



N.I.L. EDUCATION IS A KEY COMPONENT OF STRAIGHT LINE RECRUITING

BY ECCKER SPORTS GROUP
THSCA'S RESOURCE ON N.I.L. EDUCATION FOR COACHES & ATHLETES



When THSCA created the Straight Line Recruiting (SLR) program in 2018, the intent was to streamline communication and recruiting between high school and college coaches. The idea was simple: keep the high school head coach as the primary point of contact in student-athlete recruitment.

The benefits to that are two-fold. High school coaches aren't just the foremost experts in a student-athlete's physical abilities, but they also have critical insight into their emotional maturities, academic complexities, demeanor as a team leader, and responses to adversity. The high school coach is uniquely qualified to provide a holistic view of the athlete.

Concurrently, college coaches benefit from that comprehensive evaluation and have a higher likelihood of recruiting an athlete that will be a successful addition to the program. While neither of those truths changed over the years, somewhere along the line, the process became more layered.

"The landscape had changed," said Glen West, Assistant Executive Director of the Texas High School Coaches Association (THSCA). "There was a time that the college coach went to the high school coach and the recruiting took place right there at the high school campus. Before the college coach would offer an athlete a scholarship, they would ask the head coach if the student-athlete was in good standing.

"But over the years, it changed somewhat. Third parties got into the space and disrupted that relationship. We feel the best person to help is the high school coach. He's the one with the athlete the majority of the time. And it occurred to

us that there was a straight line from the college coach to the high school coach and the front porch of the athlete's home. The high school coach is there to serve both sides - the student-athlete and the college coach recruiting them."

The THSCA decided to act on that realization and developed the outline for SLR after meeting with both high school and college coaches and listening to their ideas and concerns throughout the recruiting process.

"Both sides have pulled together to make this happen," West said. "And really, what we're truly after is the student-athlete's wellbeing and how to help them."

Straight Line Recruiting was created to meet an emerging need. And while SLR has been widely adopted and lauded by high school and college coaches alike, the recruiting landscape was poised to change once again.

On June 21, 2021, in a unanimous 9-0 decision in *NCAA v. Alston*, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit that struck down NCAA caps on student-athlete academic benefits (like reimbursements) on antitrust grounds.

That decision ushered collegiate sports into a new era in which athletes can capitalize on their name, image, or likeness (NIL) without risking their eligibility. The results have created shock waves across the sports industry in the last year.

The trickle-down effect has bled into high school athletics too, challenging coaches, administrators, student-athletes, and their families with the complexities of the ever-changing NIL environment. Once again, change was on the horizon.

Currently, 14 states permit high school student-athletes to profit from their NIL, including Maine, New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Minnesota, Louisiana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Alaska, and California.

Eleven other states - New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Maryland, District of Columbia, Michigan, Indiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, South Dakota, Nevada, and Oregon - are considering permitting NIL with revisions to current bylaws.

The remaining 25 states, including Texas, have prohibited NIL - for now. (While this information is accurate at the time of publication, please refer to Eckersports.com/resource-hub for the most up-to-date news.)

As states and athletic associations review and amend bylaws, it becomes increasingly difficult to navigate the complexities of NIL. Building awareness and education are critical because while NIL is not currently permitted in Texas, it still directly impacts high school coaches and student-athlete recruitment.

"Right now, it's football season, but we are fielding some questions from parents and student-athletes and NIL discussions will come back up after the fall," said Drew Sanders, Vandegrift High School Head Coach and Athletic Coordinator.

"I think many coaches are caught up in the fact that Texas is a restricted state when it comes to NIL, but education is something that we need to help our kids navigate it and better prepare," Sanders continued. "The challenge is that, as coaches, we can barely keep up sometimes. We're the parent, spouse, coach, sometimes even teaching class, and now we're an expert on all things NIL? That's not possible."

"Having NIL resources and support gives me the chance to steer my student-athletes somewhere - the answers are available through Eckersports."

