



# Beyond the Sponsorship Asset: Building Revenue and Strategic Partnerships in College Athletics

Commercial sponsorship is becoming an increasingly important source of revenue for college athletics.

Since the landmark [House v. NCAA settlement](#) took effect in July 2025, participating Division I schools have been able to provide roughly \$20.5 million in direct payments and other benefits to athletes in the first year, adding to the already substantial cost of running a competitive program.

Football field logos, jersey patches, and other emerging assets are creating new revenue opportunities and possibilities for strategic brand partnerships. But they also raise a practical question: What do you charge for an asset that's barely been sold before?

## Athletic departments face enormous financial pressure

The new athlete payments arrived on top of an already expensive operation. Even before revenue sharing began, 94% of Division I athletics programs were spending more than they generated in athletics revenue, according to [a 2026 U.S. Government Accountability Office analysis](#). The median gap was \$20.6 million.



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On a smaller scale, consider the [University of Michigan](#). For fiscal year 2026, the athletic department budgeted \$20.5 million for revenue sharing and another \$6.2 million for new scholarships associated with the House settlement. Even with one of the largest football stadiums in the country and the revenue that comes with it, Michigan projected needing \$15 million in university support to balance its \$266.3 million athletics budget.

Schools are increasingly finding money in places that weren't for sale before. A corporate logo on a football field. A patch on a player's jersey. Both have become valuable sponsorship assets just as athletics departments have more reason than ever to sell them.

As LSU athletic director [Verge Ausberry](#) put it after the school signed a seven-year jersey patch agreement, "Every day, in athletic departments in the United States today, you better be figuring out how you're going to generate more revenue. If you're not doing that, then you're gonna be dying."

The pressure looks different depending on where you sit. A football powerhouse filling a 100,000-seat stadium has different assets to work with than a smaller regional program. A conference can bundle opportunities

across multiple schools in ways an individual institution can't.

That makes the search for new revenue highly specific to each institution. The assets available, the market around them, and the ways they can be packaged or sold all vary.

## The market is moving faster than institutions can price it

As the economics of college athletics have changed, so have the rules governing what schools can sell. Until 2024, schools couldn't sell regular-season football field space to a commercial sponsor. When the NCAA changed its rules to allow advertisements in up to three locations on the field, a new market took shape quickly.

### Assets are being created and redefined

More than 90 schools have since sold field logo rights, according to IEG data. Progressive alone will appear on fields at 13 schools during the 2026 season, from Boise State and Syracuse to Georgia, Oregon, and USC. Clemson has signed [Prisma Health](#) for an on-field logo; Illinois has [Caterpillar](#).

Jersey patches have opened another significant source of sponsorship revenue.



## BRAND SPONSORSHIP STRATEGY FOR LEADING BRANDS

We will make a difference in your business. Our sponsorship strategy begins with a consultation to tailor a solution to your goals.



Conferences can also package rights across multiple programs, sports, or events rather than selling each opportunity separately.”

More than 65 schools have sold patches for 2026–27, representing more than \$190 million in committed annual rights fees, according to IEG estimates. The average agreement is worth nearly \$2.7 million a year, while the largest deals exceed \$20 million annually.

Two-thirds of college jersey patch deals signed to date have come from schools outside the Power 4, according to IEG’s Sponsorship Intelligence Database. Only 23 Power 4 schools have sold patches so far, leaving relatively few comparable deals to guide pricing.

### Commercial structure is changing

Most schools work with multimedia rights (MMR) partners, which bring established sales operations and brand relationships and can provide guaranteed revenue. But some institutions are taking more control of sponsorship sales. [BYU](#) has built its own corporate sponsorship operation, while [Fresno State](#) moved away from its traditional MMR model in 2026 to create Bulldog Sports Enterprises, a local agency that gives the university greater control over its brand and commercial assets.

Conferences can also package rights across multiple programs, sports, or events rather than selling each opportunity separately. [The Big 12’s agreement with Monster Energy](#) includes co-branded jerseys across football and men’s and women’s basketball, along with logos on playing surfaces. [The Atlantic 10’s partnership with Betterment](#) includes jersey patches at its women’s championship events.

With more assets to sell and more ways to sell them, institutions face a growing set of choices about which opportunities make sense to pursue.

