

#7 Bri Cassidy - Director of NIL Education, Opendorse | Athlete Education and Empowerment

Hi welcome to the Nil Lounge I'm your host Andrew Minor of the Nil Report and today's guest we have Bree Cassidy joining us Bree is the Director of Nil Education at open doors Bree how are you doing today I'm doing well Thanks for having me on today Of course it's a pleasure to have you have you joined open doors is doing lots of exciting things You're just telling me uh you guys are all going to Nebraska for HQ week um kind of get on the same page It sounds like and and map out the you know the rest of 2023 and 2024 Um but I'm I'm really you know the the crossroads of education and and business at for nil um for the athletes is is really important and you kind of head up that role at at open doors So I was just wondering if you could you know just introduce yourself and explain a little bit about what you do to our our viewers Absolutely Well again just want to appreciate you having me on uh as mentioned my name is Brie Cassidy I'm the Director of Education here at open doors My job is to lead all parts of the education part of our business Obviously athletes are at the center of what we do So educating athletes from brand building social media management all of the things that they're actively thinking about helping student athletes understand the difference between collective based nil versus commercial based nil and the work associated with those things helping coaches understand what this looks like from recruiting and their policies versus maybe another school that they're recruiting against policies and administrators helping them understand how they empower their student athletes and coach and thinking about this idea of recruitment versus retention of your current student athletes So really educating the whole ecosystem is what I get to do and it's a ton of fun and our team is growing you know being able to do education with Power Five division one schools all the way down to our NAINJC A schools and everybody in between It's it's been a blast I spend a lot of time on the road So it's kind of fun that I get to be this interview today in my home office and and not somewhere else but it's a little bit about what I do I'm a former student athlete I played softball in Nebraska originally from Southern California So Nebraska was drastically different for me uh but really enjoyed my experience and that really led as a springboard for me to go into the world of college athletics working in the world of administration and ultimately landed me at that open doors in the roll And now that's awesome I

I was gonna ask about that journey because I know you played uh you're a catcher at at Nebraska um played softball there for for your career What was the best part about that um you know that experience the student athlete experience uh playing for Nebraska And then what ultimately you know how did you ultimately find yourself wanting to pursue you know athlete you know administration to finding a role at open doors Absolutely It's always so funny when I tell people I'm from Southern California and then I went to Lincoln Nebraska for college to play an outdoor spring sport Like how in the world does that happen Uh but there's a couple of things that I always go to Number one was our coaches our coaching staff you know being at a power five division one school a lot of the conversations you have in recruiting you know you're talking about championships and things that you can do as a softball player or another sport like what your sport capabilities are which absolutely is a part of the conversation when you're competing at that level But at the end of the day I'm playing a sport that I know I'm not gonna be able to play professionally forever And if I do I'm not gonna make the world's greatest money either So there is this element of making sure that I found a coaching staff in an institution that was gonna support someone like me in my journey I was first generation they knew that education was of importance to me and really figuring out what life looks like after softball even though I was a competitor I wanted to compete at a high level But at the end of the day they cared about the bigger picture which I believe Nebraska does a phenomenal job of being able to walk in and have different benefits like a training table And to know that we're gonna have the best meals provided to us every day to having our nutritionist to having our dedicated academic advisors and free study hall and free tutors and a free computer Like all of these different things that people often forget about in the day to day life of a student athlete Nebraska always takes care of that and they make sure they do a really good job of providing that holistic student athlete experience regardless of the sport you play And my coaches were really kind of the the icing and icing on the cake and cherry on top So really enjoyed that during that time Initially I wanted to coach first I thought I was gonna play softball forever Number one I was still living in that world but then I wanted to coach explored that a little bit but then having a really great life skills advisor at the time Ashley Stone is her name She's actually an administrator at Oakland University Now we had this long conversation about being able to impact student athletes journeys and just being on the other side of what I was being served And she was like bree you really care a

