



## Untapped Potential: An Examination of Name, Image, and Likeness Earnings Estimates for Community College Athletes

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*The purpose of this study was to examine the name, image, and likeness (NIL) value of community college athletes, thereby extending the NIL conversation in college athletics to this population of student-athletes. The NIL value of these athletes was examined by treating them as potential social media marketing influencers with standard influencer marketing rates applied to estimate earnings potential. Follower and engagement data were systematically scraped from Instagram profiles for a sample of California community college athletes ( $n = 1,168$ ) and used to calculate NIL value estimates. Results suggested approximately five percent of athletes possessed a monetizable Instagram profile. Male athletes had a higher ceiling for NIL earnings potential, but female athletes displayed a higher average earnings potential (\$51 per post) compared to male athletes (\$47 per post). These findings demonstrate the value in promoting NIL opportunities for community college athletes. Thus, community college athletes should receive a more prominent voice in the nationwide NIL conversation and receive access to similar NIL educational opportunities as provided to athletes at four-year institutions. Additionally, community colleges should recognize the NIL value of their female athletes and promote them in an equitable manner to foster NIL opportunities for female athletes.*

*Keywords: NIL, community colleges, social media marketing*

On September 30, 2019, California became the first state to pass legislation prohibiting postsecondary educational institutions and athletic associations from enforcing rules or regulations that would prevent or punish a college athlete for receiving compensation from the use of their name, image, or likeness (NIL) in economic activities (Dwyer, 2019). Since then, 28 additional states have either enacted legislation or executive orders enabling college athletes in those states to earn compensation from their NIL rights (The Drake Group, 2021). Additionally, on June 30, 2021, both the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) suspended previous rules prohibiting NIL monetization activities by college athletes and put interim policy guidelines in place to loosely govern NIL activities for college athletes during 2021-2022 intercollegiate athletic competition (Hosick, 2021; NJCAA, 2021a).

There has been widespread support for the expansion of college athletes' economic rights, including bi-partisan support among politicians (Dellenger, 2021), as well as support from university administrators, coaches, and fans (Smith & Broughton, 2021; Withrow, 2021). National media has also focused significant attention on college athletes' NIL activities, reporting on athletes signing with marketing agents (Philippou, 2021), announcing national endorsement deals (Dosh, 2021a), and participating in group licensing arrangements (Dosh, 2021b). However, most media reporting and academic research (Kunkel et al., 2021) on the topic of NIL in college athletics has focused on athletes competing at NCAA Division I institutions. Community college athletes have received far less attention regarding NIL opportunities and, in some cases, have been completely excluded from the conversation. For example, California's Senate Bill 206 (SB206), passed on September 30, 2019, expressly excluded community college athletes from NIL protections afforded to college athletes attending four-year educational institutions in that state. SB206 did, however, mandate the formation of a working group to study the impact of NIL on California community colleges. The working group's final report was submitted to the California Senate committee in May 2021 and was instrumental in integrating community college athletes into the California NIL legislation (California Community Colleges, 2021a; L. Woodyard, personal communication, August 24, 2021). When California enacted Senate Bill 26 on August 31, 2021, almost two years after the passing of SB206, the State of California finally extended the same protections to community college athletes as it had to athletes attending four-year educational institutions (Symon, 2021).

The marginalization of community college athletes within the nationwide NIL discussion is not unique to the state of California. Although some states expressly include community college athletes within their NIL legislation, others directly or indirectly limit NIL protections to those attending four-year postsecondary educational institutions. This is troublesome, as community college athletes may possess economic value through NIL monetization opportunities while competing at a community college institution and also have greater need for financial resources than their four-year counterparts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the inclusion of community college athletes in NIL state legislation and explore the NIL value of community college athletes, thereby extending the NIL conversation in college athletics to this population of student-athletes.

A review of popular media articles and academic journal databases did not return any results regarding social media monetization opportunities for community college athletes. As a result, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ 1: What percentage of community college athletes could potentially monetize their NIL through social media marketing opportunities?

RQ 2: What is the earnings potential for a community college athlete via social media influencer marketing?

