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A Practical Guide to Coaching International Student-Athletes (ISAs) in Interscholastic and Collegiate Sports in the United States of America

Accepted for publication in the International Journal of Kinesiology in Higher Education.

Research Repository link: <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/41460/>

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/24711616.2025.2551927>

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**A Practical Guide to Coaching International Student-Athletes (ISAs) in Interscholastic and
Collegiate Sports in the United States of America**

Abstract

The rising presence of international student-athletes (ISAs) in U.S. interscholastic and collegiate sports presents unique challenges and opportunities for coaches. This practical guide addresses critical aspects of coaching ISAs, emphasizing cultural, athletic, academic, and financial considerations. Cultural adjustment, including overcoming language barriers, homesickness, and societal differences, is vital for ISAs' successful integration. Navigating features such as rigorous academic-athletic schedules, language proficiency, and the U.S. educational structure necessitate tailored support systems for ISAs. Coaches must foster inclusive team dynamics, establish effective communication strategies, and manage recruitment expectations. Financial challenges, including limited scholarship options and restrictions on earning from name, image, and likeness (NIL), require coaches to provide informed guidance and advocate for systemic reforms. By understanding and addressing these multifaceted issues, coaches can enhance ISAs' experiences, thus ensuring their holistic development and contributions to diverse athletic programs and a greater likelihood of athletic success. This resource provides practical strategies to optimize ISAs' athletic and academic performance and well-being, benefiting athletes, teams, and academic institutions.

A Practical Guide to Coaching International Student-Athletes (ISAs) in Interscholastic and Collegiate Sports in the United States of America

The number of international students studying in the United States (U.S.) colleges reached an all-time high of 1,057,188 during the 2022-2023 academic year. This is a 12 percent increase from the previous year and the fastest growth rate in over 40 years (Open Doors, 2023). More than 25,000 of these internationals are student-athletes (ISAs) enrolled at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) colleges and universities (NCAA, 2024). The percentage of ISAs is rising after a brief downturn during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 1). In 2022, 5,189 ISAs (42% men and 58% women) were first-year student-athletes competing in the NCAA Division I (12.8% of all athletes). Division II included 2,052 (60% men and 40% women) first-year student-athletes (7.4% of all athletes).

High school coaches have also seen an increase in foreign-born students who do not speak English at home. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2021, for children aged 5-17, 26% are foreign-born or native-born with at least one foreign-born parent. In addition, three-quarters of immigrant children are ELs (English Learners). Some EL students may be multilingual and learning English as a third or fourth language. (EL and EL staff/services are currently preferred over ESL (English as a Second Language) because it is more inclusive). ELs are identified based on their English proficiency and speaking a non-English language at home (Sugarman, 2023). During the 2014-2015 school year, the U.S. Department of Education reported 4,808,758 ELs, which has since risen steadily through 2019-2020 to 5,155,887 before the COVID-19 pandemic. These students are more likely to come from low-income and linguistically isolated households with parents who did not complete high school. This impacts the type of guidance these students

70 receive through high school graduation and the college application process. According to
71 Sugarman (2023), “It is critical for school staff to understand students’ backgrounds, especially
72 as migration trends shift, to provide appropriate resources and support for their linguistic,
73 academic, and socioemotional growth” (p.14).

74 As the number of ISAs coming to the U.S. increases, coaches face the challenge of
75 leading athletic programs comprised of athletes with increasingly diverse backgrounds while
76 developing strategies that effectively assimilate ISAs into the U.S. culture, academics, and
77 sports. Unfortunately, many coaches lack adequate knowledge, skills, and training (Baghurst,
78 2024) and will likely make mistakes, leading to additional problems for the coach, the ISA, and
79 the athletic program. These problems may include low player morale, lack of team cohesion, and
80 players at high risk of dropping out. Therefore, we present coaches (and sports administrators)
81 with several variables to consider when working with ISAs and provide practical suggestions to
82 ensure that ISAs can thrive within an athletic program. The articles discussed in this narrative
83 review began with materials for the graduate course International Perspectives in Coaching at
84 Florida State University. More articles were found through manual searches of the reference lists
85 in the course articles. Additional searches were conducted with the terms “international students”
86 and “international student athletes” along with “culture”, “academics”, “athletics”, and
87 “financial.” U.S. government and the NCAA websites were also searched for current laws and
88 guidelines. With the recent developments surrounding NIL legislation, news outlets were heavily
89 relied on as sources.