lot about serving people in the way that you've been served all of your life I could see this as a really great route for you to go down from a professional standpoint and it really opened up my eyes I I never thought that that would be something that I would do I didn't even know that it was a job until I was a college student athlete So going into a master's program focused on athletic administration really opened my eyes to to all parts of what college athletics looks like and thought I would always be in an athletic department and climb that ladder Uh so it it is a little bit different for me being on the outside and not being in an athletic department but it's been really cool to still work with athletic departments all over the country where I feel like I haven't lost that connection Yeah definitely Um so your senior season was 2019 at Nebraska which is right before really the the turning point of course COVID and then the turning point of nil being introduced um to college athletes and and being you know quote unquote legalized right by the NCAA Um I'm sure there was a little bit of culture shock coming from California to to Nebraska Uh Would you say that the same how would you describe the uh you know I guess maybe the cul culture shock of nil being introduced you know you were kind of one of those last athletes that was that was playing before nil happened What how can you take your experience and compare it to what athletes are currently experiencing Yeah it's so crazy to think back what it was like then versus now and thinking hm maybe if I would have gotten injured or maybe would have red shirted one year I would have hit COVID would would have meant a COVID year which also would have meant an il uh so it's fun to draw that line But nonetheless I think the biggest thing is at the end of the day these student athletes are still trying to get their degree they're still trying to be the best they can on the field and that hasn't changed and I feel like that gets missed in the conversation all the time So at the end of the day they're still doing the same things on a day to day basis But now from my perspective student athletes are given their rights to monetize off of their name image and likeness camps and lessons was something that I really wanted to do and I was a student athlete And if I did I couldn't create a flyer I couldn't go out and post on social media and say hey come get catching lessons with Bree come do hitting lessons with Bree It would just have to be a word of mouth thing that people knew that I was open to doing those and that is really difficult So now just giving athletes that freedom of choice and freedom of monetization has been a massive game changer and some student athletes have engaged and others haven't just from an interest or an understanding standpoint but it's been really cool to see the empowerment

that's happening with student athletes There's this next level ownership that's happening of student athletes taking control of their own brand understanding and having conversations sooner about what they want like to look like what matters to them the the brand that they wanna build that's ultimately gonna serve them for the rest of their lives So I think it's just accelerated conversations and is for student athletes to think about things a little bit sooner and at the end of the day they get to make money off of it So it's it's kind of fun to to think about all of that all in the same bucket Yeah that's pretty cool Um would you how I wanted to kind of understand a little bit more how you would describe and and um your day in a life of of your role what you do working with athletes administrators collectives even um what's kind of the the day to day schedule of of of you Yeah I spend a lot of time on the road So typically during the school year I'm on the road on a different campus every week So a couple weeks ago I was at Oregon State then the next week I was at Minnesota State who's a hybrid D two D one having D one hockey programs And then in the next week I'm at a school like Providence who's a division one but not a Power Five And then I go to a division three of hard and simmons in Texas So it it I can be everywhere in a lot of different places and having lots of different levels of conversation So that's typically what my weeks look like on the front end And then a part of our role is also serving on the partner strategy side So being a success manager for a select number of schools so there's a handful of schools that I work with that are partners of open doors on more of an intimate basis to make sure that we're having those reoccurring monthly calls that they're thinking about the right strategy They know the most up to date compliance updates that they're implementing all of the things that we're seeing that can help drive dollars to their athletes boost up their you know their efforts as a department publicly or even internally And so it's a little bit of that as well too In addition to my actual like education servicing part of my job with our schools that pay for zoom education or in person on campus education and even create just really creating different ways And it's fun because our company is all remote But the unique thing about the education team is we actually get to be in the trenches in person with our schools and we can come back and be that voice for them about the things that we're hearing the things that we're seeing because it's different right We can get on zoom calls we can ask the questions when you're there with the athletes when you're there with the coaches It's unlike any other So it's fun kind of being that middle man to come back to our team and say here are the things that schools are actively

