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Beyond the Deals: Student-Athlete Identity, Development, and NIL With 42U's Stephen Bienko

SPEAKERS

[Callan G. Stein](#) | [Christopher M. Brolley](#)

In this episode of *Highway to NIL*, Troutman Pepper Locke attorneys Cal Stein and Chris Brolley are joined by 42U CEO and former Division I student-athlete Stephen Bienko to discuss how NIL is reshaping college sports from the inside out. Stephen explains how 42U helps athletes understand their identity, decision-making, and long-term goals rather than chasing one-off NIL deals. The conversation explores how Power Four and mid-major programs are building NIL infrastructures, why women's and Olympic sports may offer the greatest growth opportunity, how student-athlete expectations have evolved since the early days of NIL, and how regulatory and compliance uncertainty is affecting administrators and athletes alike.

Key Topics Include:

- Stephen's athletic background, as well as the founding story and core mission of 42U (1:39)
- How 42U uses psychological assessments to focus on identity, decision-making, and long-term development, not just NIL transactions (5:40)
- Trends in internal NIL infrastructures (7:15)
- Differences in NIL approach between Power Four programs and mid-major/smaller schools (10:23)
- Conference- and sport-specific dynamics in NIL, and the rising commercial and NIL value of women's and Olympic sports such as volleyball and gymnastics (14:06)
- The evolution of student-athlete expectations from quick NIL deals to intentional brand-building, financial literacy, and career leverage (17:23)
- Differences in NIL engagement across gender, sport, and division level, and specifically women's volleyball as NIL growth opportunity (23:39)
- How shifting NCAA rules, state laws, litigation, and tools like NIL Go are impacting schools and athletes (35:17).

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