Following the enactment of state NIL legislation, some commentators also raised concerns related to the impact of relaxed NIL restrictions on Title IX compliance and whether NIL opportunities for student-athletes would be available for both male and female athletes in an equitable manner (e.g., Bryant & Joshi, 2021; Steinbach, 2020). Some have argued NIL opportunities will be used indirectly as a recruiting tool within college athletics and, therefore, an inequitable amount of these NIL opportunities will be filtered toward high-profile recruits in men's sports, such as football and men's basketball. Men's sports are often more visible on college campuses, suggesting relaxed NIL policies will further expand these disparities between men's and women's college athletic programs (Dosh, 2020; Steinbach, 2020). Additionally, prior research suggests female athletes face additional challenges compared to male athletes regarding the ability to leverage social media for branding-related purposes (Lobpries et al., 2018).

On the other hand, some commentators expressed optimism that new NIL rules in college athletics could improve the promotion and marketing of women's sports by allowing female athletes to grow their personal brands and maximize their earnings potential (e.g., Crawford & Leblanc, 2021; Herder, 2021; Jessop & Sabin, 2021). Establishing a strong personal brand in college could prove to be especially beneficial for women given the relatively few professional sport opportunities for female athletes compared to their male counterparts. Prior research on NIL earnings potential among Division I athletes demonstrated males and females have comparable follower and engagement metrics on social media (Kunkel et al., 2021). Therefore, the third research question posed in this study is:

RQ 3: What are the differences between male and female community college athletes regarding NIL earning potential on social media?

The following section of this study presents a more detailed background on this topic by examining the inclusion or exclusion of community college athletes in NIL state legislation and providing an overview of the governance structure for community college athletics in the United States. After this discussion, the method utilized for NIL analysis in this study is presented, followed by the results of that analysis. This study concludes with a discussion of results, implications for practitioners, and future research suggestions.

### *Background on Community College Athletes and NIL Legislation*

The relative absence of community college athletes within the nationwide NIL discussion is evidenced through a review of state-level NIL legislation. Based on the authors' review of all enacted state NIL legislation and executive orders, only nine out of 29 expressly include community college athletes within the statutory NIL framework. Another 14 states do not expressly include community colleges by name, but the breadth of the definition of educational institutions used within the legislative language likely encompasses community colleges by

implication. A common example of this language comes from Senate Bill 20-123 in the State of Colorado, which defines an institution as “a public or private institution of higher education in Colorado” (23 Colo. Rev. Stat., Part 16, § 301(1)(e). (2021)).

However, six states expressly exclude community colleges from the statutory NIL framework or expressly limit the scope of the statute to four-year postsecondary educational institutions, thereby permitting community colleges to continue to restrict or limit an athletes’ economic rights to monetize their NIL. Table 1 provides a summary of NIL state legislation by categorizing each state as enacting legislation which either expressly includes community colleges, includes community colleges by implication, or expressly excludes community colleges directly or by implication.

Table 1

*Categorization of NIL State Legislation Institutional Coverage Language*

Community Colleges Expressly Included ( <i>n</i> = 9)	Community Colleges Included by Implication ( <i>n</i> = 14)	Community Colleges Expressly Excluded or Excluded by Implication ( <i>n</i> = 6)
California	Arizona	Missouri
Georgia	Arkansas	Nebraska
Illinois	Colorado	Nevada
Kentucky	Connecticut	New Mexico
Mississippi	Florida	North Carolina
Montana	Louisiana	Ohio
Oklahoma	Michigan	Virginia
Pennsylvania		
South Carolina		

*Governance of Community College Athletics*

The size and scope of community college athletics in the United States underlies the importance of exploring NIL rights among this population. There are two main governing bodies for community college athletics in the United States. The NJCAA oversees athletics for 60,000 athletes across 520 member institutions located throughout the country and organizes 52 national championship events for 13 men’s and 13 women’s sport competitions (NJCAA, 2021b). The NJCAA comprises three distinct divisions of competition. NJCAA Division I schools are allowed to offer full athletic scholarships to athletes, with each sport setting limits on the number of allowable scholarships per institution. NJCAA Division II schools can grant partial athletic scholarships, covering tuition, books, and course fees. NJCAA Division III institutions are not permitted to offer athletic scholarships to their athletes (NJCAA, 2021c).