90 After researching, reading, and reviewing relevant articles, we identified recurring
91 challenges that were highlighted by ISAs. These were inductively grouped into broader themes
92 based on similarity of content, e.g., “Stress.” For the purposes of transparency, we considered the

development of sub-themes and their appropriate categorization. For example, we were mindful of the predominant context in which issues were discussed in the literature (i.e., the primary cause of the stress). Sub-themes were developed by identifying clusters of distinctly different content within each main theme, allowing us to organize more specific issues (e.g., NIL, Scholarships, and Minimizing Stress) under the broader theme heading. Where ambiguity existed, we prioritized the primary source of the challenge (e.g., financial hardship as a main driver of stress). This was an important and critical part of theme development and required several iterative versions that were shared back and forth between the research team.

Culture

International students are at risk of experiencing culture shock (Duchesne et al., 2011), defined as the “degree of social difficulty encountered in cross-cultural interaction” (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 168). This includes the numerous pressures for adjustment that individuals experience at the cognitive, behavioral, emotional, social, and physiological levels when they move to a new culture (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Cultural adjustment support often places a lesser emphasis on academic and athletic support for ISAs who may encounter discrimination, stereotyping, and a lack of cultural awareness (Hong, 2018).

Coaches of ISAs should be aware of the factors that cause culture shock. Homesickness, language barriers, food, cultural differences, and societal differences are all core factors that can exacerbate or reduce culture shock. However, coaches who develop a cultural awareness for their players have had great experiences with ISAs and domestic students (Duchesne et al., 2011). Several strategies in the following sections have proven effective in preparing athletes before and after arriving in a new environment.

Homesickness

Homesickness is one of the most common issues ISAs experience, but there are many ways coaches can help ISAs work through that stage of culture shock. “Homesickness has been defined as a search for familiar environments and means to create a belonging feeling. The inability to achieve it may result in a depressive state, a sense of rejection, and isolation” (Baghurst et al., 2018, p. 77). As ISAs transition, homesickness is a typical experience for them. However, thanks to modern technology, ISAs can connect with family members at home and talk with them often. Although time differences can make this challenging, connection through technology can help ISAs feel more connected to family and less homesick (Frawley, 2015). Coaches can help ISAs navigate time zones to schedule video and phone calls home.

The ability to travel home during school breaks can be challenging. For example, a track and field athlete from England reported that she could fly home for Christmas and summer break, but some of her teammates did not have the financial means (O. Bagg, personal communication, September 30, 2024). Spending time with her family has lessened her experience of homesickness. She stated that coaches should not recruit athletes if they cannot afford to go home. To help ISAs, within the rules of what is permitted and appropriate, coaches could invite them over for a family meal or ensure they have somewhere to go over shorter breaks, such as Thanksgiving and spring break.

Another connection to home for ISAs is the sport they play. It can remind them of home and why they chose to study in the U.S., or if their parents also decided to move, it could provide a sense of cultural connectedness. Coaches should note that practice may be the happiest and most comforting part of the day for a homesick ISA (Baghurst et al., 2018). ISAs have been found to cope with homesickness by remembering family and country of origin, making sure to stay busy, and dealing with each day at a time (Streno et al., 2020).

When coaching ISAs, coaches must view themselves as much more than just coaches. For coaches who assume responsibilities beyond merely managing practices, such as guardians, carers, mentors, etc., the experience of working with an ISA can positively and profoundly impact their lives. “Coaches described their initial role in the ISA transition as a “caretaker” and “sounding board,” which they hoped helped convey an understanding of the challenges faced, as well as recognition of the differences facing each athlete” (Streno et al., 2020, p. 42). One coach who has successfully helped ISAs integrate said,

I see things from a parent perspective too; you can give a hug and say everything is going to be okay, but you can’t always change the situation. The internationals seem to expect you to relate to them as equals and talk more as a person. In contrast, the Americans expect that you are going to talk down to them” (Duchesne et al., 2011, p. 59).

