

Insights, News & Events

# FBI AND NCAA TEAM UP AGAINST EXPLOITATION TARGETING STUDENT-ATHLETES: 5 STEPS FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Insights  
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## FBI and NCAA Team Up Against Exploitation Targeting Student-Athletes: 5 Steps for Your School

With NIL and marketing deals becoming more common for student-athletes, the FBI and NCAA want schools to educate student-athletes on how to protect themselves from financial or sexual exploitation. In an August 10 joint public statement, both institutions warned about cyber-enabled schemes targeting student-athletes, particularly those whose public visibility has increased through athletic participation and the promotional agreements that may come along with that new celebrity status. The notice calls on schools to ensure students have FBI resources and to strengthen their reporting protocols and support programs. This Insight will cover everything you need to know about the announcement and how your school can respond effectively.

### New Celebrity Status

Student-athletes are a growing target for scammers because their public profiles, online exposure, and potential revenues can create leverage for threats to disclose private images or information. As more athletes consider NIL or other deals, the FBI warns they face increased exposure to impersonation, credential-theft, extortion, or image-based abuse.

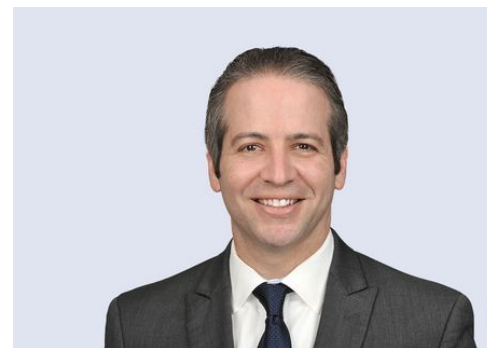
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## **Do you have a plan if a student discloses that a private image or their financial information has been exploited?**

The joint FBI and NCAA notice specifically asks coaches, compliance staff, and athletic-department leadership to review resources and develop a plan to respond to these types of incidents. Athletic department staff may be the first trusted resource a student-athlete approaches after receiving a threatening communication.

### **Warning Signs + FBI Recommendations**

The FBI notice provided several examples of schemes targeting student-athletes:

- Unsolicited text messages claiming that an account will be disabled unless the recipient provides a verification code
- Unsolicited emails reporting an alleged new account login and directing the recipient to a password-reset link
- Requests for a verification code, temporary password, PIN-reset code, payment, identifying information, or additional images
- Communications that threaten disclosure or distribution of private images unless the student complies with demands

Schools should consider setting a response plan for when an athlete reports suspected exploitation, potential extortion, or account compromise. That includes identifying the offices and staff responsible for intake, documentation, rapid-response, and support when these incidents occur.

### **The FBI advises student-athletes who are victims of exploitation to:**

- Avoid clicking links or opening unknown files
- Stop communicating with the suspected offender
- Decline demands for payment, identity verification, or additional content
- Keep and do not delete messages, emails, screenshots, account details, and images as evidence
- Report the matter promptly

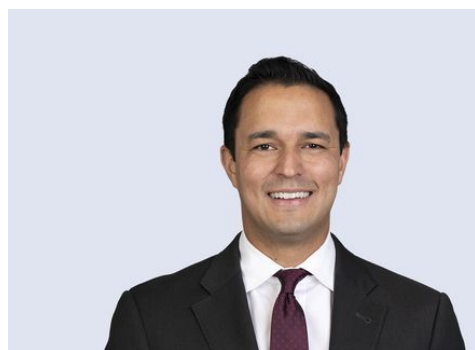
As students report such incidents to a trusted resource, schools should have in place a plan to determine quickly the



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appropriate legal, law enforcement, institutional, and other next steps.

The FBI notice cautions that paying an offender or otherwise complying with demands doesn't prevent distribution of exploitative content and frequently leads to further demands.

## 5 Practical Response Steps

While the notice doesn't require schools to adopt a specified formal policy, practical first steps include setting up a prevention training program or designating a school office to handle these reports. Educational institutions with athletic programs should consider taking the following five steps:

**1. Make reporting resources available to students and staff in advance.** Distribute the FBI/NCAA warning to student-athletes before the academic year, during team meetings, and as part of an NIL or social-media education program. The FBI stresses that athletic staff may be a student's first trusted point of contact, so providing resources before they are needed is a direct way to protect students.

**2. Develop a coordinated response plan.** Identify officials who should be involved in processing reports of exploitation. Consider including members of athletics, student affairs, campus police or security, Title IX personnel, and counseling services when developing your plan and for key roles within the response protocol. Set rules for preserving evidence while avoiding unnecessary circulation or storage of intimate images or private information.

**3. Train coaches and athletic trainers, as well as compliance, residence-life, counseling, and campus safety staff** on how to respond to these incidents. Ensure they are trained in the school's response plan and know how students should formally report exploitation.

**4. Educate student-athletes on the response plan,** as well as how to access confidential counseling, academic support, and reporting resources. As part of education programs, include examples of common schemes, as well as general account-security practices, including multifactor authentication and password-manager use.

**5. Reach out to counsel.** If you need assistance with setting up an exploitation response plan or program, contact a

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## **Conclusion**

We will continue to monitor legal developments related to student-athletes. If you have questions about revising school policies or conducting training for administrators and staff, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney or the authors of this Insight.