

To the Senate Commerce Committee Members:

Thank you all for allowing me to testify about the future of college sports and framework for federal Name, Image, Likeness legislation for college student-athletes. I would especially like to thank Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker.

We are at a critical juncture in college athletics, and it is not an exaggeration to say the future of college sports is in jeopardy. First, I want to thank you for taking the time and energy to help us develop a solution to this really complex issue. We need to make changes that are long overdue. I am 100% in favor of our players being able to monetize their NIL, and I appreciate your help in doing this at the national level.

My name is Mark Few, and I am the Head Men's Basketball Coach at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. I started my college coaching journey at Gonzaga University in 1990 as a graduate assistant. Early in my coaching career, Gonzaga's athletic programs were in the bottom 10 percent of NCAA's Division I. The University was in a tough position financially, and there were discussions of moving down athletic Divisions and reducing athletic offerings. Through a lot of hard work by a lot of people, first and foremost our fantastic student-athletes, we have been able to slowly climb to the top. I have seen this growth from every stage on our journey, and witnessed the importance of investing in student-athletes' welfare.

Having coached for 32 years I have seen a lot of change, but far and away the most change has taken place in the last 4 or 5 years, and this is especially in regards to our efforts to improve student-athlete wellbeing. Even 10-15 years ago, we weren't able to provide additional nutrition, access to mental health services, elite strength and conditioning, cost of attendance stipends, access to disability insurance policies, or the extensive life skills development opportunities that we offer today. At Gonzaga, we provide out-of-pocket healthcare expenses for two years after a student-athlete's injury, we pay for medical insurance, and we have a team of medical professionals dedicated to taking care of our student-athletes. We pay for mental health counseling. We do our very best to make sure our student-athletes are safe and well taken care of. Schools that cannot afford to provide this care to their student-athletes should be able to get assistance from the NCAA, because it is the right thing to do.

Even with all the recent change, the system is still long overdue for adjustments, especially in the NIL space. I really wished we would have addressed this a long time ago, but here we are and we need to make changes. My guys deserve to use their own name, image, and likeness in commercial endorsements and on social media, and I want them to make as much as they possibly can. They should be able to run a camp using their own name or sign autographs for money. That absolutely needs to happen now.

State NIL laws go into effect in less than a month, and only action here by Congress can maintain the level playing field. A consistent national law is critical because inconsistent state laws could permit institutions to directly enter the NIL market leading to improper inducements and resulting in a recruiting advantage. As an example, under NCAA rules, as a men's basketball

coach, I have the same number of scholarships to offer as my counterparts at Universities ten times the size of Gonzaga. That is one way a Jesuit school with 5,300 undergraduate students competes in the National Championship game twice in the past four NCAA tournaments.

There are so many positive things going on in college athletics that we don't hear about and experiences that are worth preserving and supporting. Kids who are able to go to college and be the first in their family to step in a college classroom and walk across the stage at graduation. Students that are encouraged to access mental health counseling that maybe they never asked for before or didn't realize they needed. Students are provided academic support and opportunities to prepare for life after college. Players who find a second family in the coaches and support staff at the university dedicated to ensuring they develop into the adults they should become. This year alone has been an incredible challenge, and the guys brought amazing resilience and grit and perseverance because they wanted to compete, they wanted to play, they wanted to join their brothers and find joy again by playing the sport they love at an elite level. While we know that there are challenges that remain in college athletics, I don't want to forget all the good happening on campuses throughout the country.

Students that have an opportunity to compete at the collegiate level realize a platform and exposure college athletics provides that doesn't exist anywhere else and for some, more importantly, it gives them access to a college education. An education that opens doors for their future whether they play professional sports down the road or not.

The NCAA and college sports model in the United States is unlike anything else. There really is no comparison, no model to emulate, and it has provided access to higher education to millions of students, an opportunity to form an incredible bond with a second family in their teammates. Let's find a solution that will empower, educate and provide an opportunity for these students to capitalize on their own NIL without compromising what makes attending college and playing college sports a special and transformational experience. Thank you.

Mark Few  
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