California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the United States and comprises 116 post-secondary educational institutions serving 1.8 million students annually (California Community Colleges, 2021b). Athletic programs operated by institutions in the California community college system are governed by the California Community College Athletic Association (CCCAA). The CCCAA is responsible for establishing rules and

regulations governing activities surrounding all California community college athletic events. This includes governance of all 24 sports (12 men's and 12 women's) offered by California's community college institutions to its nearly 24,000 college athletes (CCCAA, 2019). The CCCAA also provides centralized governance for each of the 11 athletic conference's containing sport teams from California's community colleges.

Between the NJCAA and the CCCAA, over 84,000 athletes at the community college and junior college level compete in athletic competitions on an annual basis. Yet, despite this sizable population of athletes, little attention is given to them in the national discussion surrounding NIL rights for college athletes. Thus, the California community college system was selected for this study as a representative sample of potential NIL opportunities for community college athletes based on its overall size and the positioning of the State of California at the forefront of the NIL movement.

## Method

### *Sample and Data Collection*

To assess the potential NIL value of community college athletes, a sample of athletes attending two-year community college institutions in California was gathered. The NIL value of these athletes was examined by treating them as potential social media marketing influencers with standard influencer marketing rates applied to estimate earnings potential. Using social media influencing as an NIL monetization avenue was appropriate given the majority of NIL activities from college athletes since July 1, 2021 have focused on social media endorsements (Opendorse, 2021).

We obtained an initial list from the CCCAA of 23,248 athletes competing across all 24 sports during the 2019-2020 athletic season. Following initial data cleaning, we collected metadata related to Instagram profiles for these athletes. Instagram provided an appropriate social media platform for this analysis due to its use by athletes across a variety of sports to engage audiences, promote and develop their brand, and monetize their brand through sponsorships (Doyle et al., 2020; Geurin & McNary, 2020). Additionally, Instagram use is more prevalent among college-aged individuals relative to other established social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Research assistants were instructed to collect data on Instagram usernames and follower counts for profiles that indicated a clear and reasonable match with a community college athlete. Several factors influenced the determination of a clear and reasonable Instagram profile match. These included pictures posted on an Instagram profile showing the athlete competing in their sport; a mention of the athlete's sport and/or institution in their Instagram bio; and/or relevant mentions of the athlete's Instagram profile by other Instagram accounts, such as the institution's athletic department or sport program. In total, this research process uncovered 4,601 Instagram profiles (19.79% of all CCCAA athletes) which provided a clear and reasonable match to an athlete.

Following the method utilized by Kunkel et al. (2021), a custom web scraper program developed in Python and Perl systematically extracted engagement data (likes and comments) for the last 12 posts made on Instagram profiles identified for CCCAA athletes. Data extraction occurred during October 2020, meaning these athletes had not yet been allowed to monetize their NIL through social media platforms. NIL value estimates were derived for athletes with

Instagram profiles containing at least 1,000 followers. This follower threshold matches industry standards regarding the minimum number of followers required to be considered a “micro-influencer” on social media (Geysler, 2020). In total, 1,168 athletes (25.38% of athletes with an identifiable Instagram profile) possessed an Instagram follower count that met this micro-influencer threshold. Therefore, the final sample used for NIL valuation estimates comprised 1,168 California Community College athletes.

