

# Rise & \$ign

*Pictured: Georgia Tech wide receiver James Blackstrain signs Techs' first full team NIL deal with TiVo. TiVo offered an NIL deal to every Tech football player in 2021*

**On July 1st, 2021, the landscape of collegiate athletics was drastically altered. Say "hello" to NIL**

STORY BY PAUL GAETA

Over a month has passed since the University of Georgia (UGA) won their first National Championship in over 40 years, and the university is still making millions off of their success. UGA made over 134 million dollars off of their football program in the 2019-20 fiscal year as reported by Mike Griffith on the DawgNation blog and that number is sure to be higher for their 21-22 campaign due to their championship win.

If it was any previous year, not a single dime would be made by any of the 70+ UGA football players and put into their own pockets. Before July 1, 2021, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) had strict rules

about players making money. No brand deals, no paid autograph signings, no personal jersey profits, and absolutely no receiving money from schools or companies. The NCAA was very serious about enforcing this. A notable example was when former UGA running back, Todd Gurley, got caught illegally signing dozens of autographs, receiving cash in exchange. He was suspended for 4 games.

While it seemed unfair for these multi-million dollar football programs to be profiting off of college student-athletes with no return compensation, it was the norm, and for years it was accepted. After all, these are just college students, and schools paying players directly would cause an array of problems. For many years, that seemed like the only potential solution for letting players get paid directly from the school, so it was

put on the back burner.

This all changed on July 1, 2021. NIL was the NCAA's way to combat the complaints and concerns.

"NIL refers to name, image and likeness and the ability to profit from use without jeopardizing college eligibility," explains Todd Stansbury, the head athletic direc-

**"NIL refers to name, image and likeness and the ability to profit from use without jeopardizing college eligibility,"**

*-Todd Stansbury, Head Athletic director at Georgia Tech*

tor at Georgia Tech. "With the rules changed this past July, student-athletes can pursue activities like endorsements, autographs and appearances in exchange for compensation," he continued.

Georgia Tech is a 'Power 5' Division 1 athletic program, so these new rules affect their players greatly. An example of a deal made with the Tech football athletes was the TiVo deal.

"Each student-athlete received 404 dollars and a streaming device from TiVo as compensation for social media posts promoting TiVo," says Lance Markos, Associate Athletic Director for Compliance at Georgia Tech.

With this also comes controversy. College football fans, in particular, seem to have very strong opinions on the new NIL rules. Some seem to like it, some despise it, but the

most common argument is its fairness or lack thereof.

"Hometeam" Brandon Leak, a sports talk on-air personality at 680 The Fan in Atlanta, explains that "there are definitely built-in advantages for these large Power 5 schools with big fan bases... especially when it comes to the number of alumni from these schools that are willing to give players NIL [deals]."

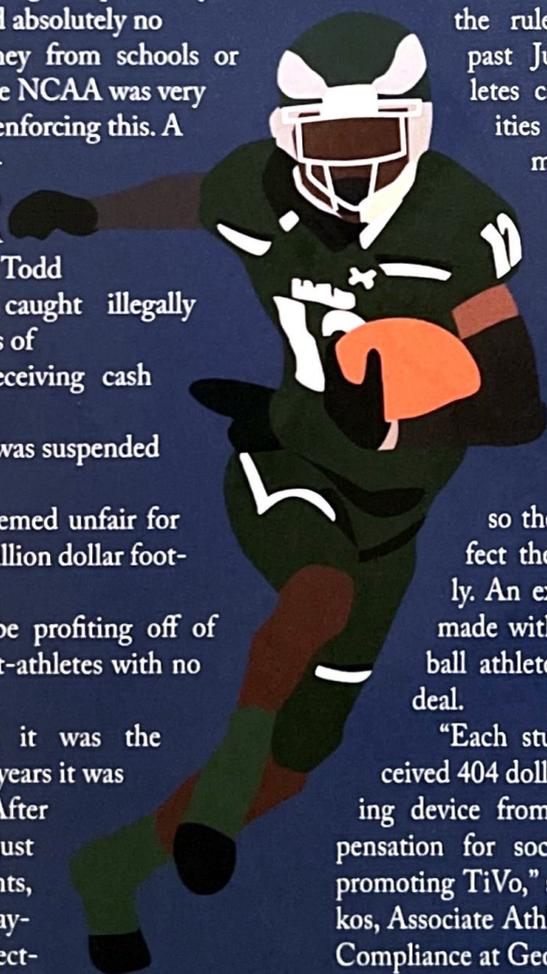
The argument from many college football fans is that NIL is not fair to the smaller Power 5 schools not in one of the 5 major D1 conferences (Group of 5 schools), and the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) (lowest level of Division 1 sports) when it comes to recruiting players for their respective programs.

