

**INTERVIEWER:** NIL, those three letters spell a revolution in college sports. As of July 1, 2021, the NCAA allowed student athlete athletes to profit off their name, image, and likeness. Suddenly, you started hearing stories of Division I athletes signing million dollar NIL deals, some even before the ink on their high school diploma was dry.

But what about the humble Division III student athletes? For a lot of them, their sports careers end at graduation. Is it possible for them to build a brand, make an impact, and maybe even earn a little dough before they hang up their cleats for good?

Greg Peterson is athletic director at Bethel University in Arden Hills. August 31 of this year, Bethel became only the second Division III school in the country, and the first in Minnesota, to launch a platform that will enable their student athletes to capitalize on their name, image, and likeness. Greg joins me now. Thanks for coming on Minnesota Now, Greg.

**GREG** Hey. Thanks for having me. It's good to chat.

**PETERSON:**

**INTERVIEWER:** Now for those who aren't familiar with it, tell me a little bit about what changed in 2021 when the NCAA let name, image, and likeness deals get cut.

**GREG** Right. Essentially what happened is the NCAA said that a student athlete could then after that date-- they  
**PETERSON:** deregulated the policy, so now a student athlete could get compensated for their name, image, and likeness. So, essentially, they could do advertising based on their individual personality, their individual brand. And that would not conflict with their athletic eligibility.

**INTERVIEWER:** So things like autographs and sponsorships, things like that?

**GREG** Correct. And you saw it at the Division I level where it really has really blown up. And it could be a social media  
**PETERSON:** influencer. It could be running a sports camp. It could be advertising for a local business or organization.

So, really, the opportunities are almost endless. But I think what you're seeing at the Division I level is really astounding and is really surprising a lot of people that it has gone to the extent that it has.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, obviously, those athletes have a lot to bring to the table. Their games are televised. They have huge followings on social media. Even here in Minnesota, we're seeing some high school athletes that are getting deals, local booster kind of things, local pride kind of arrangements.

But small private colleges, I went to one, they tend to have those town-gown divisions. Bethel is a Division III school and a Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference member. They don't get a lot of attention off campus. Are the schools like Bethel really seeing much interest, or are students interested in participating?

**GREG** Well, I think what was really interesting for me as we went into this process. We put together a working group  
**PETERSON:** starting in May with several people from our athletic department, really trying to do a deep dive and see, is this something that we want to jump into with both feet? Do we want to stay completely out of it? Or do we want to tap our toe in the water? Or what do we want to do?

And what we really found is that, one, this isn't going away. It's ever changing. We're required to be in compliance with the NCAA. And really one thing that really surprised me is how many opportunities our student athletes could potentially have. But I think a Division III athlete isn't necessarily going to have the same types of opportunities as a Division I athlete.

One thing that really caught my attention in the midst of the conversations that we had is, if we were to have a student athlete who, as an example-- if they're really an accomplished musician, and they had a YouTube channel where they played their music or performed, and if they had enough followers where they got compensated for that, previously they would have to choose between doing music or competing in intercollegiate athletics.

Now they can do that. So I think those things are the opportunities a Division III student athlete is going to have. They're not going to be hundreds of thousands of dollars. But it might be smaller organizations where they do some exchange for product, or they do \$100 for a social media post, or run their own athletic camp.

So I think that what we see nationally at the Division I level isn't necessarily the same way it's going to impact Division III. But I think it will have an impact for students that really choose to jump into it.

And that's something that we've really emphasized with their student athletes is they can jump into it at whatever level they want. They can touch their toe in the water. They can go in full with both feet. Or they don't have to be involved at all. It's really up to them.

**INTERVIEWER:** And as I understand it, you've got now a formal portal for this activity, the Royal Exchange. Who built it? How does it work?

**GREG PETERSON:** So we partnered with a third-party vendor. They're called Influencer. And when we were in the midst of our working group, one thing we did find is that there are a lot of organizations and firms out there that are getting involved with this. So we connected with several different firms and, really, Influencer stood out for us because of a variety of reasons.

They do a really good job of integrating marketing opportunities. And in our department we talk a lot about, how do we use athletic excellence to make kingdom impact? And I thought this was a great opportunity for us to allow our student athletes to have a way to be excellent in another area of our lives. And that's something that we as a department talked about.

But then with Influencer, we also are required to be in compliance with NCAA rules. And Influencer does all of that. So this platform takes care of every compliance piece that we're required to be a part of. So that was really a big deal for us because, to be candid, we really don't have the bandwidth in terms of personnel to stay up-to-date with the changes and track every different relationship that's going on between a student athlete and a potential organization that they're going to work with. So that was really a big deal for us.

And then the third thing that was really a big selling point for us is that it becomes a platform where the student athlete and the organization or the firm, they work together right through the platform. And we don't have to be involved. And, actually, the platform isn't involved. It's just a way for to really promote a communication between a student athlete and the organization.

**INTERVIEWER:** But does Bethel have any relationship or any participation in this process to provide any content or look over these deals and relationships?

**GREG PETERSON:** Well, we don't have to. We're really staying out of it as much as we possibly can. From an NCAA standpoint, we are not allowed to broker deals. So we can't pair a student athlete up with an organization or with a business. We have to stay completely out of it.

So what this does, it essentially provides a platform for student athletes to go and promote themselves and connect with businesses on their own. So that was really an important thing for us because it allows us to be in compliance with the NCAA and stay out of it, while simultaneously giving opportunities for our student athletes to take advantage of it to whatever extent they want.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now that you talked a little bit about these small deals, \$100 social media posts or something like that, are there any Division III athletes that are really making this work?

**GREG PETERSON:** So there are, and it's on a different scale. But there are some stories of people who-- there's a student athlete out east, he's really jumped into it, trying to promote himself. And that's one thing that, I think, is really almost a side benefit to it is for a student that really wants to jump into it.

I think it can almost be viewed as part of a holistic education, where they're learning how to promote themselves, build their brand, their own personal brand. They're having opportunities to communicate and sell themselves to businesses and organizations in a way that they might not have as part of a regular four-year college experience.

**INTERVIEWER:** Part of a great college education there.

**GREG PETERSON:** Yes. That's right. Exactly. It's just becoming bigger and bigger.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well, thanks for that update. And thanks for being here, Greg.

**GREG PETERSON:** All right. Well, I appreciate you having me on. Take care.

**INTERVIEWER:** Greg Peterson is athletic director at Bethel University in Arden hills.