### Data Analysis

Prior academic research on NIL valuations for college athletes based on social media influencer methodology suggested a hybrid approach, inclusive of both an individual’s reach and engagement on social media, provides the most valid estimates of social media brand value (Kunkel et al., 2021). Therefore, this analysis followed a similar approach, where social media NIL value per post estimates for community college athletes were estimated using Equation 1:

$$0.5[(F*CPM)/1000] + (\Sigma(E*CPE)) \quad (1)$$

Within this equation,  $F$  indicates the number of followers associated with an athlete’s Instagram profile and approximates their reach on social media.  $CPM$  refers to “cost per thousand impressions” and is used to approximate the marketing cost of reaching 1,000 potential consumers. Industry research on social media influencer marketing suggests a range of CPM estimates from a lower bound of \$6 per thousand impressions to an upper bound of \$20 per thousand impressions (Shewan, 2021). This study chose to utilize a relatively conservative CPM estimate of \$10 per thousand impressions given the low-profile of community college athletes relative to high-profile Division I collegiate or professional athletes. The term  $E$  is the average engagement (likes and comments) across the last 12 posts on an athlete’s Instagram profile.  $CPE$  refers to the cost per engagement. Consistent with industry standards (Birk, 2020; Schenker, 2021; Shewan, 2021), a CPE value of \$0.20 was utilized for likes and a CPE value of \$0.70 was used for comments. For each engagement type, average engagement was multiplied by its corresponding CPE value and those results were then summed to determine the contribution of engagement to an athlete’s NIL value on social media.

## Results

Prior to calculating NIL earnings potential via social media for CCCAA athletes, descriptive statistics related to followers and engagement data were compiled for the 1,168 athletes included in this analysis. Table 2 presents these statistics for male athletes, while Table 3 presents this data for female athletes.

Overall, 65.84% of the 1,186 athletes analyzed in this study were male athletes and the athlete with the largest Instagram following was a male athlete (football). On average, Instagram followers for male athletes ( $M = 2,029$ ,  $SD = 3,055$ ) were slightly higher than those for female athletes ( $M = 1,894$ ,  $SD = 2,656$ ). However, the average female athlete was able to generate more engagement via their Instagram posts, with female athletes averaging 352 likes ( $SD = 350$ ) and 19 comments ( $SD = 15$ ) per post and male athletes averaging 314 likes ( $SD = 379$ ) and 16 comments ( $SD = 15$ ) per post.

Table 2  
*Overview of Instagram Followers and Engagement for Male Athletes*

Sport	# of Accounts	% of Male Athletes	Max Followers	Avg Followers	Avg Likes	Avg Comments
Baseball	128	16.64%	23,100	1,909	343	13
Basketball	129	16.78%	14,500	2,185	354	24
Cross Country	6	0.78%	1,357	1,128	273	13
Football	359	46.68%	55,700	2,238	308	15
Golf	3	0.39%	7,103	3,147	117	9
Soccer	53	6.89%	5,372	1,487	256	15
Swim & Dive	15	1.95%	1,791	1,356	322	15
Tennis	3	0.39%	1,437	1,411	235	10
Track & Field	40	5.20%	5,706	1,496	282	13
Volleyball	11	1.43%	4,333	1,611	250	14
Water Polo	9	1.17%	2,071	1,311	277	11
Wrestling	13	1.69%	4,420	1,655	280	13
<b>Overall</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>55,700</b>	<b>2,029</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>16</b>

Table 3  
*Overview of Instagram Followers and Engagement for Female Athletes*

Sport	# of Accounts	% of Female Athletes	Max Followers	Avg Followers	Avg Likes	Avg Comments
Badminton	2	0.50%	1,818	1,541	308	17
Basketball	54	13.53%	4,262	1,682	313	19
Beach Volleyball	42	10.53%	7,847	1,663	325	17
Cross Country	4	1.00%	3,417	1,999	391	15
Golf	6	1.50%	5,365	2,896	475	14
Soccer	97	24.31%	4,970	1,686	347	21
Softball	69	17.29%	6,471	1,759	307	18
Swim & Dive	23	5.76%	9,755	1,755	300	19
Tennis	3	0.75%	3,477	2,258	504	22
Track & Field	31	7.77%	44,300	4,095	587	25
Volleyball	56	14.04%	5,842	1,615	357	18
Water Polo	12	3.01%	1,957	1,433	273	14
<b>Overall</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>44,300</b>	<b>1,894</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>19</b>

Following the NIL valuation method presented in Equation 1, Table 4 presents per post social media NIL valuations for CCCAA athletes.

