, he explained that his job involves both education and strategy. He works with both the student athletes and the institution they attend to ensure they have adequate resources to help with both aforementioned parts. From an educational point of view that entails breaking down NIL, which includes not only explaining NIL on a conceptual level, but also projecting the rules and regulations likely to appear in the approved legislation. Furthermore, from a personal branding perspective, that's where Jack's role as an advisor comes into play to provide suggestions to student athletes about social media management, how they conduct themselves outside of their athletic involvement, as well as content strategy recommendations on different platforms.

Because Jack's role is advisatory in nature, the company's goal isn't creative content production for student athletes. Instead, the partnership is "meant to bridge the gap between the athletics department and the athletes." While the athletic department will still be the source for creative content, the company's technology utilizes artificial intelligence and other sorting measures "to make sure the athletes are tagged appropriately and that they get access to that content as well." Despite the fact that many of the companies similar to the one Jack currently works for became prominent and have garnered recent attention because of the upcoming transition into the NIL within college athletics, Jack said his position "is affected by NIL, but only in the fact that it is kind of the end result these athletes are looking for" in being able to financially benefit from the use of their name, image, and likeness within their sport. The goal for him and the company is to maximize the strength and influence of student athletes' brands

now, so that when formal legislation is eventually put into place, "they will be equipped and set in putting their best foot forward" into the NIL age of college athletics.

Education is a vital piece of both the internal and external programs, however, the educational effort takes on slightly different forms within the athletic department in comparison to what the partnering company offers. Because each athletic department differs in the amount of time and assets they are able to allocate to the educational effort, the goal for the partnering companies to aid the athletic department to "bridge the gap." When thinking about their service from a student athlete education standpoint, Jack said, "It's all about resources." He used the previously mentioned strength and conditioning coach analogy to explain how in most cases it's unrealistic to expect athletic departments to have the ability to add a brand education staff comprehensive enough to serve all the needs of their student athletes. Our company "has stepped up to give our partners a solution that is much more cost effective and much easier for them to manage," Jack said. "We have the resources and engineers in place to make our education system more intuitive and able to be accessed in app compared to just another seminar that maybe an athletic department would put on a couple times a year or multiple times throughout the year. I think that another key difference between our program, it's going to be much more bite-sized." When thinking about the education effort, the "bite-sized" concept is important not only because it'll make the content more easily absorbable, but also because time management is much more of a factor within college sports, as these athletes are still students along their involvement in athletics. Giving student athletes the ability to pick and choose to cater to their specific educational needs when it comes to brand development and NIL is important from a time management standpoint and it's vital to ensure maximum engagement or usage. Student athletes are 18-22 years old growing up in an age where the perpetual use of digital and social

media has severely shrunk attention spans and companies outside of athletic departments have taken that into account when approaching the educational effort.

A final important piece within Jack's company is referred to as the "NIL Suite". The NIL Suite is an additional product offering within the company which "compiles social media performance data to educate and develop the social media storytelling behaviors of coaches, creative staff and student-athletes" (Berrios, 2021). With the NIL Suite services, student athletes, coaches, internal creatives and social media managers within the department will be provided "in-depth analytics, education, and strategy" in order for their program to better "understand the impact of their editorial storytelling and grow their commercial value for the NIL era" (Berrios, 2021). The company feels like the NIL Suite will better equip coaches to recruit athletes will their platform in the forefront of their mind. Employees within athletic departments are well-aware that regardless of when the legislation passes, coaches are going to have to be prepared to integrate individual athlete branding into their recruiting pitch. "When coaches go to a kid's home, one of the number one questions is going to be 'How are you going to build my brand?'", John said. "If a coach cannot answer that, they're going to lose out on a lot of these kids and that's going to be a massive recruiting battle.... That's going to sway a lot of decisions, it really is."

**The Internal Perspective**

While John's position is slightly more flexible in what he offers from an education standpoint to student athletes based on their needs, the mission for both John and Jack is similar: to educate and prepare student athletes, coaches, and athletic department staff both about NIL and teach the power of storytelling in an era where athlete personal branding appears it will be pushed to forefront.