Language Barriers

Language barriers are a reality for many ISAs, even those who might come from English-speaking countries. The top ten countries of origin for ISAs are Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, Germany, Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and France (NCAA, 2024). English as a second language can prove challenging for many students. For example, one student-athlete reported that her Japanese teammate had to translate an entire textbook to understand it (Swim et al., 2023). In the same study, ISAs discussed how the language barrier made them feel left out and embarrassed for saying culturally inappropriate things. This can be the case even for ISAs from other English-speaking countries. For example, in the U.K., pants are undergarments, but in the U.S., pants are trousers. It is important to note that each ISA will experience his/her own degree of linguistic transition. Those from English-speaking countries may have different adaptation processes than their EL peers.

Coaches who try to assist athletes in overcoming language barriers help bridge the communication gap and create a smooth transition. A smooth transition is more than just better cultural understanding; it includes better practices and social opportunities for the ISA. Coaches can do this by speaking more slowly, enunciating, and refraining from using terms and expressions only used in the U.S.; if they do, they would be well-advised to take time out and explain their meaning. In addition, coaches should be patient with ISA language errors so that the ISA feels free to speak and practice their language skills. Indeed, many ISAs may not use perfect grammar or possess an accent different from those in the region. However, research has shown that speaking a language is one of the best strategies for learning a new language (Woodrow, 2006). Coaches can meet regularly with ISAs to facilitate the process and ensure that clear communication and instructions are understood.

Food

Another significant change for ISAs is diet (e.g., food type, quality, and quantity). Food is a big part of a culture, and an athlete who may have eaten a specific food type their whole life may now be forced to eat completely different foods. Many ISAs arrive in the U.S. and find that the portion sizes and healthy options differ. ISAs often talk about gaining weight, not understanding portion control, and being unsure how to lose the weight they gained in the process (Swim et al., 2023). Some institutions have dietitians available to work with sports teams. The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee provides visual “Athlete Plates” guides (website in reference) for eating that coaches can share with athletes if they do not have qualified nutrition staff (USOPC, n.d.).

Streno et al. (2020) reported that ISAs found “food selection, tipping, using hands to eat, and dorm-style meals as challenging parts of the transition because of the differences from their

home countries” (p. 43). Turick et al. (2020) noted that participants mentioned food and how hard it was to adapt to American food in every interview. Some participants said it was “greasy” and “unhealthy” and that they could not access many foods they were used to eating at home (p. 9). Food issues have been recognized by the NCAA (2022), which reported that ISAs do not fully understand how damaging fast food can be to the body or how measurements and nutrition labels work in the U.S. versus their home countries.

Food may seem inconsequential, but research suggests its contributions toward a smooth transition for an ISA moving to another country are significant (Turick et al., 2020). Coaches can help their athletes succeed by learning what food the athlete would like access to and preparing them for how the food systems work at their school/college. Coaches can take ISAs grocery shopping and connect them with the athletic nutrition staff (if available). Coaches should adopt a proactive stance by learning what the ISAs have experienced concerning diet and food-related education. Table 2 provides an overview of the challenges associated with food, how it affects the ISA, and practical strategies for what coaches can do to help.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences can go unnoticed by domestic student-athletes as they have lived in the U.S. their whole life. While only 27% of U.S. adults have never traveled abroad, 37% of those without a college degree have not (Silver, 2021). Small things such as greetings, gestures, punctuality, tipping, ways people dress, personal hygiene, and distinctions between social and professional interactions are all things that ISAs need guidance with (NCAA, 2024). Knowledge of these cultural details can go a long way in helping ISAs feel at home.

In a study where coaches shared their experiences coaching ISAs, one coach expressed how important it is for there to be an opportunity for ISAs to share their cultural experiences.

I try to be open to having internationals bring up different views and perspectives. I try not to say, 'I know you are from [country], but you are in America now, and this is how it is.' I try to enjoy their perspectives and tell them, 'I can learn from you, so tell me what you did over in [country], and we can use it.' (Duchesne et al., 2011, p. 57).

ISAs may not fully understand or appreciate the significance of issues, including racial or political tension in the U.S. Therefore, educating ISAs on the current culture is essential (NCAA, 2022). Coaches and teammates can ask ISAs to learn about their cultures and express a willingness to answer questions about American culture.