The results of this analysis generated several relevant findings. First, the percentage of male and female athletes with some degree of NIL earnings potential via social media influencer marketing is relatively similar. Overall, 1,168 out of 23,248 total CCCAA athletes (5.02%) were found to have an identifiable and monetizable Instagram platform. The larger number of male athletes with social media earnings potential is due to the larger number of male athletes within

the CCCAA (65.36% of all CCCAA athletes in the 2019-2020 athletic season were male). When assessed relative to gender, approximately five percent of male and female athletes were found to have NIL monetization potential via social media influencer marketing.

Second, results suggested male athletes do possess a higher ceiling for NIL earnings potential on social media. Four of the top five maximum per post values came from men's sports, with women's track and field being the only women's sport with a higher NIL value than men's baseball, basketball, or track and field. However, female athletes did display a higher average and minimum per post value than men. The average female athlete with a monetizable social media brand could earn \$51 per post compared to the average male athlete earning \$47 per post.

Finally, to further contextualize the NIL earnings potential of CCCAA athletes, Table 5 displays frequencies of per post earnings estimates within specific monetary categories. The categories created for this analysis included: per post NIL rights value under \$20; between \$20 and \$100; between \$100 and \$200; and over \$200 per post.

The results of this analysis suggest the overwhelming majority (92.72%) of CCCAA athletes with identifiable and monetizable Instagram profiles could earn between \$20 and \$100 per post through social media influencer marketing. Only 11 athletes (nine male athletes from baseball, basketball, or football and two female track and field athletes) were found to have a monetizable social media profile that would generate more than \$200 per post.

Table 4

*NIL Per Post Social Media Value Estimates for Male and Female Athletes*

Male Athletes					Female Athletes				
Sport	N	Max	Avg	Min	Sport	N	Max	Avg	Min
Baseball	128	\$375	\$48	\$16	Badminton	2	\$61	\$44	\$28
Basketball	129	\$365	\$55	\$14	Basketball	54	\$88	\$47	\$13
Cross Country	6	\$53	\$37	\$23	Beach Volleyball	42	\$114	\$47	\$17
Football	359	\$1,107	\$47	\$10	Cross Country	4	\$82	\$55	\$22
Golf	3	\$50	\$31	\$20	Golf	6	\$139	\$67	\$23
Soccer	53	\$77	\$38	\$14	Soccer	97	\$132	\$51	\$14
Swim & Dive	15	\$65	\$44	\$23	Softball	69	\$95	\$46	\$15
Tennis	3	\$37	\$34	\$29	Swim & Dive	23	\$100	\$46	\$13
Track & Field	40	\$177	\$40	\$8	Tennis	3	\$107	\$69	\$25
Volleyball	11	\$62	\$38	\$27	Track & Field	31	\$862	\$88	\$16
Water Polo	9	\$67	\$38	\$24	Volleyball	56	\$149	\$50	\$17
Wrestling	13	\$84	\$41	\$23	Water Polo	12	\$63	\$39	\$24
<b>Overall</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>\$1,107</b>	<b>\$47</b>	<b>\$8</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>\$862</b>	<b>\$51</b>	<b>\$13</b>
<b>CCCAA Athletes</b>	<b>15,194</b>				<b>CCCAA Athletes</b>	<b>8,054</b>			
<b>% of All Athletes</b>	<b>5.1%</b>				<b>% of All Athletes</b>	<b>5.0%</b>			



Table 5

*NIL Per Post Value Estimates by Sport, Gender, and Monetary*

<b>Sport</b>	<b>&lt; \$20</b>	<b>\$20 - \$100</b>	<b>\$100 - \$200</b>	<b>&gt; \$200</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Men's</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>769</b>
Baseball	1	121	3	3	128
Basketball	4	116	7	2	129
Cross Country		6			6
Football	17	328	10	4	359
Golf		3			3
Soccer	1	52			53
Swim & Dive		15			15
Tennis		3			3
Track & Field	4	34	2		40
Volleyball		11			11
Water Polo		9			9
Wrestling		13			13
<b>Women's</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>399</b>
Badminton		2			2
Basketball	2	52			54
Beach Volleyball	1	39	2		42
Cross Country		4			4
Golf		5	1		6
Soccer	2	88	7		97
Softball	1	68			69
Swim & Dive	1	21	1		23
Tennis		2	1		3
Track & Field	1	28		2	31
Volleyball	1	51	4		56
Water Polo		12			12
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1168</b>
<b>% of Grand Total</b>	<b>3.08%</b>	<b>92.72%</b>	<b>3.25%</b>	<b>0.94%</b>	