Both John and Jill, employees within two separate athletic departments discussed the internal programs that have launched within their respective departments. John described it as a "Four-year holistic development tool for our student athletes that helps them build their brand. Financial literacy, entrepreneurship skill sets, a lot of other things will go into that as well." The program, which is backed by a student athlete development initiative aimed at both current and former collegiate athletes at the university, is designed to teach not only personal brand development strategy, but also "maximize career development offerings" for its past and present student athletes, so that they are put into position to succeed after sports. Jill echoed the importance of education surrounding NIL to be able to maximize your platform as a student athlete as well as prepare for a life post athletics. "NIL wasn't really on the front burner for us when I first started," Jill said. However, she reiterated that a big focus within the educational effort since NIL has risen to prominence within college sports has been how to go about "leveraging your student athlete experience and what makes you unique" to be in position to capitalize on the legislation when it officially passes. The program within Jill's department is built on three similar pillars: personal brand management, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. In addition, the program is supported through a partnership with the faculty director of Entrepreneurial Initiatives within the institution's business school and an external brand marketing consultant.

Jill explained although NIL has impacted the development of the program, that is just one piece of the program. It's centered both around brand development and the responses from student athletes surrounding their interests outside of athletics. "Yes, it's partly around NIL and the branding and marketing, but really (the location and educational institution) has that entrepreneurial spirit," Jill said. "A lot of feedback we got from student athletes when we were

meeting with them about 'what's your dream job?' or 'what would you do outside of athletics?' It was 'I want to work for myself or I have this idea, I want to be an entrepreneur' in some way shape or form. So, really for us it was how can we help student athletes, especially if they're not in the business school or if they're not taking entrepreneurship classes, can we at least help them get some of those foundations of entrepreneurship?" Jill added when they came to the faculty director of Entrepreneurial Initiatives in the business school with the idea of the program, he became an integral part of the student athlete education initiative given his background. "That's what we approached (him) with, 'hey you're the industry expert from not just the academic side, but being a serial entrepreneur..., and (he) is the best person to work with students in general and to have that entrepreneurship class," Jill said. "So, we meet with him once a month as a cohort and will teach for about an hour or so. It's really from A to Z of being an entrepreneur, with A being how do you even come up with an idea, what makes it a good idea, to Z being we're going to do a mock pitch night. So, student athletes can pitch their mock ventures and get feedback kind of like 'Shark Tank' style."

The other aspect of the program is based on self-promotion and personal brand development through the department's partnership with an outside brand consultant, who worked previously as the director of marketing for Adidas football and baseball. "The program then expanded from just being an entrepreneur to the NIL piece is really that branding and marketing, and how can you develop your own personal brand?," Jill said. "How do you be consistent with that and understand that marketing piece? So, we partnered with (an external brand marketing executive and consultant). Student athletes watch his different videos and then they have a workbook that they go along and complete that, so they'll have a full on personal marketing plan when they're finished with the program as well."

In summary, this section provided more insight into the different aspects of the programs, whether they exist internally or are formed through an outside partnership with the athletic department, the goal is for the two to work complementary to each other. Furthermore, although NIL is a hot topic within college sports at the moment, the programs that are developing don't depend on the passing of NIL legislation, despite the fact that more often than not when student athletes think of personal brand development the status of the legislation is tied into that. Although this makes sense, where the legislation is in terms of being passed should not deter student athletes from engaging in and taking advantage of the programs. Their value exists regardless of the NCAA's decision surrounding NIL.