thinking about or come back to our team who is full of success managers and say here are some things that this school is going to try that I think could work really well for other schools that we should be sharing with everybody So that's a lot of what it looks like especially during the school year And then the summer is a lot of planning recapping data tracking making sure that we're filling schools in on everything great that happened in the last year and starting to plan on what the next school year could look for Yeah that's that's intense I would imagine Maybe traveling is probably the best part of your your job of seeing different campus interacting with um the athletes Uh I'm I'm curious what very many different players right in in college athletics what are the you know kind of the unique talk talking points that you've experienced um that the you know administrators wanna know versus you know that actual athletes wanna know when they're talking with you Yeah I'd say one of the biggest things and it goes back to the question you asked me earlier about what's different between when I was an athlete versus now is now more than ever Everyone just wants to understand what in the world is going on What is our policy versus another school in my same state's policy versus our state versus a state who doesn't have a state law or another state who does have a state law and administrators and coaches want to know that because they want to know what they're up against you know when athletes get on social media and they see a good friend of theirs that goes to another school maybe doing a deal with marks and logos and they're being told at their school you can't do deals with marks and logos Now these athletes are coming to those administrators and coaches asking that question So helping provide that clarity both on the athlete side and the administrator and coaches side has been critical and because they just want to know what they're recruiting against what they're well positioned for especially from a policy perspective because it's something they've never really had to think about If you think about your traditional compliance rules everyone was really living under the same umbrella and that same thing cannot be said for nil and nil policy So it's tough for administrators and coaches because the athletes are coming to them with questions or coaches are coming to them and saying my buddy at this school is doing this thing Can I do that same thing And the answer might be no And the coaches don't really love that But on the athlete side beyond that I'd say the number one biggest thing has been athletes not understanding that name image and likeness is something that they have they see it as this unobtainable thing They say how can I get an il And when I hear that question it makes me laugh I'm like do you understand

what name image and likeness means Like you have a name you have an image you have likeness you're monetizing off of that So just really bridging that gap and helping them understand that It doesn't matter if you're a softball player at an NA I school in the middle of nowhere Kentucky or you're a football player at Oregon State and you're the star running back It doesn't matter It's about how you build your name and likeness and build that brand that you can turn that into opportunities for monetization And that's really the biggest gap you would think two years into this thing Athletes would have a really good understanding of what this looks like for them But it blows my mind every week that I'm on a campus So many athletes still feel like it's unobtainable It's not for them If you're not a football or men's basketball player or if you're not working with a collective they think it's not even an option which going into almost three years It's it's crazy that we're still living in that world Yeah I that's just it's just wild It's like what is the what how do I get nil is like you're you you have nil congratulations you have nil right That's that's wild That that's the biggest gap Um that that you you see out out there Um and especially as you know it develops into a billion dollar industry as you guys have you know open doors as reported uh based on your findings going into year three That's that's absolutely wild Um I I guess it is that also the biggest so with the biggest gap for administrators coaches just basically hey what can can we not do And then the players just like I'm just kind of wrapping their head around Hey I can do this or this is all I have to do Yeah I I would definitely say that you know it's been interesting to hear things coming out of the congressional hearings and we're gonna have another one coming out tomorrow actually which it'll be interesting to see what comes out of that But I you know coaches just want to know what they can and can't do to support their student athletes What's real that's another gap we're trying to fill is helping coaches actually understand the data What's what deals have actually been done What is actually what dollars have actually made it to athletes pockets versus not It's really kind of the same thing for the athletes too Uh Here what a a brand deal looks like Here's the expectations for a brand deal versus maybe a collective deal for those athletes who are doing deals with the collective and helping them understand those are two very different worlds And that is a challenge that that we're working to overcome from an education perspective helping athletes understand the difference of working with the collective versus a commercial based deal that requires you to build your brand to post on social media to drive ro I for a business that maybe you don't necessarily have to do

for a collective So there's a lot of different things but the end of the day it boils down to what this actually looks like and how easy it can be when you put in the work because it's a common misconception for both administrators but also the athletes too would you say that a lot of many athletes uh are just expecting collectives to kind of give them nil deals and um you know nil money and that's maybe where some of the confusion is where they just think it's something they're supposed to be receiving and not really realizing you know how much deeper it goes I think there's definitely not education happening around when they get a deal with the collective what that means and why they're getting that deal versus a commercial based deal and why a brand would want to work with them They might think oh I'm doing all of these deals of the collective This collective is supporting me They got me going out doing events in the community I'm signing autographs and helping them take a step back can recognize Well yes a collective may be paying you a certain amount for those things But brains and businesses when they invest in you whether it's through in kind compensation or whether they're actually investing cash they're hoping to get some sort of return on investment and their marketing campaigns There's business decisions being made you can say the same for collectors but it's very different from a commercial NIO standpoint And I think athletes don't necessarily understand that all the time because it's not being explained to them So automatically they just bucket it all together and they think holy crap I have to build a brand I have to post all these things on social People have to know what my engagement rate is There's all these different things that athletes have to think about on the commercial side that isn't necessarily being explained to them always So that's a a big gap that we're having to fill Got it Yeah it it makes sense Um Yeah I'm very very pro ale trying to learn you know I would always recommend from an educational piece like learn how to go out negotiate prospects cold call into the you know businesses and do things for yourself because the the collective well so to speak might dry up whether that be donors not donating anymore whether that you know athletes become employees and now the universities have to pay them and there's no need for collectives Um What's your what would be your what's your biggest uh number one piece of edu education advice to the athletes when you're on these campuses What's something that you always um it's universal You always tell every single athlete like this is the first step or this is what the highest piece of advice I can give you Yeah I always tell the athletes the power is in their hands to do whatever they want to do and and that could be