American society is more relaxed and less formal than many others, which can cause athletes not to understand the treatment of elders. Differences in climate, weather, transportation, and city life were described as important elements for ISAs' acclimation in a new environment (Streno et al., p. 41). ISAs may have trouble fitting into American society because they may have different religious beliefs, have different holidays, or not appreciate the significance that holidays such as Thanksgiving and Independence Day hold for Americans. Helping athletes understand these holidays and social norms is something that coaches can help with (Baghurst et al., 2018). For example, Ramadan is observed by many Muslim athletes and involves fasting from dawn until sunset. This can be problematic for coaches when planning training schedules, particularly during a competitive season. It is suggested that coaches carefully consider how best to work with ISAs by collaboratively engaging in conversations and planning relevant aspects of the schedule. To facilitate a deep appreciation of different cultures, coaches, and teammates can invite ISAs to their holiday celebrations and be curious about what national holidays or religious events they observe. Finally, coaches and teammates can also engage with ISAs to celebrate their holidays (e.g., Chinese New Year).

Athletics

Working with ISAs requires coaches to think creatively and maintain a key role in their lives. ISAs have a different view of university education than domestic students. A 2011 study interviewed 355 Division I student-athletes, of which 192 were international, and asked what the most significant consideration was when choosing a university (Popp, 2011). ISAs responded differently to domestic students; ISAs reported that their athletic scholarships and coaches' personalities were the most important. In contrast, domestic student-athletes considered their degree from a quality university, leading to a good job, as well as the overall reputation of the school, as the most important (Popp, 2011).

When coaches determine their coaching style for a team, it is essential to realize that not every athlete views their role on the team the same, nor do they have the same long-term goals. Ultimately, coaches desire to produce winning teams, but it is also important to remember that they play a role in developing the young men and women on their teams (Baghurst, 2023). ISAs bring their athletic skills to their respective institutions and bring cultural diversity, different ways of thinking, and languages that enrich these campuses (Hong, 2018). Coaches must develop plans that include recruiting, creating a team-family atmosphere, and effective communication to have a positive outcome for their team.

Recruiting

Many ISAs come from a more "independent" structure than they will face in a U.S. college athletics atmosphere (Hauff et al., 2021, p. 3). Coaches should be prepared to discuss with potential recruits what their schedules will look like once on campus. For example, Hauff et al. (2021) found that one of the recurring themes of difficult transition was navigating the structure of the athletics program. One athlete commented that "prior to attending a university in

the U.S., she got to pick when she went to golf and in what tournaments she played. Now, the university decides everything for the athletes including practice times and competitions” (Hauff et al., 2021, p. 4). For all athletes, particularly ISAs, this big adjustment should be discussed thoroughly to prepare the athlete for college.

If retaining the athlete is important to the program, the coach must be transparent with the athlete during the recruiting process. Often, the coach will be the only face-to-face contact the athlete will have with the program before arrival. Therefore, honesty regarding practice schedules, navigating the challenges of campus, dealing with the climate, and integrating into the surrounding community are all aspects that should be discussed. Hauff et al. (2021) included comments from one ISA that “coaches can talk to you and make everything sound nice... and like, when I came here I realized that our coaches are very different than what I experienced through recruiting” (p. 5).

Jean-Noel’s (2020) study found that ISAs felt respected and included when faced with positive coaching experiences. “Positive coaching experiences include speaking native languages, the coach having prior experience of being an ISA themselves, responding to individual training needs, setting up team bonding events, treating the ISAs with respect, not forcing ideology upon them, and making themselves available to the ISAs” (Jean-Noel, 2020, p. 68). These are good examples of how to recruit confidently and retain ISAs. Overall, it is recommended that coaches should be honest about what to expect and be available to help ISAs transition to their new team and community.

Most, if not all, high school coaches in the U.S. are prohibited from recruiting athletes. The Supreme Court of the United States affirmed this in the case of *Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Assn. v. Brentwood Academy* in 2007 (Walsh, 2007). Coaches should check their

state's athletic association rules for specific guidelines. However, coaches can give visibility to their program through other avenues, such as youth sports camps. High schools can attract students through academics and other programs. If the school's reach includes international students and ELs, honesty about what to expect and assistance programs should be included in promotions.

Team-Family Atmosphere

Although athletes are likely to be provided with academic advisors, and international students are often provided with additional support on campus and in schools, others, and most likely those in athletics, will largely, by default of time spent, become their primary circle. Coaches and other adults surrounding the sports program will become "advisors." Numerous studies have explored the transitions of ISAs, and a robust support system composed of teammates, coaches, friends, and family has been consistently seen as the most critical factor contributing to a successful transition (Pierce et al., 2011). Coaches should proactively create an atmosphere that emulates family. If need be, assign new ISAs to a teammate who can help them navigate the first few months of their college career, such as a seasoned ISA or domestic teammate. It is crucial that ISAs feel that they have a peer they can go to with social, academic, financial, and athletic questions or concerns. Ultimately, the goal is for each team member (domestic and international) to feel connected to multiple teammates like a family. However, at least initially, that connection may need to be orchestrated purposefully by the coach.

