

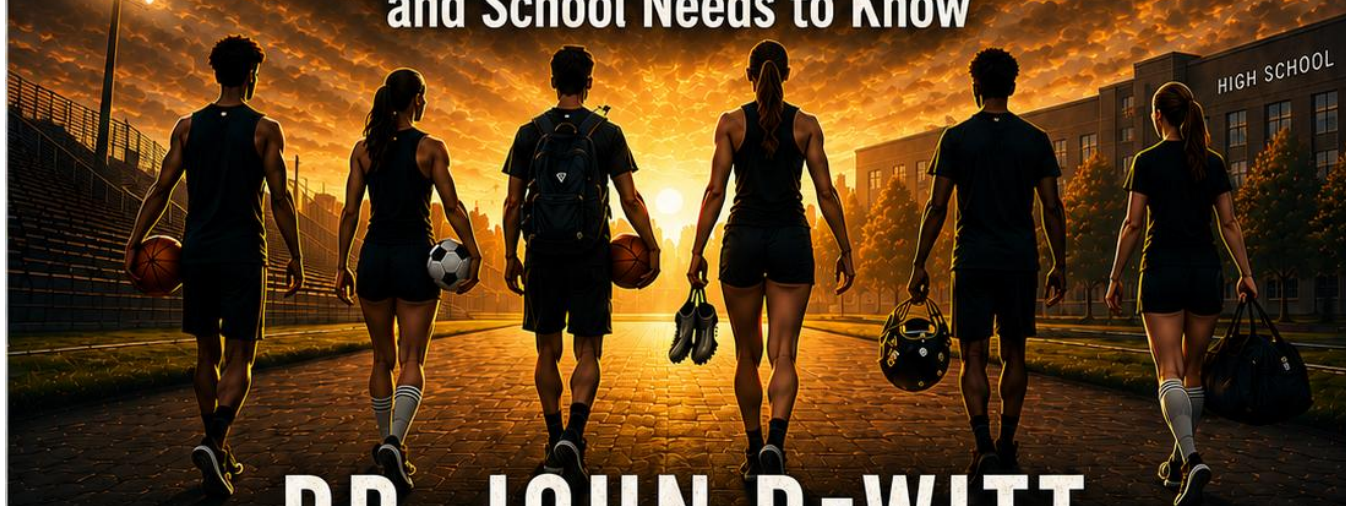
— THE HIGH SCHOOL —

NFL



FIELD GUIDE

What Every Athlete, Parent, Coach,  
and School Needs to Know



— DR. JOHN DEWITT —

## Before You Make NIL Decisions, Read This First

If you're a parent trying to understand today's NIL landscape, you're not alone. Every day, families hear stories about endorsement deals, recruiting, the transfer portal, social media, and athletes earning money from their Name, Image, and Likeness. Some of those stories are accurate. Many are incomplete. Others simply don't apply to high school athletes. It's no surprise that so many parents feel overwhelmed. **You don't need to read this guide all at once.** Many families return to different sections as new questions arise throughout their athlete's journey.

Most families aren't making poor decisions because they don't care. They're making decisions without enough context, structure, or long-term perspective. That's why I created this Field Guide. Its purpose isn't to convince your family to pursue NIL opportunities—or to avoid them. Its purpose is to help you understand the landscape, ask better questions, and make decisions that support your athlete's long-term future.

The athletes who navigate NIL successfully are rarely the ones who move the fastest. More often, they're the ones whose families understand the process, communicate openly, and make thoughtful decisions based on education rather than emotion. I hope this guide gives you greater clarity, confidence, and peace of mind as you navigate each step of your family's journey.

Before we discuss recruiting, social media, endorsement opportunities, contracts, or personal branding, it's important to understand one fundamental truth: **High school NIL is not one-size-fits-all.**

Every athlete has different goals, different strengths, different circumstances, and different opportunities. The best decision for one family may be the wrong decision for another. That's why this guide doesn't offer quick fixes or universal answers. Instead, it provides practical frameworks that can help your family evaluate opportunities and make decisions that align with your own values and long-term goals.