them owning camps and lessons It could be them posting a lot on social media and and promoting products on social It could be being an entrepreneur and starting their business that they wanna run long term and they wanna capture an audience right now that will help build that brand awareness later down the road whatever it is own it you have the power to own it You're in a position where people want to work with you So if you want to put in the work the value and the opportunity can be massive And I think they're not told that enough and in most rooms it really lights up some eyes of like oh it's I didn't know it was that simple or I didn't even see myself doing something like that or I didn't know that was an option So it can be pretty fun and leads to some good conversation Absolutely Um from a school standpoint as well as an athlete standpoint But for the schools that you visit with um and you don't have to name names But what uh what let me rephrase this as I'm thinking in my head But what what schools uh that are having success with nil what are the main reasons for that Like how are they how are those schools building their program and working with the athletes to have you know this nil success And is it translating to on court on field uh success as well that that you've seen Yeah it's a good question There's this idea that we always talk about with administrators of before athletes help schools make money in a variety of ways multimedia rights selling tickets all that fun stuff And now schools that have shifted their mindset and understand that they're helping their athletes make money Those are the ones that are really capitalizing of How do I get more dollars in my athletes pockets How do it create more opportunities for them How do I provide the resources that they want and they need to set themselves up for the most success So when when schools can confidently answer those questions we typically see them do really great stuff Um I'll use Minnesota State man Cato as an example There are division two with two division one men's and women's ice hockey programs They've made more money than a lot of division one schools have honestly without a collective they have done a phenomenal job of empowering their student athletes to understand all of their options that are available to them They help them get connected with folks in the local community and just help emphasize the fact that these people coming to your games These are folks showing up to the fan fest These are people in the stands They want to support you They've been supporting you as a student athlete Now there's a business opportunity here that you can really lean into that You can monetize it in a variety of ways The empowerment is real And I talk about that all the time is the more the

student athletes are empowered The better the school is gonna be and then that school being all in on things like promoting something like a marketplace or educating publicly what a deal actually looks like Sometimes schools will you know get a marketplace or get an exchange or whatever technology they're partnering with and they just hope that people come in and do deals with athletes It's like well fans have seen these horror stories donors have seen these horror stories businesses have seen these horror stories of athletes losing their eligibility over getting a ride to an air or a free meal that even though we just assume that they understand what name of a likeness means or that they can do a deal with an athlete that doesn't mean they know how it doesn't mean that they know what it means to engage with an athlete So the schools that do a good job of bridging that gap have been really successful in a variety of ways and you know it can lead thing it it could lead to things like successful collectives But ultimately having that holistic approach of empowering your student athletes bridging the gap between the external stakeholders that are going to be doing deals with athletes creates a really good world to live in making sure they know what you know how you can do this and that you can do this type thing Yeah it's really it's really good I would imagine Nebraska is is very similar especially with the volleyball um day that that obviously broke world records recently and everything that they do down there in Lincoln Um yeah it's really really impressive One thing I'd add to that as you know in in Nebraska it's you see volleyball players being on the biggest stage and the whole world blowing up over volleyball day which is amazing But at the end of the day those athletes are not afraid to connect with the community and do things that may be more impact driven versus compensation driven And I feel like that's stuff that's often missed in the media You have Kenzie Knuckles who was on the volleyball team She's not there anymore She graduated but was willing to put a video out on social media and say hey world did you know you can connect with me now I'd love to do a video chat with you or maybe come to a practice or connect for somebody's birthday She's not gonna make a bunch of money A collective is always going to pay her more She's always gonna make more by doing a bigger brain deal But being able to have that human side and athletes being good about that human side and schools encouraging that It's it's been really fun to see that for some of the athletes that are on the biggest stage doing really great things They ultimately could work with anybody that they wanted to But being able to realize hey these are people in my community that support me It's important that I maintain those

