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Name, Image, Likeness: How Women are Pioneers in College Athletics.

Introduction

The day is June 10, 1963, and you, a young female, are listening attentively to the remarks of President John F. Kennedy regarding the Equal Pay Act, eliminating your days of being treated differently in the workspace for being a woman (“Equal Pay for Equal Work”). Fast forward to July 1, 2021, when the Senate passed a bill to allow all college athletes to profit off their name, image, and likeness (NIL) (Hill and Wohlwend). This day will forever change the world of college sports as you now know, forgoing the days of amateurism while welcoming the days of NIL collectives that pay student-athletes.

This paper will examine the diverse impacts of gender equality for women in the world of name, image, and likeness in college athletics, featuring both the pros and the cons. While NIL policies open new avenues for female athletes to gain new heights of financial independence, visibility and platforms, and empowerment, they also reveal the ongoing battle for equal opportunity and the wage gap. By assessing these pros and cons, this paper will help provide a deeper grasp of how NIL initiatives can simultaneously drive progress and inequalities in collegiate sports.

Background

Throughout all periods, gender discrimination has been very prevalent in society. Everything predating 1920 shows evidence that gender inequality was at the forefront of every

civilization (Quffa 143). For example, women did not have the right to basic privileges like voting or owning property. It wasn't until after Congress decided to rule in favor of the 19th Amendment, which allowed women to begin their journey of equality, affording them the same rights as their male counterparts in the United States. ("History of Gender (in)Equality").

Within the broad debate of gender equality, the United States finds itself in much turmoil. As of late, women have been advocating for equal pay and opportunities in the sports world, and according to On3, a company that releases data from name, image, and likeness deals, reported that "9 of the top 100 highest NIL earning athletes are females" ("On3 NIL 100"). In agreeance with this information, Opendorse, a company that releases relevant statistics on NIL, shows that "female athletes make up only 22.9% of the total NIL compensation" ("Women's Sports and NIL Success" 2). These studies lead the average American to question the pros and cons of name, image, and likeness policies on females in college sports.

Pros

To list the pros that NIL policies have on female student-athletes in the United States, these females receive greater financial independence, visibility and platforms, and empowerment. Jay Bilas, one of the most well-known college basketball analysts for ESPN, believes "all evidence indicates that NIL has enhanced women's sports and brought more attention to its best and most charismatic athletes" (Bilas).

All across the nation, female athletes becoming independent based on earnings from their name, image, and likeness. One trusted report shows that athletes such as Caitlin Clark and Livvy Dunne make \$3.1 million and \$3.6 million respectively through NIL deals (Blasi). Another trusted paper reports two twin basketball players for the University of Miami accumulating roughly \$1.7 million in sponsorship deals (Williams 376). Women like these stellar

athletes are profiting more off their talents and abilities on and off the court now more than ever before, which leads to greater financial freedoms and independence.

Another resource female athletes are using throughout the country is that they are using this NIL platform to be seen and go viral. In a thesis paper written by a graduate student at Texas State University, the author did a survey where she found that “89.6% of respondents, with varying levels of agreement, stated they believe social media is the best way for women athletes to highlight their athletic skill to benefit from NIL” (Dalal 24). Social media has undoubtedly become the driving factor for women’s added success through NIL. World-class athletes like Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka have used their social media presence to talk about their battle with mental health, impacting countless people who struggle as well (Summers). As we can see, social media allows female athletes to push for equality, talk about subjects that matter, and make a change in this world one post at a time.

This fight to be seen through different means has been a topic of discussion because of the lack of change in recent years. One blog that talks very frequently about females’ battle with gender equality in sports, stated in “2019 that women accounted for just over 5.1% of overall sports coverage on SportsCenter” (Garrett). With that in mind, this blogger believes that the importance of valuing and seeing female athletes has never been bigger than right now. NIL can help female athletes in college, in whatever division of college they may be in, to have a voice for something greater. It is now on our shoulders as citizens of the United States of America to see and hear them, through whatever media present.

Lastly, these female athletes are using their NIL opportunities to create a sensation of empowerment for their gender. Spearheading this change is Degree, a worldwide company that has been around since the 1960s. They have recently started an important initiative called

“Breaking Limits,” where they focus on breaking barriers to provide gender equality and empowerment to female athletes on a global scale (“Breaking Limits Through the Power of Movement”). According to a blog with many articles and discussions on female athletes and NIL, companies like Foot Locker, Adidas, and Puma, have capitalized on allowing female athletes to seize their moment through NIL deals (Wyman).

