

Testimony for the Record  
Submitted to the  
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
for the Hearing  
“Don’t Fumble Their Future: Positioning Student-Athletes for Success  
in School and Beyond”  
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“The tail is about to wag the dog.”

When legendary Coach Eddie G. Robinson, Sr. spoke those words before Congress on July 31, 1984, he was issuing a warning grounded in foresight and experience. In the wake of the *NCAA v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma* decision, which stripped the National Collegiate Athletic Association of control over television rights, Coach Robinson recognized that a new era was emerging. One where exposure, revenue, and influence would no longer be evenly distributed, rather concentrated among institutions with the most resources and visibility. He understood that television was not just a platform, but a power structure that would reshape recruiting, funding, and competitive balance, leaving under-resourced programs at a systemic disadvantage.

At Grambling State University, we do not speak about collegiate athletics in theory. We speak from lived experience. For more than a century, Grambling has stood as a place where opportunity was created in the absence of resources, where excellence was built through discipline, and where young men and women - many from underrepresented and under-resourced communities - found a pathway to education, leadership, and economic mobility through sport.

Ours is a program where history and purpose are inseparable. Coach Robinson did not simply build a winning program; he built a model of access and transformation that changed lives, families, and communities across generations.

Coach Robinson’s warning was not about resisting change, but about preserving the purpose of collegiate athletics. He feared that as external financial interests gained influence, the educational mission and developmental focus of the system would be overshadowed. Speaking on behalf of institutions without equal access to these growing revenue streams, he called for intentionality, for safeguards that would ensure equity, and for opportunity to remain central to the model. His words were a challenge to decision-makers to consider not just what college athletics could become, but what it should remain.

That warning has come to pass in today’s collegiate athletics landscape. What was once a caution has now become our reality.

From the perspective of an Athletic Director at a low-resource NCAA Division I institution, that forecast has materialized into a series of pressing structural realities that must be addressed with clarity and urgency.

As Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics, I carry the responsibility of leading a program rooted in tradition, opportunity, and transformation. My perspective is shaped not only by my professional experience in collegiate athletics, but also by my time as a former Division I basketball student-athlete at a low-resource institution.

Today, I have the privilege of serving student-athletes ensuring they are supported academically, competitively, and personally in an increasingly complex environment.

We are operating in a system where competitive balance is no longer a shared expectation, but an increasingly distant idea. Institutions with substantial financial backing exist in a different reality than those without. The gap is visible in recruiting, in retention, in facilities, in staffing, and ultimately, in outcomes. Without a unified national framework, disparities have widened to the point where equity is no longer the goal, survival is.

Competitive balance has shifted into something far more complex than wins and losses. Programs with access to significant financial resources are functioning in a different ecosystem altogether. They are able to invest heavily in athlete compensation opportunities in ways that others simply cannot replicate. For institutions without those resources, the challenge is not just competing on the field, it is competing for relevance, for visibility, and for the ability to retain talent that has already been developed internally. The gap continues to widen and, without structural intervention, it becomes increasingly difficult to close.

Opportunity, which has long been the heartbeat of collegiate athletics, is also being constrained. Extended eligibility and shifting policies have slowed roster turnover, which directly impacts the number of available scholarships. At underfunded institutions, where each scholarship represents a critical investment, this creates a bottleneck. Talented high school student-athletes are finding fewer entry points, and programs are forced to make difficult decisions about how to allocate limited resources. Recruiting becomes less about potential and more about immediate need. As administrators, we are forced into difficult decisions that ripple into high school relationships,

recruiting pipelines, and the long-term sustainability of our programs. The consequence is not abstract. It is fewer scholarships. Fewer roster spots. Fewer chances for the next generation of student-athletes waiting for their opportunity.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of Name, Image, and Likeness activity has introduced a new layer of vulnerability. Without consistent national regulation, and states racing each other to enact legislation to create recruiting advantages for their flagship institutions, the NIL space has become difficult to monitor and even more difficult to guide. Student-athletes at under-resourced institutions often do not have access to the same level of legal counsel, education, or representation as those at larger programs. This creates an imbalance not only in earning potential, but in protection. Individuals with limited to zero qualifications are entering the space to take advantage of the confusion and chaos, and student-athletes are left to navigate agreements that carry real financial and legal consequences. Athletic departments are expected to support them, yet lack the authority to fully regulate the environment.