Throughout this guide, you'll find reality checks, practical questions to consider, and simple tools designed to help you slow down and think critically before making important decisions. My hope is that by the time you finish reading, you'll feel better prepared to navigate conversations about NIL with confidence rather than confusion. Let's begin by making sure we're all talking about the same thing.

**What does Name, Image, and Likeness actually mean?**

## **What Does Name, Image, and Likeness Actually Mean?**

One of the biggest sources of confusion surrounding NIL is that people often use the term to describe several different things. As a result, families sometimes believe NIL, recruiting, scholarships, and transfer opportunities are all part of the same process. They are not.

At its core, **Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL)** simply means an individual has the ability to receive compensation for the commercial use of their identity. In other words, someone is paying an athlete because of who they are, their reputation, or the audience they have built.

That compensation can take many forms. It may involve promoting a local business on social media, appearing in a marketing campaign, signing autographs, hosting a youth camp, creating online content, or participating in other promotional activities. The specific opportunities available to a high school athlete depend on state laws, school policies, and the circumstances surrounding each opportunity.

What NIL **does not** mean is that every athlete will receive endorsement offers or significant income. In reality, most high school athletes will never sign a major NIL agreement, and that's perfectly okay. The purpose of high school athletics has always been to develop skills, build character, create relationships, and prepare athletes for opportunities that may come later. Understanding what NIL is—and what it isn't—is the first step toward making informed decisions as a family.

# WHAT NIL IS AND IS NOT

## WHAT NIL REALLY MEANS



### NIL IS



#### ENDORSEMENTS

Partnering with a business or brand.



#### SPONSORED CONTENT

Creating and sharing content for a brand or business.



#### PERSONAL APPEARANCES

Attending events, signings, or meet & greets.



#### CAMPS & CLINICS

Hosting or participating in sports-related camps or clinics.

VS.



### NIL IS NOT



#### RECRUITING

NIL has nothing to do with college coaches recruiting you.



#### SCHOLARSHIPS

NIL opportunities do not guarantee athletic scholarships.



#### PLAYING TIME

NIL deals will not earn you more playing time.



#### GUARANTEED MONEY

There is no guarantee that you will receive any NIL offers.



### THE BOTTOM LINE:

NIL is compensation for value—**not** a shortcut to recruiting, scholarships, or playing time.

## **Reality Check #1: NIL Is Not Recruiting**

If there is one misconception that causes more confusion than any other, it is the belief that NIL and recruiting are the same thing. They are not. Recruiting is the process of college coaches evaluating athletes to determine whether they can help their program. Coaches consider factors such as athletic ability, academics, character, work ethic, position needs, and how well an athlete fits within their team. Their primary question is simple: **Can this athlete help us win?**

NIL is different. NIL refers to opportunities for an athlete to receive compensation for the commercial use of their name, image, and likeness. Those opportunities may come from businesses, organizations, or other third parties that believe the athlete can help promote a product, service, or brand.

While recruiting and NIL may eventually intersect at the college level, they are not the same process. A college coach may recruit an athlete because of their ability on the field, while an NIL opportunity may arise because of the athlete's marketability, reputation, community involvement, or audience.

For high school families, understanding this distinction is important. Too often, parents believe that building a social media following or chasing NIL opportunities will automatically improve recruiting. In reality, college coaches are still looking first for athletes who can compete, contribute, and fit their program. The strongest foundation for future NIL opportunities is still the same foundation that has always mattered: becoming a better student, a better athlete, and a better teammate.

## **Reality Check #2: The Transfer Portal Changed Recruiting**

One of the biggest changes in college athletics over the past several years has been the rapid growth of the transfer portal. While it has created new opportunities for many athletes, it has also changed the recruiting landscape for high school students. Today, college coaches often have a choice. They can recruit a high school athlete who may need several years of development, or they can recruit an experienced college athlete through the transfer portal who has already competed at the collegiate level. That doesn't mean high school recruiting has disappeared. It simply means coaches are being more selective with the scholarships and roster spots they dedicate to incoming freshmen.