**The Student Athlete Perspective**

Throughout the interview process, student athletes had different points of view surrounding NIL and how it could impact them individually. However, for the most part because the status of the legislation remains somewhat up in the air, student athlete knowledge surrounding what the legislation may entail is still relatively murky. With that being said, it hasn't deterred student athletes from beginning to think about how to tell their story and craft their social media persona. For example, Jamal, a first-year college athlete at an institution in the western part of the United States, was a two-sport athlete in high school and began to brand himself under a particular nickname and social handle. Now, a freshman in college, Jamal has developed a visual identity tied with that nickname and has had different clothing and merchandise made. "Everybody on the football team, I guess they call me TikTok famous," Jamal said. "I'm well-known on Tik Tok. Instagram, Twitter, I'm on every social media (platform). Everybody knows me by Jamal, but some people know me by (social media handle) because that's been my thing since high school. Just to bring it (from) high school to college and a bigger platform and my name's

already out there more and the more I play and the more I perform (well), I think it's going to work out well." Jamal added, similar to Jayden, within his network, personal brand development isn't something just exclusive to him. "My aunt, she does the same type of stuff," Jamal said. "She brands herself. She has her own hair company. It's called Primetime Hair. She works with Deion Sanders' daughter." Jamal said his knowledge about brand development came about through his connection with the Sanders' family and being surrounded by those relationships since he was little. "Branding is in the family I guess you could say," Jamal said.

Jamal's brand development story, although to some extent it's just beginning, showcases the power of networking and connections. Regardless of how an athlete performs within their sport, more often than not the relationships they have and develop can further elevate their platform and strengthen their influence. Learning how to properly use and capitalize on those connections, similar to networking within the job search process, should be taught as just as important of a skill as personal brand development on social media. As far as where student athletes are in terms of the rules of education, because of the status of the legislation, understanding is relatively slim about what could be done. "They've talked about it here and there," Jamal said. "They haven't given us a whole thing about it, but they're given us pieces and bits about it. I haven't got the full understanding about it, but I know that they said there's a possibility that they might sign it and say that we can brand ourselves. But, I mean that's all we have heard." Student athletes continuously echoed Jamal's perspective in interviews surrounding the NIL education piece, saying it hasn't been comprehensive, mostly because the education from a legal point of view is based around projections and assumptions at this stage, given no formal legislation has been passed.

Jeremiah, a freshman student athlete at a division one institution in the Western United States, talked about growing up being the son of a Hall-of-Fame athlete and how that's impacted his approach for developing his own brand and using his father as a resource for learning how utilize his platform to launch into the world after sports. Jeremiah said the institution he attends has a "business culture". "There's a lot of investors, a lot of people looking towards building something new," Jeremiah said. His point of view reinforces feedback Jill received from student athletes regarding their interests outside of athletics. The entrepreneurial desire is strong among those student athletes associated with a higher education institution located in places where starting your own business has been popularized. Jeremiah added that his dad has been an example of something he would like to emulate in terms of how he used his platform for not only starting his own business, but also from a philanthropic perspective. "I'd have to say, just him going out of his way and finding different resources and income or different areas to like, truly inspire others and give back to the world," Jeremiah said. "That's what I want to do with my life. I want to end up creating my own brand, creating my own clothing line, doing real estate, anything that helps me (get) more in touch with the community and those around me and truly build off of that. I've always looked up to LeBron (James). I looked up to Michael (Jordan). I want to have that big of an impact on the game and to which I can go out here and do what I want in life." Although Jeremiah would like to replicate certain aspects of his father's brand off the field, the premise behind Jeremiah's brand he wants to develop is the idea of being "nameless". He said a name, "it doesn't hold you, it doesn't hold you accountable to anything. "It doesn't. You can go out there and do what you want in life, you don't have to be the person that everybody wants you to set out to be." While Jeremiah wants the primary idea behind his personal brand to be "nameless", he acknowledged that the last name he shares with his father

has been a massive aid in getting him to where he is today. "When I was younger, I definitely did not want his name," Jeremiah said. "I definitely didn't like a lot of stuff that he did. But at the same time, as I'm growing up, that name has helped me a lot. That name has taken me places and it has driven me to points that I would literally break and see new heights."