In a recent study, Hauff et al. (2021) investigated 24 Division I ISAs and reported that teammates are critical in the transition and retention of ISAs. One participant said that nine out of ten times, he would go to his teammates first for help regarding academic, financial, and personal matters before going to the coach, athletics, or university administration. In the same

study, a female veteran ISA said she accompanied new ISAs to help with tasks such as completing financial paperwork. She commented that when she began, she was very unsure and did not have anyone from athletics or her team to assist her. Consequently, she took it upon herself to help her teammates by going with them for financial aid, international student paperwork, and academic advising as much as possible (Hauff et al., 2021). Simple things like this can make a big difference!

Outside of practice and required contact, teammates should be encouraged to build genuine relationships with one another and make concerted efforts to include ISAs authentically. Jean-Noel's study of eight ISAs found the following to be true of all participants: "relationships were fostered through engaging in discussions, participating in team bonding activities, living with teammates as roommates, competing and traveling, and helping each other succeed" (2020, p. 67). Coaches can encourage these relationships early on by pairing their athletes with roommates, hosting and attending social events with the team, and following up often with ISAs to check on their acclimation with the school and team.

Communication

Coaches can help ISAs by being intentional in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Slang often differs from ISA's previous English language studies and can vary by sport, region, and culture. Nonverbal communication can also be nuanced and cultural. Eye contact and humor are two examples of nonverbal communication that can be interpreted differently in different cultures (Turick et al., 2020). As a coach, it is essential to note what forms of communication are the most effective in teaching and ensure the ISAs feel included and understood. In a study on how best to welcome ISAs to American university athletics, one coach made the following observation: "Communication norms can be different, even something as

small as nonverbal during a face-to-face conversation can be off-putting if you're not familiar with maybe some of the norms of that individual's culture or background" (Turick et al., 2020, p. 10). One participant who came from a culture that expresses affection more physically than the U.S. had to adjust to not hugging and kissing his friends. He said that "initially this left him feeling less connected to his teammates until he learned ways to express his appreciation for his teammates more verbally" (Jean-Noel, 2020, p. 86).

Communication begins with the mindset of being open to understanding the cultural backgrounds of the athletes that make up the team. A practical first step would be to ask the ISAs about their background and culture. One coach had the whole team learn five words in the ISA's language, "For example, Kaleigh's "five words" practice presents an opportunity for the ISA to learn English and for their support system to learn words from the ISA's home country" (Turick et al., 2020, p.13).

Academics

Campus Orientation

Specific to post-secondary education, each college and university will offer a unique experience; some will be better than others in providing services and support for ISAs. Participating in in-person campus visits before transitioning is extremely valuable to ISAs. For example, it allows them to meet the coach and team and speak "with compliance and academic advisors, friends currently competing in the U.S., and professional liaisons" (Streno et al., 2020, p. 42). In summary, all ISAs positively experienced these interactions and gained a richer understanding of the collegiate lifestyle and U.S. culture. Coaches and athletic departments can assist ISAs in connecting to the resources through an ISA-specific orientation. This provides an

opportunity for ISAs to meet and experience in-person groups and other international campus personnel and resources, giving them a solid foundation of support during their transition (Streno et al., 2020). In addition to an ISA orientation, coaches can schedule weekly check-ins with ISAs during their first semester.

English Language Proficiency

Proficiency in the English language dramatically affects the experience of many areas of ISAs. In particular, in the classroom, ISAs often cannot ask for help, fear asking for help, or cannot participate in class discussions (Frawley, 2015). One study found that

The less international students interact with others, the poorer their social and language skills become and the more disconfirmed they feel, all creating a negative cycle. Among those international college students for whom English is a second language, then, it is not surprising that language competency is a critical factor that emphatically affects self-concept and self-efficacy in work and study performance (Chen, 1999, p.52).