## Discussion

A market analysis of NIL earnings potential for CCCAA athletes via social media influencer marketing produced valid evidence of monetization potential for this group of athletes and suggested initial evidence to answer the research questions guiding this study. In regard to RQ1 and the percentage of community college athletes with monetization potential through social media marketing opportunities, approximately 5.0% (1,168 out of 23,248 athletes) were found to have an identifiable and monetizable Instagram platform, defined as possessing a follower base of at least 1,000, thereby meeting industry standards for consideration as a “micro-influencer” (Geyser, 2020). If these results are able to be extrapolated to the entire community college athlete population across the United States (over 84,000 athletes), it would indicate approximately 4,200 community college athletes could generate income via social media influencer marketing. This is likely a conservative estimate given that this study only examined one social media platform (Instagram) and was stringent about ensuring a clear and identifiable match between athlete and Instagram profile. This evidence demonstrates the clear need to

ensure NIL rights for community college athletes are protected in the same manner as college athletes attending four-year educational institutions.

In regard to RQ2 and the earnings potential of a community college athlete via social media influencer marketing, results suggested a high ceiling for some athletes, with per post values estimated at over \$200. The highest monetization estimate in this data set occurred for a male athlete (football) with a per post value of \$1,107. If this were extrapolated to annual earnings, with an industry standard of one sponsored post per week (Weber, 2020) used for that valuation, this would equate to \$57,558 annually. It is worth mentioning that this athlete benefitted from appearances on the popular documentary “Last Chance U,” which followed the Laney College football program over the course of their 2019 season (Tobias, 2020). Although this may be considered an outlier, it is notable to discuss as opportunities like this can present community college athletes with a means to grow their social media following and, therefore, generate significant value for themselves by using their NIL to promote products and other endorsement opportunities through their social media platform.

However, similar to initial studies of NIL valuations for Division I athletes (Kunkel et al., 2021), most community college athletes would not realize annual earnings of over \$50,000 for the use of their NIL within social media marketing. The majority of athletes with a monetizable social media platform would likely earn between \$20 to \$100 per post, with the average athlete in this sample earning \$48.60 per sponsored social media post. Applying the industry standard of one sponsored post per week (Weber, 2020), this would equate to an annual value with a lower bound of \$1,040 and an upper bound of \$5,200, with an average annual value of about \$2,525. Although this is certainly not a livable annual income, it can be meaningful to a group of athletes that, often times, are attending a two-year institution without any type of financial assistance through an athletic scholarship. Institutions in the California Community Colleges do not offer any athletic scholarships to its sport participants (CCCAA, 2019). Of the three Divisions in the NJCAA, only Division I institutions permit full athletic scholarships. NJCAA Division II institutions can only offer partial athletic scholarships and NJCAA Division III institutions are not permitted to offer any athletic scholarships (NJCAA, 2021c). Both NJCAA Division I and II also limit the total number of scholarships that can be granted (NJCAA, 2021c). Community college students experience a host of financial difficulties including food and housing insecurity and transportation issues (Klawans, 2021). Recently, Long Beach City College (part of the California Community Colleges) created a pilot program which would allow students to sleep overnight in their cars in a campus parking structure where they would have access to campus Wi-Fi and restrooms (Weissman, 2021). These financial challenges faced by the community college student population further highlight the need to provide these individuals with avenues to generate income and achieve a greater sense of financial security and independence.