I hope the two aforementioned anecdotes demonstrate the fact that while there may be questions from a legislative standpoint about what will eventually be passed at the federal level in terms of NIL, it has not put a damper on student athletes thinking about the message they want to push and the brand they want to develop using their platform at the college level. Moreover, every student athlete echoed similar sentiments in regard to how much the development of their platform was a part of the recruiting pitch as a high school athlete, saying the people, education and the potential play professional were the three primary factors. "The whole personal branding thing, that wasn't brought to my attention until I already got here," Jamal said. Jeremiah spoke about his visit to his college and how the relationship he and mom developed with the coaches was the driving force behind his decision. "Honestly, I didn't really need a recruiting pitch like that," Jeremiah said. "I wanted to feel at home somewhere. Because I knew that if I go anywhere, and I worked my butt off, I'm (going to) get noticed, I'm (going to) do the things that I want to do in life. So, all I needed was mentors and leaders around me to help build me into that person."

Although the recruiting pitch surrounding the development of student athletes' personal brands will likely evolve into more of a prominent role within recruiting, it's a topic of discussion that has drawn significant concern from the department of justice, something that will be examined in the next section.

**Where are we now with the NIL legislation?**

In a nutshell the NCAA's drafted name, image, and likeness legislation will allow student athletes to profit from third party endorsements "both related to and separate from athletics" (NCAA.org). The legislation supports compensation and endorsements through social media and personal businesses. For example, student athletes could run their own private lessons or operate their own camps. However, a restriction exists around the logos and other marks used. Currently, the legislation draft prohibits the use of school marks as a part of student athletes' personal business ventures regardless of whether they're tied to athletics or not. In addition, the draft of the bill supports endorsing products through commercials and other ventures (i.e. social media). Although, the student athlete can't reveal the school they attend or use school marks. According to the NIL legislation draft, student athletes are only allowed to refer to "their involvement in intercollegiate athletics generally." Furthermore, although the legislation supports autograph sessions, they cannot occur during an institution event or competition (i.e. pre or postgame) and no school marks or apparel may be used during the sale. Finally, online crowdsourcing resources such as GoFundMe may be used. However, only in cases of charity, catastrophic events, family hardships and educational experiences (Forde & Dellenger, 2020).

Johanna, an internal college athletics employee working in compliance, explained why NIL has impacted her day to day work currently. "So, it does impact me day to day right now," Johanna said. "Because it's imminent, right? A lot of what we do, you're like, okay, what's the current rule? What could it potentially be? How are our decisions right now potentially going to impact us later?" Furthermore, Johanna added that the reason behind why the NCAA's vote on the legislation was recently tabled on January 12, had to do with a letter from the department of justice warning the NCAA about the potential violation of antitrust laws based on the drafted

legislation. Makan Delrahim, the former Assistant Attorney General for the Antitrust Division of the United States Department of Justice, cautioned the NCAA that the board may be functioning as a "backdoor way to limit competition." Delrahim said in the letter, "Ultimately, the antitrust laws demand that college athletes, like everyone else in our free market economy, benefit appropriately from competition"(Berkowitz, 2021). Confusion as to exactly how different NIL ventures will be properly vetted by the NCAA once the legislation passes was another contributing factor within the letter delaying the vote. There's mention of an "independent third-party administrator" in the drafted legislation, who would work to "ensure integrity of the recruiting process," and "evaluate NIL activities for possible malfeasance." Delrahim provided an instance where a conflict could arise between the legislation and current antitrust regulations "For example, if the NCAA adopted a rule that fixes the price at which students can license their NIL, e.g., based on what the NCAA determines to be a 'fair' market value, such a rule may raise concerns under the antitrust laws, Derahim said."(Berkowitz, 2021). Also, The idea of NIL being utilized as a recruiting inducement raised some concern from the department of justice as it applies to limiting competition.

As a student athlete and/or athletic department what can you take away from all this? Education from a legal perspective both for department staff and student athletes right now takes precedence over personal brand development education. Why? Because staying up to date on both the current rules and what the NCAA may do, or in the words of Johanna, evaluating potential directions the legislation may take following the delay, will position both departments and student athletes best to properly benefit from the rules once they're put in place. As strong as your brand may be, the reality is that if you are a student athlete who's looking at NIL from a four-year perspective (which many do) education on NIL from a legal point of view should be

your focus because you'll be guided (and limited) by that legislation as a collegiate athlete. While, this doesn't diminish the importance of the development of your overall brand as an athlete, at this stage legislatively, education surrounding the cans and cannots will serve departments and athletes best in the short term, while the development of your brand and persona through social media should be ongoing in the background.

