

Ohio State Athletic Director Ross Bjork Says School's NIL Collectives, Brand Affiliates Disbursed "Over 20 Million" To Football Players This Year



Just over two months before his retirement, former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith made it clear that the athletic department and its associates were doing whatever it takes to help the football program secure a national title, saying that he went “all in” during the offseason to help bring the Buckeyes a championship.

Smith and Ohio State’s efforts were clearly outlined by Smith’s predecessor and new Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork, who told Yahoo Sports’ Ross Dellenger at Big Ten Media Days on Tuesday that the school’s collectives and brand affiliates handed out “around \$20 million” to Buckeye football players this past year, a gaudy number that likely tops all other major programs.

This signals a significant philosophical change for Ohio State over the offseason regarding NIL and the transfer portal, where the Buckeyes — more than any year before — relied heavily on its top collectives and sponsors to generate enough money to help fortify their roster for the 2024 season, whether that be bringing in top transfer talent such as Caleb Downs or Will Howard, keeping NFL-ready Buckeyes such as Denzel Burke, Emeka Egbuka and Jack Sawyer in Columbus for another season or even signing top-rated recruits like Jeremiah Smith or Eddrick Houston.

While Bjork discussed with Dellenger the major efforts made by these collectives and brand affiliates — with the program’s top NIL collective, The Foundation, likely leading the way — he also touched on if this aggressive approach will continue into the future, a time where schools are set to pay its student-athletes up to a cap of 22 percent of the average revenue generated by power conference programs starting in 2025-26.

Bjork said he is unsure if the implementation of revenue sharing will have any impact on these gaudy

spending numbers in the future, but he feels an urgency to find a solution with the next recruiting cycle coming this winter.

“It’s too early to predict,” Bjork said. “How is it going to be broken down from a Title IX standpoint? The challenge is, we’re up against the clock. We’re signing athletes in football in December. We need some clarity sometime this fall.”

Bjork told Dellinger that — like many other schools — he and his staff are “modeling, analyzing and testing” different ways to distribute revenue against “legal analysis,” which looks at different spending scenarios ranging from men getting 80 percent of the annual revenue to a 50-50 split going to both men and women.

But, even with these wide ranges, the athletic director said he and his school will commit to following Title IX legislation, a stance he has taken numerous times since taking over for Smith in July.

“We all are going to follow Title IX,” Bjork said. “It applies to our athletic programs, universities, all of those things. But this is a new pocket of financial aid or compensation, a new bucket that was not contemplated when only financial aid and just grant-in-aids were talked about in the original Title IX legislation. We need a lot of analysis. What does the legal analysis say (about) this newfound bucket of money?”

This lack of clarity surrounding revenue sharing raises questions about the impact of NIL collectives moving forward, which could lose some influence in college football when revenue-sharing takes place. While Bjork did not have a full answer on how this change will change the role of collectives over time, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said he believes his program will continue to utilize and maximize their NIL resources for the foreseeable future.

“Yeah I do,” Day said at Big Ten Media Days when asked if collectives will still play a role with revenue sharing. “I still think they are going to be a part of this. There’s just more overall structure in terms of cap and all of those things. Until something happens that leads us to think that they aren’t going to be a part of this, I see it continuing the way it is right now.”