Leak weighs in on this topic, agreeing that there is an advantage to these large Power 5 schools, although large Power 5 schools have always had recruiting advantages over smaller schools. They gain this advantage through things like facilities, talent in practice etc., so recruiting "fairness" has never been achieved at the college football level.

"The weight room at the University of Alabama (UofA) is bigger than the weight room at FCS level Alabama State University... which is a built-in recruiting advantage for UofA over smaller schools," Leak explained.

A full season of college football has passed, and there have already been monumental NIL related headlines surrounding player deals. Some notable NIL deals include Quinn Ewers, Bryce Young, and Travis Hunter.

Quinn Ewers was one of the highest recruited highschool quarterbacks of all time. He committed to The Ohio State University forgoing his senior year of highschool and instead taking advantage of over 1 million dollars in NIL deals. However, Ewers never started a game this year; in fact, he played under 10 snaps. Recently, he announced he is



transferring to Texas, and is sure to make millions more with NIL.

Bryce Young was another highly recruited quarterback who also made an estimated 1 million dollars his freshman year at the University of Alabama. The only difference be-

**“The weight room at the University of Alabama (UofA) is bigger than the weight room at FCS level Alabama State University... which is a built-in recruiting advantage for UofA over smaller schools.”**

*-Brandon Leak*

tween the two is their play, as Young won the Heisman Trophy while Ewers rode the bench.

Travis Hunter, on the other hand, is a much more unusual story. The number one recruit in the class of 2022 was committed to Florida State University, but then unexpectedly decommitted and reopened his recruitment at the end of 2021. On National Signing Day, Hunter shocked the college football world when he committed to Jackson State University, an FCS level “Historically Black College and University (HBCU).”

Many things contributed to his commitment, but the over 1.5 million dollars he is estimated to receive off of NIL was a large factor. This highlights how NIL deals can make a top talent athlete go to a FCS school rather than a large Power 5 school. While many think that NIL deals could hurt smaller schools, this is an example of a smaller school getting talent with major help from NIL.

A full college football season has been played since this monumental change. Coincidentally, or perhaps not, the College Football Playoff saw two “first-timers”: the Universi-

ty of Michigan and the University of Cincinnati. Historically, the Playoff saw the same 4 or 5 teams, typically large Power 5 powerhouses, and had never seen a Group of 5 school since its start in 2014.

These two “first-timers” don’t fit the powerhouse mold since 2014.

Michigan was coming off of their best season in over 20 years, and Cincinnati (being a Group of 5 team) needed a miracle undefeated season to grasp the number 4 spot in the Playoff. It is likely that NIL did not affect this season as much as it will affect seasons in the future, but the irony is glaring.

The first year of NIL legality saw two new teams to the Playoff. This is the complete opposite effect that many skeptical critics of NIL predicted would occur.

Although it has only been a year, NIL is sure to shake up the college football world. The demographic of college football could drastically change in the coming years with this addition. It is definitely something to keep an eye on.



### NOTABLE NIL DEALS: BY THE NUMBERS

BRYCE YOUNG → \$1,000,000

QUINN EWERS → \$1,400,000

DJ UIAGALELEI → \$1,500,000

2021 GEORGIA TECH FOOTBALL → \$404 Per athlete