**The Takeaways**

### For Student Athletes

1. Athletic performance alone doesn't dictate the strength of your brand.

2. Personal brand development extends beyond your four-year career playing college sports.

3. Education on the latest news and legislation surrounding NIL will be equally important as your education surrounding personal brand development.

4. Successful networking and relationship development will take you further than any performance related accomplishment.

5. Your window of athletic influence is small.

6. Use your platform as an athlete to build your passions outside of sports.

7. Although athletic performance may draw the initial eyes, the story you tell after will determine the power and influence of your brand.

8. You get out what you put in doesn't just apply to performance on the court or field, it's the same for the development of your digital platform.

9. Leverage your connections both within and outside of athletics to manufacture business opportunities both related to and separate from your sport.

10. Be your authentic self on social media. People follow you for you to be yourself.

### For Athletic Departments

1. Although many student athletes think of NIL in the form of financial gain during their four years, if you can portray NIL and personal brand development as an essential aspect of successful careers. your athletes and in turn your department will benefit the most.

2. Make the legal education surrounding NIL as big if not a bigger priority than the personal brand development education aspect. Although they both complement each other, the legislation will guide (and limit) student athletes during their collegiate careers.

3. An athlete's understanding of the elements that comprise a brand will dictate the strength of their own, and in turn the strength of yours.

4. The better your educational effort both from a NIL rules standpoint and brand development point of view, the more opportunities will exist for your athletes, which will impact their decision on whether or not to attend and stay at your institution.

5. Be ready to adapt with the NIL legislation both with your internal programs and external partnerships

6. Begin (if you haven't already) educating your incoming student athlete classes on not only personal brand development, but also your brand as a department and university.

7. Make the education effort about networking and relationship development, just as much as it is about personal brand development and NIL rules.

8. Be ready to communicate how an association with your institution will help advance an athlete's brand. It will impact student athletes' decisions.

9. As a department, ensure individual programs spend time educating themselves on the cans and cannots as it applies to NIL in recruiting. While it's vital to integrate, the line between acceptable and unacceptable appears as though it will be thin.

10. The influence of your student athletes isn't going anywhere. Use the development of their brands to build yours.

In summary, crafting student athletes' point of view so that they know personal brand development is a long-term endeavor will be essential for the NIL and brand development educational effort within athletic departments to complement their athletes' self-promotion and personal brand goals whether or not they are tied to their athletic performance or outside of it. Furthermore, effective communication from athletic departments to their student athletes regarding story telling techniques and using your audience as an athlete to not only engage after a solid performances but capitalizing on those eyes through the promotion of outside interests is key piece that strengthens a student athlete's relationship with their audience and in turn strengthens their brand. Finally, in the personal brand development effort from the perspective of both student athletes and athletic department staff it is vital to understand that athletes window of athletic influence is small, however, how you use that heightened level of influence during your collegiate career can have a large impact on public perception as you continue throughout life whether professional sports is in your future or not. The keys to student athlete personal brand development add essential elements to the overall understanding of a brand and the pieces that comprise a personal brand.

**Conclusion (Discussion)**

An important limitation that emerged in this study was the lack of gender diversity among the student athlete interviews. All four of the student athletes that were interviewed were male, in spite of the fact that both male and female student athletes were initially contacted. The lack of a female population within the student athlete interview portion may reflect a difference in comfortability and potentially familiarity discussing personal branding efforts and NIL

between male and female student athletes. Perhaps this is reinforced by the prevalence of male sports (primarily football and men's basketball) accounting for a large portion of the revenue associated with the NCAA, which ultimately was a major factor in prompting the draft of the NIL legislation. Although, the conclusion reached would've likely remained for the most part unchanged, incorporating the female student athlete point of view would've allowed for a more comprehensive "baseline" of student athlete knowledge surrounding personal brand development and NIL to be established. Furthermore, answers to questions tailored to female student athletes regarding the prevalence of top-of-mind nature of male sports when discussing student athlete personal branding and the impact of NIL would be interesting to analyze in comparison to the male responses. Overall, although female college athletic employees were incorporated in the study, the lack of a female student athlete perspective limited this study in terms of how comprehensive the data collected was surrounding student athlete knowledge and understanding as it applies to personal branding and NIL.

