

Social Media and Sports Collide

By: Anslee Wood

It is no secret that social media is both most people's best and worst enemy. From fashion trends to brand deals, it has pretty much everything you need. But what about student athletes' use of social media? How do their brand deals and potential flaunting of their lavish lifestyles impact their playing time and potential punishments on and off the field?

Humans are creatures of habit. For most of us, our bedtime routine is time to relax and unwind from a long day. Scrolling through social media, like Instagram or TikTok however, has been found to lead to detrimental gametime stats the next day. A [study](#) done at Stony Brook University looked at 112 players from 2009-2016 and their nighttime social media scrolling between 11pm and 7am compared to their next day points scored, rebounds, minutes played, turnovers, fouls, and shooting accuracy. Dr. Hale and her team of sleep researchers found that the late night social media use was associated with less time played, fewer points scored, and fewer rebounds the next day.

[The Digital Media Treatment & Education Center](#) published an article with a study done in Canada in 2018 that found that college athletes typically spend 32 hours a week on their phones. Northern Michigan University also found that the average number of athletes spent 5.2 hours a day on their phones. So, what effect does this have on the athletes playing time? Coaches have reported that today's athletes have a hard time staying focused and are experiencing challenges with the communication needed for successful training. This has had such an impact that the NBA has also started to notice the trend in the locker room both pre and post-game activities of players.

With the NCAA's implementation of NIL, Name, Image, Likeness, the "legal" name practically writes its description itself. Essentially, NIL allows for student-athletes to receive compensation for the use of their personal "label." Being here in South Carolina, seeing names like Mitch Jeter broadcasting golf courses or suit stores, and [Spencer Rattler](#) having an NIL deal with Dick Dyer Mercedes-Benz, it is no question that these athletes are being very well taken care of. So how does the NIL work? All it requires is a brand to reach out to an [athlete](#), pay the athlete for their post, and the brand gets exposure, leading to an athlete getting paid again.

All sounds wonderful for these athletes, right? Maybe not. This hyperfocus on making money or being required to make posts everyday can have a huge toll on mental health, and like the Digital Media Treatment & Education Center found, this can lead to an addictive behavior, eventually causing depression or anxiety. We have seen several athletes come out about how mental health has greatly impacted their decision to continue playing, but also impact their performance. Harry Miller, a football player at Ohio State University is a prime example of this. He medically retired from the game of football to focus on his mental health battle. Athletes have begun to treat social media as a business. [Hyperfocusing](#) on presenting themselves as maybe someone they are not and promoting their potential future earnings can create not only these mental health issues, but also imposter syndrome. So how do we prevent this from happening? [We teach our athletes the importance of utilizing cost benefit analyses before agreeing to NIL deals.](#)

What about just social media posts in general before NIL and before college sports? Josh Allen of Wyoming was forced to delete tweets he made years before the 2018 NFL draft, which many believe led to his seventh overall pick. Several high school coaches have also started lecturing their players about the importance of not posting controversial messages on social

media. Many coaches also reported in a study that many football players lost scholarship opportunities because of a post they [made](#).

Although there are many negative impacts of using social media, there are some positive ones as well. During 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic took place, triathlete Jan Frodeno completed a triathlon within his own four walls. He was also able to raise 22,000 euros for hospitals in the area. Looking at what an athlete can bring to a program, such as gaining a positive response from a brand can create an atmosphere that leads to athletes wanting to perform better. This can lead to more fan engagement due to a higher presence on social media, an increased revenue for sports programs, and create vital [relationships](#) between schools and brands.

Social media, just like most everything else in the world, can have both positive and negative effects on student athletes. From both a financial and mental health perspective, it is important to emphasize just how necessary it is to inform our athletes what they are getting themselves into. Prioritizing informed and healthy decisions over the amount of money an athlete can earn from their likeness can lead to more deals in the future and the ability to better the new NIL space.