For parents, this changes the conversation. Instead of asking, *"How can my athlete get noticed?"* it may be more valuable to ask, *"How can my athlete become someone a college coach cannot ignore?"* The answer usually has very little to do with chasing NIL opportunities.

Athletes who continue to improve their skills, perform well academically, demonstrate strong character, and become dependable teammates still give themselves the best opportunity to be recruited. Those qualities have never gone out of style, even as the recruiting landscape continues to evolve.

The transfer portal has made development even more important. College coaches are looking for athletes who can provide value to their program, whether they are arriving from high school or another college. Families who understand that reality are more likely to focus their time and energy on the things they can actually control. The goal should never be to compete with the transfer portal. The goal should be to become the type of athlete a coach wants regardless of where the competition is coming from.

# THE TRANSFER PORTAL CHANGED RECRUITING

Many college programs now fill roster spots  
with **experienced players** before recruiting high school athletes.



**COLLEGE PROGRAM  
NEEDS A PLAYER**



**TRANSFER PORTAL  
(EXPERIENCED PLAYERS)**



**WHY COACHES CONSIDER IT:**

- ✓ College Experience
- ✓ Proven Production
- ✓ Immediate Impact
- ✓ Closer to Graduation

**OR**



**HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE  
(DEVELOPING TALENT)**



**WHY COACHES CONSIDER IT:**

- ✓ Long-Term Potential
- ✓ Program Fit
- ✓ Culture & Character
- ✓ Future Development



**QUESTION:  
WHO CAN HELP US SOONER?**



**THE BOTTOM LINE:**

The transfer portal hasn't eliminated  
high school recruiting.

**It has made competition for roster spots even greater.**

### **Reality Check #3: Development Before Exposure**

One of the most common questions parents ask is, *"How do we get my athlete more exposure?"* It's an understandable question, but it may not be the best one. A better question is: **"How do we help our athlete become someone college coaches want to recruit?"**

Exposure is only valuable if there is something worth seeing. College coaches can create opportunities for athletes they believe can help their program. If an athlete is not yet physically, technically, academically, or emotionally prepared to compete at the next level, simply increasing exposure rarely changes the outcome.

For most high school athletes, the greatest return on investment comes from improving the things they can control. Developing athletic skills, maintaining strong grades, building healthy relationships with coaches, demonstrating leadership, and becoming a dependable teammate will have a greater long-term impact than chasing followers or worrying about building a personal brand too early. This doesn't mean exposure isn't important. It is. However, exposure should be the result of development—not a substitute for it.

Parents can support this process by encouraging consistent improvement rather than comparing their athlete to what they see on social media. Every athlete develops at a different pace, and every recruiting journey looks different. When families focus on becoming better instead of simply becoming more visible, they place themselves in the strongest position to take advantage of opportunities when they arise.

**Remember:** You can't market potential that hasn't been developed. Build the athlete first. The opportunities will follow.

# BUILD THE ATHLETE FIRST

The right **focus**. The right **results**.



## THE BOTTOM LINE:

Development creates opportunity.

Exposure simply helps people **see it**.

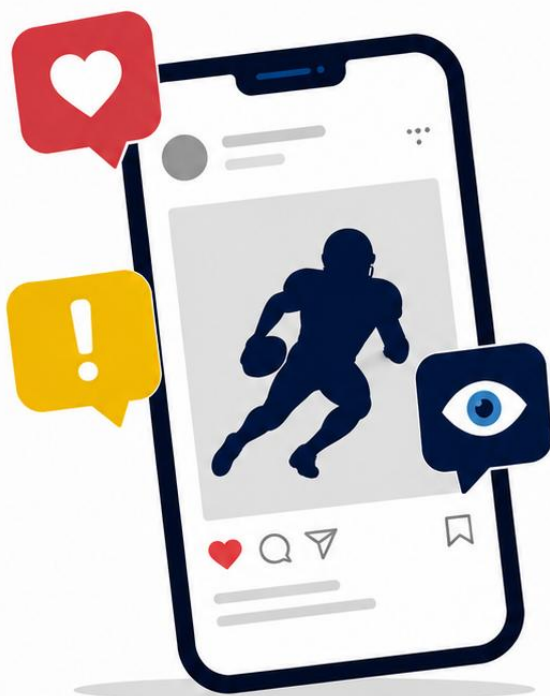
## Reality Check #4: Social Media Can Open Doors... and Close Them