The rise in prominence of student athlete personal branding and the impact of the NCAA's proposed name, image and likeness legislation has placed an emphasis on the education and effective story telling as an integral piece to successful personal brand development. In the effort to build one's digital persona, the definition of a brand shifts from providing a name for one's consumption of goods and services to aligning personal brand with the "brand as experience" concept mentioned previously as an addition to Riley and De Chernatony's 12-part brand definition because it places an emphasis the intangible brand elements (value perceptions, quality perceptions, organization, brand name, other user recommendations, corporate image, and reputation) presented by De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace in *Creating Powerful Brands*, *4th edition*. As a student athlete what determines successful self-promotion and personal

branding is effective communication of your story through the combination of both athletic-related and non-athletic-related endeavors and interests.

Although, as it applies to student athlete personal branding, corporate image and user recommendations take a different form, all of the aforementioned intangible elements play an essential role in shaping brand perception. Ultimately, discovering what makes you unique as a student athlete and telling that story will communicate your values, facilitate engagement and interaction with your audience, and craft the impression your brand makes. However, telling that story requires an understanding of not only what makes you unique as a student athlete, but also how to use your platform in complement with the institution you attend to capitalize on the elevated level of influence you'll have being associated with a particular institution throughout your collegiate career. An integral part of that effort is understanding your interests outside of athletics, the entrepreneurial steps involved in crafting how to develop a brand you can capitalize on monetarily, and the can and cannots associated with the upcoming name, image, and likeness legislation to avoid issues that could hurt the authenticity of your brand.

From the perspective of college athletics employees, the educational efforts associated with personal brand development and NIL have shed light on the essential elements associated with a brand and successful brand development. Everything from understanding a brand on a conceptual level, harnessing your uniqueness, and maintaining authenticity while telling your story to comprehending the entrepreneurial process and how to use your platform and story for financial gain. Although, the idea of self-promotion being synonymous across both concepts of brand and personal brand development was presented by Kotler and Levy, the strength of a personal brand is only as strong as the background and knowledge base of the person behind it. The ascent of student athlete personal branding in addition to NIL provided proof of this notion

through the focus on student athlete education, which was reinforced in the interviews with current/former college athletic employees.

All in all, although Riley and De Chernatony 12-part brand definition provided a more comprehensive understanding of the elements that comprise a brand than the conscious consumer perspective presented in the dictionary definition, the data presented in the one-on-one interviews with student athletes and college athletic employees supplied additional insight into essential pieces of effective brand and personal brand development. The primary two being the elements associated with effective telling of your story as a student athlete and the educational understanding needed to craft an influential and lucrative brand as a student athlete. This study could be furthered through an analysis of the mindsets and reactions from athletic departments and student athletes following the federal approval of the NCAA's proposed name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation using this research as a comparison. Furthermore, follow-up surveys could be utilized in complement with interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the virtual interviews and ultimately reach more student athletes, so the results can be generalized to a larger population. Four student athletes and five current/former college athletic employees were interviewed as a part of this study. Incorporating follow-up surveys for the virtual interviews as well as more comprehensive surveys in addition to the interviews may provide a more comprehensive understanding of student athlete and college athletic employee knowledge surrounding the topics discussed. Potentially as college sports transitions into the NIL era, this can be used as a guide for the personal brand development and educational effort for student athletes that could serve both athletes and athletic department staff.