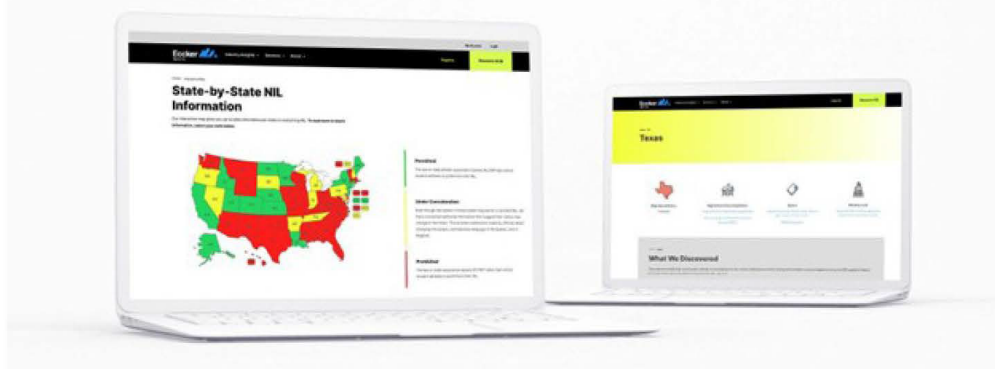
The fact remains that NIL will continue to be part of the recruitment conversation, and understanding how to guide, protect, and inform student-athletes is more important than ever. One critical aspect is the subtle differences in NIL policies across individual states and collegiate institutions, which drives a need for vetted, reliable information ahead of in-person visits or recruitment conversations. Eligibility infractions are still a major concern, and state-by-state updates are essential to mitigating unintentional missteps. This is where Eckersports and the NIL Playbook come in.

THSCA created the Straight Line Recruiting concept to support high school coaches, and when it identified the potential challenges of NIL, it took a similarly proactive approach to arm its coaches with the necessary education, resources, and tools to navigate the ever-changing landscape through a partnership with Eckersports.

"Whether you're for or against NIL, it's here and we need to be able to help people make informed decisions," said Glen West. "We see NIL education as part of Straight Line Recruiting and Eckersports is a critical component to the education piece."

The NIL environment is complicated, and few coaches have the time or resources required to educate themselves or their athletes on the latest regulations. Founded by two former coaches, Tim Prukop and Randy Eckers, Eckersports was created to address that need, offering a comprehensive six-module NIL Playbook course to educate coaches on NIL, including state-specific updates, videos, and a Resource HUB with up-to-date news and information.





“Before the Supreme Court ruling, everyone was talking about how NIL was going to change college sports,” said Tim Prukop, co-founder of Eccker Sports. “But Randy (Eccker) and I asked, ‘What about what this could do to high school sports?’ We talked to a few friends who are currently coaching high school football and they all told us the same thing: ‘I have no idea what it is and I don’t have the time to figure it out.’”

“We decided pretty quickly that we needed to build something to help support coaches around the country with accurate and timely information to help them stay informed on NIL and its impact on their high school community,” Eccker said.

Through Eccker Sports, members receive alerts and real-time updates like revised state bylaws and new NCAA guidance to give coaches the information they need to lead with knowledge. Additionally, an annual membership provides access to podcasts, webinars, and expert-led interviews.

“When it comes to NIL, you can’t say, ‘Oh, I read up on that once,’” West said. “It’s constantly changing and new updates are made all the time. With Eccker Sports, coaches get the quick, real-time information they need to navigate NIL without taking hours to locate news or read through complex regulations.”

Eccker Sports also authored a toolkit called Coach Assist to help coaches organize their knowledge of NIL and effectively communicate it with high school athletes and their families, potentially mitigating any eligibility infractions or unnecessary headaches. The provided resources include ready-to-go presentations, how-to guides, webinars, and access to industry experts.

Already this year, NIL has directly impacted student-athletes and coaches in Central Texas, and information and guidelines from Eccker Sports’ NIL Playbook have

helped prevent a potential problem or eligibility risk for the student-athlete. NIL isn’t currently permitted for high school athletes in Texas, but NIL is still here.

“We’re certainly getting questions about NIL,” said North Shore High School Head Coach Jon Kay. “Currently, it’s from both seniors and their parents who are Division I prospects, but we’re also hearing from others about the status around NIL while our athletes are in high school.”

The Straight Line Recruiting concept was created to keep the head coach as the primary point of contact, and by empowering coaches with NIL knowledge, THSCA and Eccker Sports are set to do the same.

“To effectively maintain Straight Line Recruiting,” continued Kay, “We have to have accurate information, otherwise we stand the risk of becoming a barrier in the process. We need to be informed on NIL so we’re doing our due diligence to stay on top of things and help guide those conversations.”

“When we’re in season, I can’t be finding time to Google the latest on NIL,” said Kay. “If I do, something else is going to drop. I need immediate and accurate information. Having access to something like Eccker Sports allows me to focus on my day-to-day needs while also remaining a source of accurate and relevant information. It’s critical.”

Staying informed through NIL education is a key component of recruitment conversations. For coaches who arm themselves with the resources to guide, protect, and inform their athletes, navigating the ever-changing landscape of NIL will be a more streamlined process, benefiting the coaches, student-athletes, and their families.

For more information on the Eccker Sports NIL Playbook, including the Resource HUB, Coach Assist toolkit, and comprehensive NIL courses, visit www.ecckersports.com.