

# How NCAA's New Rules Are Opening Money Doors for Student Athletes Outside Marquee Sports

Student athletes who play volleyball, soccer, water polo and other sports can get a piece of the financial action

By Dan Weil Nov. 13, 2021 11:00 am ET



Stanford University basketball player Haley Jones, pictured (center) with head coach Tara VanDerveer and player Lexie Hull during an NCAA college basketball news conference, has endorsement deals with companies including videogame publisher 2K Sports.

Photo: Jeff Chiu/Associated Press

Thanks to new rules in college sports, student athletes now can make money from their names, images and likenesses. The change has been heralded as ushering in a new era of lucrative endorsement opportunities for stars of the most popular sports, such as football and

men's basketball.

The new rules, implemented July 1 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, a nonprofit that regulates college sports, allow athletes to use their status to gain endorsements, sponsorships and appearance fees, which were off limits to them before. In addition, they can now give paid instruction with less restrictions.

Haley Jones, a Stanford University basketball star, is one of the big winners. She has signed with sports agency PRP, which also represents basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal.

Already since July 1, she has scored a deal with videogame publisher 2K Sports to appear in a TV ad for NBA 2K22. And she participated in a roundtable on cryptocurrencies sponsored by Coin Cloud, a provider of cryptocurrency ATMs.

Ms. Jones declines to reveal her compensation for this work. But these kinds of deals typically pay as much as tens of thousands of dollars, industry sources say.

"My family and I see this as starting the process two years earlier than we would have otherwise," says Ms. Jones, who is a junior and expects to play basketball professionally after she graduates.

Meanwhile, Jaelin Howell, a star women's soccer player at Florida State University, says she already has received between 20 and 30 endorsement offers. So far, she only has chosen to pursue deals with Oakland, Calif.-based Harmless Harvest's coconut water and Milner Technologies, a workplace technology company based in Peachtree Corners, Ga. Ms. Howell declines to disclose her compensation for the two opportunities, but Sports Business Journal has reported that Milner

planned to offer her \$5,000.

Florida State University soccer player Jaelin Howell, who also is in the U.S. Women's National Team system, has already received between 20 and 30 endorsement offers.

Photo: Getty Images

Under the Milner deal, Ms. Howell will make visits to a local YMCA three times this year for five hours a day to teach kids soccer. Milner is donating Ms. Howell's services to the Y. "It's nice to give back to the

community, showcase women's sports and earn the money," she says.

To help garner her Milner deal, Ms. Howell used a tool a lot of college athletes in low-revenue sports are utilizing, an Internet platform that brokers deals between companies and athletes. The platform she used is Icon Source, a Denver-based business that matches athletes and companies for endorsements and promotions, many through social media. Icon says that from July 1 through Nov. 4, more than 10,000 offers were made to college athletes on its site, with the majority going to low-revenue-sport athletes.

The most important asset many of these athletes bring to the table is their social-media following, particularly on Instagram. Corey Staniscia, external affairs director of Orlando-based Dreamfield Sports, another firm that matches athletes and companies for endorsements, says he has seen industry research showing that about 90% of name, image and likeness deals for athletes involve social media.

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At their simplest, such deals call for the athlete to post a picture of herself or himself to Instagram with the product and the company's name. More advanced deals could involve a print or video ad or a promotional appearance.

"Low-revenue-sport athletes don't have a huge platform, they aren't on TV every Saturday," Mr. Staniscia says. But they can still have devoted social-media followings in the geographical areas of their schools.

"They get their exposure through social media: TikTok, Instagram and

[Twitter](#), " he says.

Callie Williams, a Baylor University volleyball player who previously played at the University of Tennessee, struck an endorsement deal over the summer with Uptime Energy drinks involving Instagram posts. She says she is in talks about other opportunities.

"Colleges are such a major part of their towns, and athletes by nature have a large reach," says Ms. Williams, who has 2,924 followers on Instagram. "They're visible to the public. So it's a way companies can advertise their products cheaply and reach a big part of the community."

While the money she is earning won't have a huge impact on her finances, Ms. Williams says, she sees nonmonetary benefits as well—such as the networking and job opportunities that could arise.

Ms. Williams is a client of 98Strong, an online platform that some athletes in low-revenue college sports use to find sponsorships and other types of name, image and likeness deals. Started by two former college water-polo players, Andrew Mavis,

an alum of George Washington University, and Nick Bunn, an alum of Harvard University, the business gets its name from the 98% of college athletes who don't go pro, the co-founders say. Most of their clients have Instagram followings of 1,000 to 25,000.

Another 98Strong client, Nick Schroeder, a water-polo player at George Washington, obtained the most basic form of payment for an endorsement deal: barter. Zanerobe, an Australian apparel company, gave him some of its shirts, pants, shorts and a sweater in return for wearing the clothes—with a friend—in a picture that Mr. Schroeder

posted to Instagram. No cash was included in the deal. The picture, which included Zanerobe's name and a thank-you, appeared in the Instagram Stories format, which means it disappeared after 24 hours.

"I'm definitely happy to get free clothes for just putting up a picture," says Mr. Schroeder, who has about 1,300 Instagram followers.

More than 50 businesses have contacted University of Florida star gymnast Trinity Thomas with potential deals since July 1, Ms. Thomas says. She has done a few small barter arrangements and a \$50 Instagram deal with Novashine, a Columbia, Mo.-based teeth-whitening products company.

Realizing she could use management help, she says, Ms. Thomas has signed on with the Miami-based Raymond Representation agency. "I was overwhelmed with the email I was getting, not knowing the companies," she says. Ms. Thomas hopes to get involved with health and wellness companies and ultimately have her own athletic-wear line.

University of Florida gymnast Trinity Thomas says she has been contacted by more than 50 businesses.

Photo: jerome miron/Reuters

Another way college athletes profit from their skills is by giving lessons. They weren't barred from doing this before, but not until the July 1 rule change could they mention their school's name in promoting their services.

Noah Gans, a soccer player at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass., says he earned \$900 in July giving soccer lessons to youngsters. When he gave lessons in July 2020, he says, he made only \$400.

"I couldn't market myself as a college athlete. I couldn't say that I

played on a team which made the 2017 final four for Division 3," he says. "Now I have more credibility." Mr. Gans says he charged clients \$50 an hour for one-on-one lessons this July, up from \$35 a year earlier.

While the senior will be too busy for coaching during the school year, he says, "it's a nice supplement while I'm home."

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