

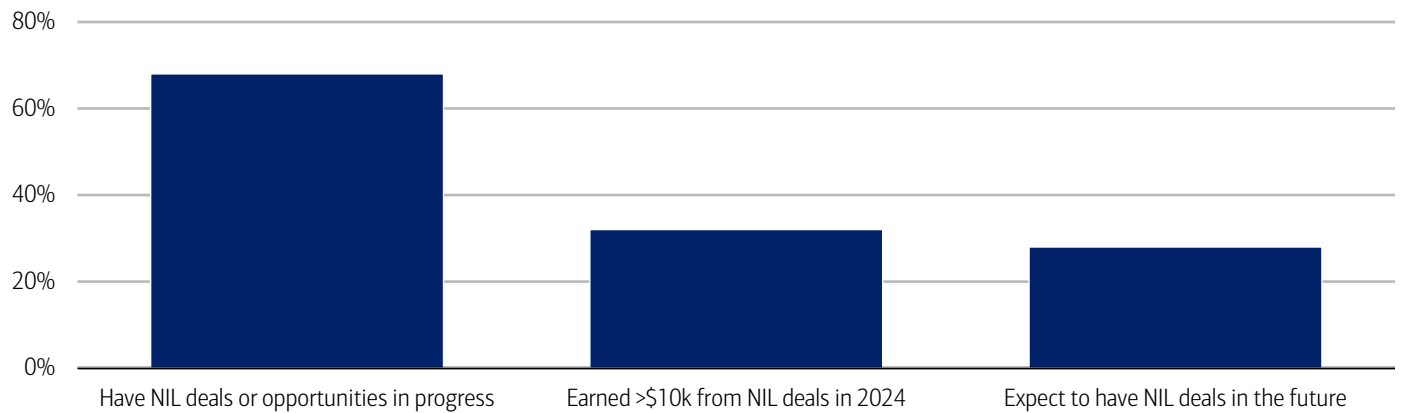
Daily Insights

How NIL is changing the game for young athletes

27 March 2026

At the time of Merrill's study, 68% of respondents had NIL deals or opportunities in progress

NIL deal expectations (% of respondents)



Source: Merrill's 2025 The financial reality of today's young athletes

BANK OF AMERICA INSTITUTE

As March brings heightened visibility to college basketball and its athletes, the growing impact of college athletics is becoming increasingly clear.

Brands are now partnering with college athletes and innovating with collaborations across fitness, health and fashion. In fact, according to a recent Merrill study, 74% of surveyed athletes were expecting \$25,000 or more from name, image and likeness (NIL) deals, sponsorships and related opportunities in 2025. Meanwhile, 32% had already earned \$10,000+ from NIL deals in 2024 – representing meaningful income for many young athletes.

For a deeper dive into today's sports economy, check out our recent publication: [The business of women's sports](#).

Methodology

Merrill's study on *The financial reality of today's young athletes* is based on research conducted among 159 high-potential athletes across the United States in 2025. High-potential athletes were defined as those age 18+ with significant earning potential, including athletes with existing or pending NIL deals of \$10,000 or more, those competing at professional levels or offered professional contracts, athletes representing their country in international competition, those competing in top conferences for their sport or those expecting to pursue professional athletics. The study participants represented diverse sports including basketball (18%), football (14%), baseball (11%), soccer (9%) and various other competitive athletics. Ages ranged from 18-24, with 81% between ages 18-21. The study examined financial behaviors, NIL participation, advisor relationships and financial planning priorities, providing comprehensive insights into this unique demographic's financial needs and preferences.

Contributors

Liz Everett Krisberg

Head of Bank of America Institute

David Michael Tinsley

Senior Economist, Bank of America Institute

Disclosures

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