Parents often ask whether their athlete needs thousands of followers to benefit from NIL. While social media can certainly create opportunities, follower count alone rarely determines an athlete's value. For most high school athletes, social media should be viewed as a tool—not the goal.

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# THE REALITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

YOUR POSTS TODAY CAN **IMPACT** YOUR OPPORTUNITIES TOMORROW.



### 1 IT'S PUBLIC

Recruiters, coaches, and brands are always watching.

### 2 IT LASTS

What you post today can follow you for years to come.

### 3 IT SHAPES YOUR REPUTATION

Your online presence shapes how others perceive you.

### 4 IT CREATES OPPORTUNITIES

Use social media to showcase your character, work ethic, and goals.



### REALITY CHECK:

Your digital reputation is built one post at a time.  
Make every post support the **future** you're working toward.

### **Reality Check #5: Every NIL Opportunity Comes With Responsibilities**

When families first hear about an NIL opportunity, it's natural to focus on the excitement. After all, someone believes enough in your athlete to offer compensation. That's an exciting moment and one worth celebrating. However, every NIL opportunity should also come with an important question:

**"What am I agreeing to in return?"**

NIL agreements are business agreements. While some opportunities may be simple, others include specific expectations that must be fulfilled. An athlete may be asked to create social media content, attend promotional events, appear in advertisements, wear certain apparel, or avoid promoting competing businesses. Receiving compensation means accepting responsibility.

Before agreeing to any opportunity, families should understand exactly what is expected, how long the agreement lasts, whether it is exclusive, and what happens if either party wants to end the relationship early. Taking time to ask these questions before signing can prevent misunderstandings later.

Just because an opportunity is exciting doesn't automatically mean it's the right opportunity. The best NIL opportunities are those that align with an athlete's values, schedule, long-term goals, and ability to fulfill every commitment they make.

Remember, your athlete's reputation is one of their greatest assets. Following through on commitments, communicating professionally, and honoring agreements builds trust that can open future doors long after a single NIL deal has ended.

# BEFORE YOU SIGN

— SLOW DOWN. ASK QUESTIONS. THINK LONG-TERM. —



## THE PARENT CHECKLIST



What is my athlete expected to do?



How long does the agreement last?



Is the agreement exclusive?



Who owns the photos, videos, and other content?



What happens if circumstances change?



Does this fit our family's long-term goals?



### THE BOTTOM LINE:

A good NIL opportunity should create value—**not pressure.**

The best opportunities are those that support your athlete's long-term development rather than simply offering short-term excitement.

- ☐ **Are we being pressured to decide quickly?**
- ☐ **Have we taken time to think it through?**
- ☐ **Will this decision still make sense a year from now?**

Sometimes the smartest decision is to wait. The goal is not to collect the most NIL opportunities. The goal is to make the **right** opportunities part of your athlete's journey.

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### **Parent Reality Check**

**Every "yes" also means saying "no" to something else. Choose carefully.**

## Questions Every Parent Should Ask

The quality of your decisions often depends on the quality of your questions. When families feel rushed, excited, or overwhelmed, it's easy to focus on the opportunity instead of understanding it. Taking a few minutes to ask thoughtful questions can provide clarity, reduce misunderstandings, and help your family make decisions with confidence. You don't need to know every answer about NIL. You simply need to know which questions to ask.

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# QUESTIONS EVERY PARENT SHOULD ASK

Ask now. Protect later. **Your athlete's future is worth it.**

The quality of your decisions often depends on the quality of your questions. When families feel rushed, excited, or overwhelmed, it's easy to focus on the opportunity instead of understanding it. Taking a few minutes to ask thoughtful questions can provide clarity, reduce misunderstandings, and help your family make decisions with confidence.