Overlaying all of this is a system of governance that is no longer stable. Policies are not just evolving, they are shifting in real time, often shaped by court decisions across multiple jurisdictions. Rules surrounding eligibility, transfers, and compensation have changed midseason. Coaches recruit under one set of expectations and compete under another. Administrators build budgets and compliance systems without clarity on what tomorrow's rules may be. The rule today may not be the rule tomorrow. A system without consistency cannot produce fairness.

And in the midst of this instability, we must ask a deeper question. What happens to the academic mission?

Collegiate athletics at its core has always been, and must remain, an educational model. For countless student-athletes, sport is the pathway to a degree, to upward mobility, to life beyond the game. But when the system becomes dominated by compensation structures, legal disputes, and external pressures, education risks becoming secondary. That is not a shift we can afford to ignore. It is a line we cannot afford to cross.

What becomes clear is this. Structure is no longer optional, it is necessary.

Organizations like the National Collegiate Athletic Association were designed to provide that structure. But without enforceable authority, governance becomes symbolic. Rules without enforcement are not rules, they are suggestions. And a system built on suggestions cannot sustain competitive balance or institutional accountability.

It is within this context that the Student Compensation and Opportunity through Rights and Endorsements Act, the SCORE Act, enters the conversation, not as a final solution, but as a critical step toward restoring order.

The SCORE Act offers something that has been missing, consistency. By establishing a national framework for NIL, and preempting the current patchwork of state laws, it provides clarity where confusion has reigned. It recognizes the modern reality that student-athletes should benefit from their name, image, and likeness, while also creating a more transparent and structured marketplace.

As the SCORE Act establishes a national framework for Name, Image, and Likeness activity, institutions will be required to carefully evaluate how resources, support services, and institutional involvement are distributed. Although NIL compensation is largely driven by market demand and individual visibility, universities cannot ignore their responsibility to maintain gender equity in the support structures surrounding those opportunities. This creates a nuanced challenge, as institutions must navigate a space where free-market dynamics intersect with federal compliance obligations.

The SCORE Act presents an opportunity to strengthen the principles of Title IX if approached with intention. Requirements that emphasize student-athlete support, including access to counseling, medical care, and the preservation of a broad range of varsity sports, can help protect opportunities for women's athletics and non-revenue programs. A consistent national policy may also allow institutions to build more equitable NIL education and development systems. However, concerns remain. If NIL earnings continue to be concentrated in high-profile men's sports, institutions may face increased pressure to demonstrate that their overall athletic programs still meet Title IX standards. Moving forward, the challenge will be ensuring that the growth of NIL and athlete compensation does not unintentionally widen gender disparities, but

instead evolves in a way that aligns with the longstanding commitment to equity in collegiate athletics.

The SCORE Act attempts to bring structure back to a system that has been operating without it.

But structure alone is not enough.

If competitive imbalance is not addressed, the divide between institutions will continue to widen, even under a national NIL framework. If eligibility and roster limitations are not recalibrated, access to opportunity will continue to decline. If stronger protections are not implemented, exploitation will simply adapt to new rules. And if governance authority remains vulnerable to ongoing legal disruption, instability will persist, regardless of policy.

The SCORE Act creates a foundation. What we build on it will determine the future of collegiate athletics.

Because this moment is not about resisting change. Change is already here.

The question is whether we will shape it with intention, grounded in equity, guided by structure, and anchored in education, or whether we will continue to react to it as it reshapes the system around us.

At an institution like Grambling State University, where athletics serves as a gateway to education and upward mobility, the policies we discuss today have immediate and lasting consequences.

Collegiate athletics is a uniquely American institution, full of opportunity, and it must be allowed to continue as such. I would not be sitting in this room today without collegiate sports opening the door for me, and I want that door to remain open for young men and women to follow.

The warning from Coach Robinson was never about control. It was about consequence.

And now, the responsibility to respond belongs to us.