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## Acknowledgments

# Appendixes

## A. IRB Letters of Approval



CU · Office of Research Integrity
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

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**APPROVAL**

17-Nov-2020

Dear Adam Bender,

On 17-Nov-2020 the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Submission: | Initial Application |
| Review Category: | Exempt |
| Risk Level: | Minimal |
| Title: | Student Athlete Personal Branding in the Name, Image and Likeness Era |
| Investigator: | Bender, Adam |
| Protocol #: | 20-0533 |
| Funding: | None |
| Documents Approved: | Interview Script.docx; 20-0533 Protocol (17Nov20); recruitment-email NIL word doc; 20-0533 Consent Form (17Nov20); |
| Documents Reviewed: | HRP-211: FORM - Initial Application v10; |

The IRB confirmed the Exemption of this protocol on **17-Nov-2020**.

You are required to use the IRB Approved versions of study documents to conduct your research. The IRB Approved documents can be found here: Approved Documents

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,


Institutional Review Board


This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within the University of Colorado Boulder's IRB records.

**Office of Research Integrity**

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

## APPROVAL

04-Mar-2021

Dear Adam Bender,

On 04-Mar-2021 the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Submission: | Amendment |
| Review Category: | Exempt |
| Risk Level: | Minimal |
| Title: | Student Athlete Personal Branding in the Name, Image and Likeness Era |
| Investigator: | Bender, Adam |
| Protocol #: | 20-0533 |
| Funding: | None |
| Documents Approved: | 20-0533 Consent Form - Employees (4Mar21); Recruitment Email - Employee (4Mar21); 20-0533 Protocol (4Mar21); Interview Script Industry Employees; |
| Documents Reviewed: | HRP-213 Amendment-v3; |
| Description: | - Addition of subject population and data collection procedures. |

The IRB confirmed the Exemption of this protocol on **04-Mar-2021**.

You are required to use the IRB Approved versions of study documents to conduct your research. The IRB Approved documents can be found here: <u>Approved Documents</u>

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the <u>INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103)</u>.

Sincerely,
Douglas Grafel
IRB Admin Review Coordinator
Institutional Review Board

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within the University of Colorado Boulder's IRB records.

### B. Interview Scripts

**Interview Script – Student Athletes**

**Introduction**

After the interviewee logs onto to the call, put them at ease with a friendly, business-like attitude in order to make them feel comfortable while simultaneously maintaining professionalism. Make sure to thank for interviewee for taking time out of their day to talk with the principal investigator.

**Establishing Background Information**

In order to maintain the flow of the interview process. There will be a few basic questions asked at the beginning of the interview about the student athlete's position within the program they play for, including the year they are in school, the institution they attend (if outside of the University of Colorado), and the position they play within their sport.

**Primary Interview Questions**

**NIL**

- Are you aware of the purposed name, image, and likeness legislation from the NCAA for 2021? If so, what are your expectations as far as how it will impact both you individually and college sports as a whole?
  - Brief Background if unaware/unsure: The purposed legislation from the NCAA in regard to name, image, and likeness (NIL) will allow student athletes to leverage their social platform monetarily through third party endorsements related or unrelated to athletics, social media, personal businesses and appearances… etc.

- Do you feel well-informed from the department regarding the upcoming potential changes when it comes to  incoming NIL legislation (may've partially answered from above question)? If so, what information has been the most useful/informative? If not, what do you wish you knew more about?

- If not, do you anticipate that changing if the NIL legislation is passed in January? How so?

**Personal Branding via Social Media**

- Is developing a personal brand via social media using your platform as a division one collegiate athlete something you've thought about/started to create/develop? If yes, how so? If not, why not?

- As a student-athlete do you feel you have a message to push through either your own personal social media platform or the ones run by the athletic department?

- Regardless of where you are in the process of developing a personal brand via social media, where do you feel are the grey res in terms of your knowledge surrounding self-promotion and branding virtually?

**Education/Recruiting Impact**

- What would be your reaction if colleges and universities made a required portion of your academic education dedicated to a combination of personal branding and social media marketing outside of the resources you'll likely be provided with in athletics to help with your personal brand development process? Why do you think you'd react this way?

