

The Power Conferences Are Looking to Fly Solo

Dristin K. Hughes

Kinesiology Department, SUNY Cortland

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Dr. Brian K. Richardson

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What we once knew as Power Five conferences in football, have been diminished to Power Four. This is only start, as they look to become more independent. As the Power Five still exist in all other sports, they believe the NCAA has failed them and they would be better off separate.

A split between the Power Five conferences and the NCAA used to be a longshot of an idea. Since last year, it is like a 20-foot putt. As time goes on and as revenues increase, the likelihood of the Power Five conferences operating under their own governing body become more possible by the day. Ross Dellenger of YAHOO Sports calls it a “looming reality,” (SBJ, 2023). The Athletic Director of Maryland, Damon Evans, shared his thoughts with the Knight Foundation, “he believes ‘five years from now that we will be at a point where we are sharing revenue with student-athletes,’” (SBJ, 2023). The NCAA has reached a point where they have handled NIL so poorly as well as other relations with student athletes, the Power Five wants out.

What would separation even look like? A coach in the SEC in August of 2023, said he “would be surprised if there is not a Division 1A and Division 1AA in the next five years. Like Football. Why would schools share the money if they do not have to?” (Shaw, 2023). It is confirmed that a move like this is circulated around money. For a while, student-athletes did not get paid. This was not a huge concern until attention rose when the NCAA and their schools were making money from their name, image, and likeness, or NIL. It would come to the attention of student-athletes, past and present, that the NCAA had video games with players’ build, number, likeness, abilities, and so on. However, the players were identified on these games as “G #34,” or “WR #11.” These “imaginary players,” looked an awful lot like the real people, acted like them, and even wore the same number. Not only this, but school stores sold jerseys with no

names but the number of a highly successful player. No credit nor share of profit was given to the athletes, and they had no idea. That is, until they did.

Student-athletes wanted their fair share. If the NCAA was going to use their name, image, and likeness, then they should be getting profit from it. The NCAA did not agree and refused to pay their student-athletes, who only a handful are on scholarships and if they get injured have their scholarship taken away. Student-athletes were left to find another solution. NIL deals. The NCAA then had to step in and make rules and regulations that ended up very unclear. Since “its failure to lead on NIL, the NCAA lacks the credibility – and more important, the authority – to direct the operations of high-earning college football programs,” (Moglia, 2023). Athletic Directors have to come to realize they are no longer running college athletics, but instead a business (Moglia, 2023). With the NCAA’s failure to lead they have also lost much of their authority. At the loss of such authority, the Power Five conferences will look to cash in on an opportunity to make more money than ever. The lines are blurred between college/amateur and professional. Which is which? Student-athletes at the Division 1 level play with the goal to go professional, and now with their eligibility for compensation, the Power Five conferences do not need the NCAA to compensate athletes, despite the NCAA needing them.

Two of the conferences, the Big 10 and the SEC are making a stand to the NCAA’s failure. The two conferences are “locking arms after the NCAA pleaded – unsuccessfully – for federal help to navigate NIL. Antitrust laws mount against college sports’ governing body,” (Toppmeyer, 2024). The NCAA faces repeated lawsuits against them after they have failed to obtain “congressional relief in the form of federal NIL legislation or antitrust exemption,” currently the “attorneys general of Tennessee and Virginia sued the NCAA in an ongoing antitrust case that alleges the NCAA’s meager NIL guidelines run afoul of the Sherman Antitrust

Act,” (Toppmeyer, 2024). The NCAA has failed time and time again to get it right while people like the Cavinder twins or Florida State Football have been left to pick up the pieces. The same coach from the SEC agreed in the NCAA’s failure, saying “The NCAA does very little to regulate things. They spend their money on things like lawyers to keep themselves out of the news. Now, the major schools have all the power from the tv money. What is the role the NCAA actually plays?” (Shaw, 2023). Moglia (2023) agrees, saying “The NCAA is neither competent nor empowered to handle revenue and deals at this level, or to foster a system that protects football programs and fairly compensates players.”

How do we save the future of college athletics? Notre Dame’s Athletic Director suggests “Futuristically, we need to recreate or relaunch the NCAA,” (SBJ, 2023). Maybe the NCAA does need a restart. They have lost all authority, respect, and leverage they once had. The NCAA must concede, that it has indeed handled NIL and paying student-athletes incorrectly. It may take years, but the best first thing the NCAA can do right now is start from scratch and come to new agreements upon NIL deals with conferences and schools with reasonable regulations. That may mean the NCAA possibly paying players and doing away with NIL. In that time, conferences must draw a line between amateur and professional competition. There are plenty of other places the money they get from revenues, can go. There are equipment managers, building managers and coaches that dedicate most of their time and all of their effort towards trying to make programs successful that we seem to have forgotten about.

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