Finally, in regard to RQ3, which inquired about differences between male and female community college athletes regarding NIL value, findings generally supported equitable earnings opportunities between gender. The top echelon of NIL earnings potential centered around male athletes, with nine of the 11 athletes projected to have a sponsored social media per post value of \$200 or greater being athletes in football, baseball, men’s basketball, or men’s track and field. However, the average female athlete had a higher per post value (\$51) compared to their male counterparts (\$47). This corresponds with prior research regarding equitable earnings potential across genders for Division I athletes (Kunkel et al., 2021). A higher average rate of engagement (likes and comments) across Instagram posts by female athletes compared to male athletes contributed to this finding. This also corresponds to prior research demonstrating women

generally have comparable rates of engagement across social media platforms compared to men (Brison & Geurin, 2021). Furthermore, the percentage of CCCAA female athletes with a monetizable Instagram platform (5.0%) was comparable to that of male athletes (5.1%), providing further evidence of equitable NIL opportunities for females and males at the community college level of athletics.

### *Implications*

There are three main practical implications that arise from the findings of this study. First, this study demonstrates there is value in the promotion of NIL opportunities for community college athletes. Therefore, state and federal legislators should be mindful of including community college athletes in NIL discussions and ensure these athletes are equally represented in any state law, executive order, or national bill passed related to NIL or student-athlete rights. As mentioned previously, while 23 of the 29 state NIL laws expressly or implicitly include community college athletes, six states still exclude or prohibit community college athletes from pursuing the same NIL rights and protections afforded to college athletes at four-year institutions. These six states, and other states proposing NIL legislation, should consider the recommendations developed by the California Community Colleges working group. The working group's final recommendations to the state legislature and the CCCAA unanimously supported including community college athletes in California's NIL legislation (California Community Colleges, 2021a). These recommendations were reflected in California's revised NIL legislation (Senate Bill 26), which extended NIL protections to community college athletes (Symon, 2021). States considering amendments to existing legislation or proposing new NIL legislation could enact a similar process as the State of California and require the formation of a working group to gather information and submit a report containing community college NIL policy recommendations to the state legislature. States that do not expressly include community college institutions in their current NIL legislation should consider forming a working group comprised of stakeholders from the community college system to explore the possibility of extending NIL protections to this group of athletes and to address potential administrative and financial concerns from academic leaders and athletic administrators at community colleges.

It is also important to recognize that six bills have been introduced in the United States Congress regarding NIL over the past year (Dellenger, 2021). These bills would likely include community colleges by implication based upon using the definition of an "institution of higher education" from the Education Act of 1965 (See, 20 U.S.C. § 1001, 2021). However, none of them expressly mention community colleges within the bill text. Additionally, none of the Congressional or Senate hearings held thus far on NIL or student-athlete rights have included community college representatives among the invited speakers to those committees. One committee did invite the NJCAA and other amateur athletic associations to submit written responses to a series of questions posed in a Letter to Stakeholders on Name, Image, and Likeness of Collegiate Athletes in September 2020 (Energy and Commerce Committee, 2020). Since that time, community colleges have not had a meaningful voice in these national hearings surrounding college athlete NIL.

It is imperative that any future state legislation, amendments to state legislation, or national bill regarding NIL be explicit in addressing community college athletes. For example, the *Uniform College Athlete Name, Image, and Likeness Act* expressly provides and recommends statutory language which includes "public or private institutions of higher education in this state,

including a community college, junior college, college, and university” (Uniform Law Commission, 2021). Without specifically covering this population of athletes in a state or federal NIL legislation, it is possible that community college institutions, perhaps weary of logistical complications related to NIL, would perceive this omission as a means for not providing their athletes with services to help foster and promote NIL opportunities.

Second, it is necessary for community college athletics governing bodies (NJCAA and CCCAA) to create clear, unrestrictive policies that promote NIL as a positive opportunity for its athletes. The NJCAA initially issued interim guidelines for the governance of NIL policies across their member institutions and has more recently amended its 2021-22 NJCAA Handbook to permit student-athlete NIL activities (NJCAA, 2021a). The CCCAA has also recently revised their NIL policies to align with Senate Bill 26 in the state of California (CCCAA, 2021). Both of these governing bodies should look to comprehensively review their amateurism policies and amend sections of their constitutions and bylaws, where warranted, to create an environment with as few restrictions as possible on NIL opportunities for community college athletes.