- Think back to your recruiting process as a high school senior (presumably), assuming the new NIL rules had been passed prior to your recruitment, would a school's showcase of their ability and resources in student athlete personal brand development had changed or impacted your college decision? If so, please explain why and if not, what was you looking for from schools in the recruiting process during (and potentially after leaving) high school?

- How do you think the new legislation will influence or change your interests, hobbies, and/goals of the court at all? If so, how so? If not, why not?

**Also, there will be some initial research prior to the interview surrounding the athlete's presence on social media. They're may be follow-up questions not specified the "Primary Interview Questions" regarding specific personal branding efforts made by student-athletes that are specific to their page and social media presence.****

**Wrap Up/Conclusion**

Make sure to thank the interviewee for their time and let them know that they're welcome to view the final product and to reach out if they'd like to see the final paper. Wish them good luck, as many student athletes will be in the midst of their season.

### Interview Script – Current/Former College Athletics Employees

1. Can you talk a little bit about your career path and what you learned in your experience working outside of college athletics?
   a. And a follow up to that question, what did you take from your time outside of sports that helped you at university?

2. What did working outside college athletics and in the startup space teach you about brand promotion/development

      a. What did you learn about storytelling/brand development through design during that time?

      b. What have you seen since graduating from university 2012 regarding the evolution of creative storytelling within sports and specifically within social media?

3. I have to ask a bit about the brand development program you helped spearhead and the process behind the creation of that program.

      a. First, can you talk about what the brand development program is, and how your relationship with student athletes helped ignite its creation?

      b. Can you describe what the response was like from the student athletes there to the brand development program? What did the program help drive home and communicate to them?

      c. Can you explain and talk a bit about the impact brand development program had from a recruiting standpoint?

      d. Can you talk a bit about the resources brand development program offers student athletes from an educational standpoint surrounding personal brand development?

      e. Finally, I want to ask you about the personal brand development process of two university student athletes. Can you talk about the creative storytelling process that went into the development of those personal brands?

4. Given the effort you were able to spearhead at university with the brand development program at university, I'm curious to hear your thoughts on the third party partnerships between athletic departments and student athlete brand development companies.

      a. How do you foresee the personal brand development initiative playing out among the second and third tier schools?

      b. Do you think it's possible to see student athletes from the non-elite programs outsource brand development and creative work from independent companies or contractors?

5. From a storytelling and brand development perspective how important is authenticity? How did you go about communicating that to student athletes at university?

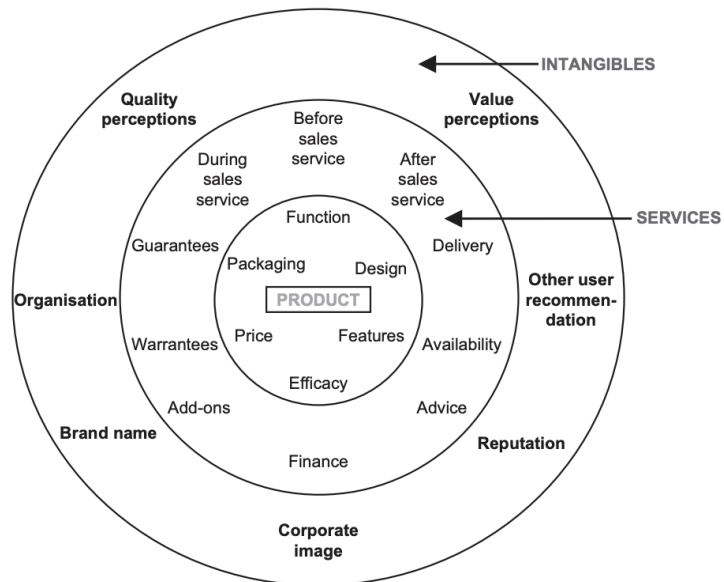6. What would you say to the student athlete who is a senior and is thinking about personal branding/NIL from a 4-year perspective?

## C.  Figure 1.13 "The Components of a Product"



**FIGURE 1.13**
The components of a product