### Why “sell more sponsorships” isn’t a strategy

The temptation is understandable. If a patch can bring in millions and a football field has suddenly become sellable, why not find every available surface and put a sponsor on it?

## THE BIG 12’S AGREEMENT WITH MONSTER ENERGY INCLUDES CO-BRANDED JERSEYS ACROSS FOOTBALL AND MEN’S AND WOMEN’S BASKETBALL.





Adding another brand within a category can weaken the exclusivity offered to an existing partner. Turning a previously untouched space into advertising may create revenue now while changing what makes that space distinctive.”

For generations, Michigan kept the Big House relatively free of advertising. When the university opened it to Coca-Cola, Meijer, and Google Gemini in 2026, Michigan described the move as “a deliberate evolution,” with new signage following a uniform maize, blue, or white visual standard designed to preserve the stadium’s character. Michigan considered more than what its stadium could earn. It had to decide what kind of commercial presence belonged there.

Every school will draw that line differently. Yet every new sponsorship affects what remains to sell. Adding another brand within a category can weaken the exclusivity offered to an existing partner. Turning a previously untouched space into advertising may create revenue now while changing what makes that space distinctive. Pricing a new asset too low can create a benchmark that follows the school into the next negotiation.

## **Commercial strategy starts with market evidence**

There’s no single model for commercial strategy in college athletics. A Power 4 program, a Group of 5 school, a mid-major, and a conference office each bring different assets, audiences, markets, and priorities to the table.

What they share is a market moving quickly. New assets are becoming available, new commercial structures are taking shape, and many of the most valuable opportunities have relatively little precedent behind them. Past deals can provide useful reference points, but they can’t answer every question about what an asset is worth or how it fits within an institution’s broader priorities.

Market intelligence provides the context precedent alone can’t. IEG’s Sponsorship Intelligence Database tracks more than 85,000 active sponsorship deals across sectors, continually updated through direct marketplace research—evidence of what brands are buying, what markets will support, and how opportunities compare across categories and industries.



# The Four Pillars of a Successful Commercial Strategy

Before putting another asset on the market, schools need to know what they already have and what it's worth. Four elements help turn that understanding into a commercial strategy:



## 1. An independent market perspective

Start outside your own walls. What are brands buying? What are comparable assets commanding? How are categories and deal structures changing? An outside view can help separate what an institution hopes an asset is worth from what the market will actually support.



## 2. A sponsorship asset and opportunity assessment

Before creating something new to sell, take stock of what already exists. The answer may reveal overlooked or underused assets as well as emerging opportunities, from jersey patches to spaces that have never previously carried a sponsor. Then consider those assets from a potential partner's perspective: what audiences, experiences, or opportunities could they offer a brand?



## 3. Defensible valuation and pricing

For established assets, comparable deals can provide a useful starting point. Newer categories are harder. IEG's Valuation Next methodology looks beyond fair market value to consider the value of sponsorship assets, use of likeness, and exclusivity, along with factors such as the competitive landscape and alignment with marketing priorities. The result isn't just a number, but context an institution can use to support negotiations and build the business case for a partnership.



## 4. Performance measurement

After signing a deal, schools also need to understand what the partnership delivered. That evidence can shape renewals, negotiations, and decisions about which assets deserve more—or less—emphasis next time.

# Build a Commercial Strategy Grounded in Evidence

New sponsorship assets create new revenue potential, but their value depends on more than what another school charged for a similar opportunity. Institutions need to understand what brands are buying, what their own assets can offer, how those opportunities should be valued, and what partnerships actually deliver over time.

IEG brings those pieces together through market intelligence and its Valuation Next methodology, helping institutions build a more informed, defensible commercial strategy for the next generation of sponsorship partnerships.

**IEG BRINGS THOSE  
PIECES TOGETHER  
THROUGH MARKET  
INTELLIGENCE  
AND ITS  
VALUATION NEXT  
METHODOLOGY.**



IEG is the leading authority in sponsorship consulting, trusted by brands and rights holders alike. For nearly four decades, IEG has provided the valuation, strategy, and market intelligence that allow organizations to enter, optimize, and exit sponsorship relationships with confidence.

**To learn more about how IEG can support your upcoming renewal, contact:**

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