Community colleges are under-resourced compared to other institutions of higher education. Recent estimates show community colleges operate on an annual budget that is only 16% of the average annual spend by a four-year public college (Hanson, 2021). Therefore, the NJCAA and CCCAA, instead of delegating athlete NIL education to their respective member institutions as the NCAA has done, should centralize the development and deployment of student-athlete education related to NIL. A common theme from commentators regarding NIL is the need to educate college athletes on the myriad of issues related to NIL, such as personal brand development and management, fair market value for the use of one’s NIL, time management, financial literacy, tax implications related to NIL activities, and basic business skills (Bromberg, 2021). These governing bodies would do well to mandate some educational seminars on these topics for their athletes, which are largely comprised of 18- to 22-year-old individuals with little experience in personal brand management and financial literacy. The State of Florida’s NIL bill (SB 646) mandates at least five hours of financial literacy education for college athletes in that state (See, *Florida Statutes* § 1006.74(2)(k) (2020)). This is an example of mandated education that can improve a college athlete’s ability to manage NIL opportunities in an appropriate manner and provide long-term life-skill training for these athletes. There are various platforms that provide educational seminars for college athletes related to NIL, such as Opendorse and Spry Payments. Additionally, these governing bodies could look to develop standardized education materials to be delivered to each member institution for dissemination to their student-athletes.

Finally, institutions must ensure equity in their promotion of NIL opportunities between men’s and women’s sport programs. The results of this study suggest that female community college athletes, on average, possess higher NIL value through social media influencer marketing compared to men. However, value is nothing without opportunity. If college athletic programs focus an unequal amount of time on marketing and promoting men’s sports, such as football, baseball, and men’s basketball, then, inevitably, these will be the athletes that are presented with greater amounts of NIL opportunities from third parties. College institutions, including community colleges, should recognize the NIL value of their female athletes and promote these athletes in an equitable manner to ensure the opportunities are there for female athletes to realize their NIL value in the marketplace.

### Future Research

There are several assumptions and limitations of this study providing avenues for meaningful future research on the NIL value of community college athletes. First, assumptions were made regarding cost per thousand impressions and cost per engagement metrics that were required to derive a per sponsored post value for athletes included in this study. These metrics were applied evenly for all athletes. Future research could examine the impact of applying different cost per impression or cost per engagement values based on athlete sport, gender, or size of institution. Second, this study only focused on community college athletes in California. Future research could explore NIL monetization opportunities for community college athletes located in other states or regions of the country. Similarly, this study only examined earnings potential from one social media platform (Instagram). Future research could examine NIL value estimates from other social media sites, such as Snapchat, TikTok, or YouTube. Also, social media influencer marketing is only one method by which an athlete can monetize their personal brand. Other monetization avenues include traditional endorsements and media advertising, promotional appearances, autograph signings, hosting camps or clinics, and group licensing. Future research on this topic could explore the NIL monetization potential for community college athletes in these areas. Third, it is not uncommon for athletic programs to place restrictions on the social media activity of their athletes (Wittry, 2021). Therefore, these restrictions may limit the social media reach and engagement potential of athletes, thereby limiting their true monetization potential via social media marketing. Future research could explore the limiting impacts of these restrictions. Finally, it is important to note that opportunity does not equate to actual occurrence. Even though a community college athlete may have monetization potential via their social media platform, it does not necessarily mean they will take advantage of that opportunity. Athletes may decline sponsorship opportunities for a variety of reasons, such as offers from companies that do not align with their personal brand strategy. Future research should examine the actual earnings of community college athletes across a variety of NIL monetization avenues.

In summary, this research examined baseline estimates for social media NIL value related to California Community College athletes. This study hopes to begin the conversation on earnings potential and fair market value for these athletes. Results suggest a sizeable group of community college athletes do possess NIL earnings potential and, therefore, should be included in the national NIL discussion within college athletics.

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