

On Deck with Jim Henderson

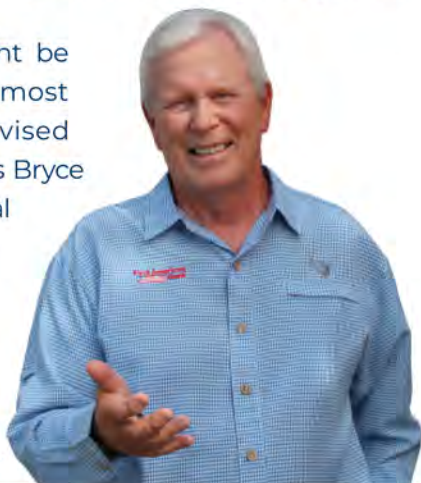
Watch any college football game on TV and you are likely to see either an AFLAC insurance commercial, a Dr. Pepper soda commercial, or both. Alabama football Coach, Nick Saban, starring in the first...his quarterback Bryce Young starring in the other.

Coaches making money off of commercials pre-dates Saban and his predecessor, Bear Bryant. Players making money off commercials is far more recent beginning with the state of California okaying NIL in 2019.

Name, Image, Likeness...which allows student athletes to shed their "amateur status" and make money off their athletic prowess and social network presence.

Saban recently said his profession has gotten much more difficult because of the allure of players seeking NIL riches; compounded by the advent of the transfer portal in 2008 that allows players to change schools without the previous penalty of sitting out a year. In subtle ways, they could be inter-connected, you might imagine.

"Come to Alabama" – a recruit might be enticed – and "You will play for the most prestigious and often nationally televised program in the nation." Such exposure, as Bryce Young has enjoyed, can result in a National Championship. Over a million dollars a year in off-the-field endorsement income and becoming an NFL first round draft choice of whom Saban has produced a record 41 in his career.



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Hard to compete as a rival coach with that recruiting pitch. But money can be a major equalizer, Saban seemed to argue, when he accused Texas A&M Coach Jimbo Fisher of buying the number one recruiting class in the nation in 2022 with NIL riches. Saban would eventually apologize, but it's interesting that Saban's 2022 record has been disappointing by Alabama's standards and Texas A&M's has been disastrous given the Aggies' expectations.

Will both programs deal with attrition as players seek elsewhere what this past season didn't deliver? Will each program have to select replacements from the transfer portal? Will both recruitment and retention be affected by well-healed boosters pouring money into businesses and side deals luring players to their schools in their cities?

Meanwhile the horses have left the barn. The NCAA decides how or if it's even possible to police the new normal in the wake of NIL and the transfer portal. Even high school athletes can sign NIL deals with more coming all the time. Whether the combination of the transfer portal and the advent of NIL is simply acknowledging that athletes have been under-compensated, their freedom overly-restricted or whether the system has not irretrievably sold out to greed and personal profit at the cost of individual sacrifice and teamwork...only the future can reveal.

God Bless,
Jim Henderson

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