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Digital Branding and Athlete Revenue Models

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The financial structure of professional and collegiate athletics has undergone a significant transformation during the digital era. Historically dependent on league contracts and traditional endorsement agreements, athletes now operate within a decentralized digital marketplace shaped by social media engagement and Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policy reform. This paper argues that digital branding and NIL regulations have fundamentally redefined athlete revenue models by enabling diversified income streams independent of team-controlled exposure. Using financial trend analysis and case-based examples of high-profile NIL athletes, this study evaluates how direct platform monetization, sponsored content, and brand partnerships contribute to both financial expansion and revenue diversification. The findings contribute to sports finance scholarship by demonstrating that digital visibility now functions as an independent economic asset within modern athlete compensation structures. As the digital sports economy continues to evolve, understanding how online engagement translates into financial opportunity becomes increasingly important for both athletes and sports organizations.

Keywords: name image and likeness (NIL), collegiate athletics, student-athletes