Through all of these initiatives and companies, females are playing pivotal roles in these milestones to the bigger goal ahead: gender equality. Every effort made by any collegiate female athlete helps women as a whole. One company, Obsesh, goes as far as to say that NIL is providing female athletes in college with opportunities to create a paradigm shift for young girls all across the country (Benson). Little girls all across the world will hear the success stories of female student-athletes that make it big in college. These athletes have a great opportunity to create real change in this world by empowering future generations through their name, image, and likeness.

Cons

On the other hand, NIL has been seen in a negative light about its impact on collegiate female athletes. Things like gender inequality and market opportunities are still at large for women. Another factor that is very present is the fact that NIL is still relatively new, thus we all are trying to navigate college athletics under this new light. Domonique Felix, a Senior for Sacred Hearts University’s 2023 volleyball team mentions in a peer-reviewed paper she published, that because NIL is still fresh, there are still many kinks to iron out, and only time will tell how to handle these situations. Because it is still new, she suggests more federal laws be passed to take control of how the states handle NIL (Felix pp. 11-12).

All over, we are seeing trends that NIL is hurting female student-athletes in newly discovered areas that do not come to mind first. To further illustrate this, we see that NIL is creating more inequality for females; Susan Shaw, a writer for Forbes who previously taught women and gender studies at Oregon State for more than two decades, reported that foreign female athletes cannot profit off of their name, image, and likeness in the United States. Devoted athletes like Phoebe Jakubczyk, a gymnast from the United Kingdom, and Grace Fetherstonhaugh, a record-setting track star from Canada, are not allowed the same privileges as American female athletes in college when it comes to NIL deals (Shaw).

Moreover, collegiate female athletes all across the country are reporting the different difficulties and stressors that NIL deals have on them. Two graduate students at Texas A&M University hosted a research study about the various effects NIL is having on female student-athletes; In their study, they noted that most often, the female student-athletes they studied commented on the struggles of determining what type of products they wanted to endorse. These student-athletes weighed this with what characteristics that company has at its core and how that company adds value to these females' portfolios (Harris and Brison 55). They were so focused on the money and earnings that would come from these NIL deals, that they had lost sight of what is most important, which is the values that these athletes want to share with the world.

Lastly, according to a published thesis paper by the University of Texas at Austin, "not only are female student-athletes realizing significantly less NIL opportunities than male student-athletes...male and female student-athletes in non-revenue generating sports generally do not attain the same number of NIL opportunities and value as athletes participating in revenue-generating sports" (Adamson 54) This idea that females who play sports that generate

revenue are the only important ones for a university is unsound and unfair. The thesis paper continues, “others believe that a school’s inability to provide substantially proportionate publicity to both male and female athletes should also trigger Title IX violations” (Adamson pp. 94-95). Essentially, this thesis paper provides evidence that opportunity inequality still lingers for collegiate female athletes solely on the fact of their gender.

Conclusion

The implementation of name, image, and likeness policies will have lasting effects in the context of college athletics, particularly for female athletes. This controversial topic is crucial in its importance because it underscores the broader struggle for gender equality, shedding light on both the progress made and the challenges that persist. NIL policies offer female athletes unprecedented opportunities for financial independence, increased visibility, and empowerment. They enable female student-athletes to leverage their athletic abilities in ways that had been previously unimagined.

However, the journey toward true equality remains unfinished. The disparities between male and female athletes, the exclusion of international female athletes from benefitting under current NIL regulations, and the added pressures faced by these female athletes highlight ongoing inequalities. In an economics paper issued by Smith College about the future implications as a result of NIL policies and laws, the authors conclude that it would be desirable to live in a world where no regulatory measures were necessary, but that we don’t live in that kind of world today (Meyer 303). One thing though is certain: The prevalent issues and concerns that surround us in the debate over gender equality underscore the need for continued policy refinement to ensure that female student-athletes can come out victorious in this battle.

Understanding the dual impact of NIL policies- both their potential to advance gender equality and their role in further perpetuating existing disparities- is vital for collegiate sports. It informs the efforts of policymakers, educational institutions, and advocacy groups to create a more inclusive and fair environment for all athletes alike. As we progress as a society, recognizing and addressing these complexities will help pave the way for a future where gender equality in sports becomes a reality. This exploration into name, image, and likeness policies and their effects on female athletes in college contributes to the ongoing battle for gender equality.

I used artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) in my introduction and conclusion paragraphs to help me gather my thoughts which were all over the place.

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