**You don't need to know every answer about NIL.**  
**You simply need to know which questions to ask.**



### 1. WHY WAS MY ATHLETE SELECTED?

What makes my athlete a good fit for this opportunity?



### 2. WHAT IS MY ATHLETE EXPECTED TO DO?

What are the deliverables, expectations, and outcomes?



### 3. DOES THIS FIT OUR FAMILY'S LONG-TERM GOALS?

Will this help or distract from the bigger picture?



### 4. WHO IS BEHIND THIS OPPORTUNITY?

Do we trust this person or organization?



### 5. HOW MUCH TIME IS REQUIRED?

Will this fit our schedule and school priorities?



### 6. WHAT QUESTIONS HAVEN'T WE ASKED YET?

What else do we need to know before deciding?



### THE BOTTOM LINE:

The right opportunity today should support your athlete's **future tomorrow.**

Parents don't have to become NIL experts overnight. They simply need to become comfortable asking thoughtful questions before making important decisions.



**REMEMBER:** Good decisions begin with good questions.

Don't be afraid to slow the conversation down until you understand the answers.

Good questions lead to good decisions. A simple family plan helps you put those questions into practice.

**FIELD GUIDE**

# YOUR FAMILY'S NIL GAME PLAN

BUILD. COMMUNICATE. **DECIDE** WITH CONFIDENCE.



## **1 DEVELOP**

Athlete First



## **2 COMMUNICATE**

Stay Aligned



## **3 EVALUATE**

Ask Questions



## **4 DECIDE**

Think Long-Term



## **5 LEARN**

Keep Growing



### **THE BOTTOM LINE:**

The best NIL strategy isn't chasing opportunities. It's becoming prepared when the **right opportunity** arrives.

## **A Final Word to Parents**

If there's one message I hope you take away from this Field Guide, it's this: **Your athlete does not have to have everything figured out today.**

The current NIL landscape can make it feel like every decision is urgent and every opportunity must be pursued immediately. Social media often highlights extraordinary stories while ignoring the thousands of athletes quietly developing their skills, earning playing time, building relationships, and preparing for their future. Don't allow someone else's timeline to become your family's standard.

Every athlete's journey is unique. Some athletes will receive NIL opportunities in high school. Others won't see meaningful opportunities until college. Many successful athletes may never pursue NIL at all, yet still enjoy incredible athletic careers and meaningful lives beyond sports.

As parents, one of the greatest gifts you can provide is perspective. Encourage your athlete to pursue excellence rather than attention. Celebrate progress instead of comparison. Help them build character, resilience, humility, and integrity—qualities that will continue to create opportunities long after athletics have ended. NIL is one chapter in your athlete's story. It should never become the entire story.

Thank you for taking the time to invest in your family's education. I hope this Field Guide has given you greater confidence to ask better questions, make informed decisions, and enjoy the journey ahead.

I wish you and your athlete nothing but the best.

— **Dr. John DeWitt**



### About the Author

Dr. John DeWitt is an educator, speaker, former professional football player, chiropractor, and founder of NIL Smart Hub™. After competing at the collegiate and professional levels, he has dedicated his career to helping athletes and families make informed decisions that support long-term success both on and off the field.

Recognizing the confusion surrounding Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), Dr. DeWitt has interviewed athletic directors, coaches, attorneys, industry professionals, and families across the country to better understand the challenges facing today's high school athletes and their parents. His work is focused on providing practical, unbiased education that helps parents navigate NIL with greater confidence and clarity.

Dr. DeWitt is the author of *The Reality Guide to High School NIL* and speaks to schools, athletic departments, coaches, and parent organizations on NIL education, athlete development, decision-making, and preparing young athletes for success beyond sports. The perspectives shared throughout this guide reflect insights gathered from conversations with leaders across the NIL landscape. His mission is simple: **replace confusion with education so families can make better long-term decisions.**

Thank you for investing in your athlete's future.