connections and focused on impact versus compensation and just know that the compensation is going to happen on the back end Yeah nil success that I've seen at least has been when athletes are authentic with with their audience and and they do the things that that mean a lot to them and and if there's not a lot of money on on the opposite side of that for them so so be it you know it's they that's why I always encourage as well like right just go go do something that you wanna do you know Um You know I think the world is wide open for any athlete uh in terms of like it's your oyster you can kind of do whatever you want like do cool things and if there's not like a lot of money to be made like just go and do it see what happens and build and have fun with it it is something that I always uh you know try to communicate So that's it's really interesting I was gonna say I was just gonna ask of the players that that that you've worked with what what are some of the most unique or coolest nil deals that that you've seen Um and and been a part of uh maybe not you yourself connecting or or whatever but that you've seen you've worked with people and then and then you've seen them do some really cool uh deals Yeah there's so many we could probably spend a whole hour together talking about all of the the different things that I've seen There's one in particular I think of a a deal that open doors uh managed from a campaign perspective with degree and it was a walk on campaign It was so cool to hear those student ale stories of the power of being a walk on and what that means to them and then able to do a big deal with a big brand like degree People aren't talking about the walk ons doing nil deals So it's cool to see a brand be directly focused on a specific population and then hearing those athletes stories on the other side It's it's really cool to to hear things like that I think of a it's a story that we always share There is a volleyball player at organ and we went there for a campus visit and education visit and we just asked like hey like you do a really great job with open doors Like why have you been all in And you know you're a volleyball player or again there's naturally an elevated brain there But the work that the student athlete had done was unreal And she shared with us the fact that you know she lost her parents at a young age She had to take care of her her siblings that she had to live in a car for for a while and and really be kind of the caretaker for them And ultimately nil provided a way for her to grind to build a brand and make enough money to buy her own car So those are some of the cool things that you hear about where maybe it's not necessarily a specific nil deal but it's what those nil deals mean to those student athletes on the back end Right You I I love the the local stories We have an NA I school and down in

Kentucky and every week I see these kids uh there's a a set of twin uh women's basketball players and they call it like twin buckets and they have something like a pizza named after them at that local pizza shop that their team goes to all the time So you hear those fun ones but it's just so cool to see those student athletes have an opportunity to do some really fun things That's awesome built in advantage If you have a uh if you have a toy it seems like it Right No doubt no doubt Uh wow Well you uh I think you are in the front lines bree of uh you know really you know making trailblazing um the path for nil education and um obviously education and time are are two of the most critical assets for all these uh um student athletes and their time is limited that's a limited asset but their education is um endless Hopefully they can use the two to and use you to you know get educated and move fast in the time that they have and and and really capitalize on monetizing their nil Um I think thank you so much for joining uh joining me and and sharing a little bit of your experience really great insight Um I'll I'll turn over you just where can people find find you on uh on social media Um And and how can athletes maybe use uh open doors if they're not already familiar with uh with your marketplace Yeah absolutely For anyone curious to know more about open doors in general you can go to [open doors.com](https://www.opendoors.com) and check out the marketplace maybe pitch an athlete a deal If you've never done that before it's fun to the ground and look at their profile So athletes you can sign up for open doors for free even if your school is not a partner use it as a place to do business manage your taxes have a brand do all of that fun stuff Uh But for anyone that again wants to learn more about open doors or myself you can find us on all social platforms Twitter tiktok uh Instagram I guess I shouldn't have said Twitter It's X now formally Twitter and then uh on our website Biz dot Open doors.com has a ton of great stuff but our open doors uh profiles at open doors We're always posting a ton of data I always try to share stuff on my personal pages If you just search Preity I try to highlight different on campuses that I'm going on or the stories of student ale and the fun things that we're doing and always happy to answer any questions So really appreciate the time and thank you for the work that you're doing in the space Of course thank you for joining and good luck Uh Good luck this week and good luck for the rest of the year moving forward Thank you