Improving English language skills is crucial academically for ISAs. As a practical strategy to help, coaches can connect ISAs with existing campus resources, provide a tutor, and help pair ISAs with a U.S.-born roommate and/or “buddy” in the same academic program (Baghurst et al., 2018). Many colleges and universities offer ESL (English as a second language) programs (ESL Directory, n.d.). Free online translation applications and resources, such as Microsoft Translator for Education and Google Translate, are available for teachers, students, and parents. Students may use the dictate function in word processing applications to make writing easier. One college coach reported asking professors to play videos with subtitles whenever possible to help ISAs stay current with conversations (Turick et al., 2020). Coaches

should remember that if ISAs struggle in the classroom, their college and high school athletic eligibility can be affected.

Concerning high school, Per Title VI, every school district in the U.S. must provide EL staff, services, and programs for students and communicate important school information with parents in a language they can understand (U.S. DOE, n.d.). High school coaches can follow suit by offering important team information such as expectations, codes of conduct, and schedules in appropriate languages. More recently, the development of artificial intelligence and other translation applications means that spoken and written language can be accurately and rapidly translated. While, to some extent, this technology helps with day-to-day communication, it may encourage ISAs to become reliant on this form of communication.

U.S. Academic Structure

In addition to English language proficiency challenges, ISAs face other classroom performance expectations. Often, ISAs expect to perform as well as or better than they did in their country of origin (Chen, 1999). Assessments, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) that most colleges use for admitting ISAs, are not good predictors of ISAs' academic success (Baghurst et al., 2018). Elementary and secondary public schools in the U.S. identify potential ELs through a home language survey during enrollment. Potential ELs are then assessed through an English language proficiency test in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The U.S. Department of Education (2017) outlines these requirements and provides a toolkit (website in references), but implementation and test selection are regulated by each state.

For ISAs, adjusting to the new educational system can often result in slower academic progress. Moreover, new grades that do not align with expectations can become significant stressors. Many ISAs are not accustomed to the prevalence of class participation and

presentations, which require creativity and communication skills (Chen, 1999). ISAs have reported that the U.S. university system differs significantly from what they expected. For example, students may struggle with unfamiliar and required subjects, but this can be helped by making tutors accessible (Streno et al., 2020). Most campuses have an international support center to help students with various aspects of academic study. In addition, coaches can help alleviate some academic stress by candidly informing ISAs about the educational structure at their university *before* the ISA comes to the U.S.

U.S. public high schools are required by law to provide ELs with services so they can participate meaningfully in educational programs. Assistance continues until the student attains English proficiency and can participate in school without support (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Coaches can collaborate with school EL staff to support the student-athlete best.

Academic Pace

For many ISAs, the pace of academic and athletic life is faster than they are accustomed to; therefore, effective time management is essential. Practice schedules are long, and courses cover the amount of material in a semester that they typically do in a year (Frawley, 2015). In a qualitative study, ISAs stated that they would have valued having more knowledge of and preparation for how intense academics might be before transitioning to the U.S. (Streno et al., 2020). Most colleges and universities provide academic assistance for all students (Baghurst et al., 2018). Coaches can work with international and academic assistance services to determine the best support for the ISA.

For students entering high school, the English Learner Toolkit recommends offering a newcomer program for new arrivals to the U.S. These programs are designed to help students

acclimate to U.S. schools and usually last no longer than one year (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Newcomer programs are suggested but not required. Coaches can and should advocate for such programs at their schools, particularly in areas where international students are common.

Financial

When discussing financial issues for ISAs, several problems emerge that coaches need to be aware of to support the individual appropriately. Ignorance of the financial situations they may face in the United States could create an unfortunate situation for these athletes. Understanding NIL (name, image, and likeness) and scholarships for high school and college is critical to the athlete's well-being. If coaches take the time to educate themselves on these issues, they will be better equipped to support their athletes.

NIL

One challenging area that ISAs face is the inability to earn income from NIL deals (Solomon et al., 2022). As of July 1, 2021, college student-athletes could earn income based on their name, image, and likeness. Unfortunately, "While some student-athletes are already bringing home six-figure deals, international student-athletes remain in the dark regarding their ability to cash in on NIL deals" (Davis et al., 2023, para. 1). Understanding how ISAs can earn income is incredibly important because college tuition costs more for out-of-state students, and sometimes even more for out-of-country students. A recent example of this issue was with a Division I basketball player from Purdue named Zach Edey, a Canadian attending the university on a visa, making it illegal for him to make money through a NIL deal (Schiffer, 2024). Despite his numerous accolades, he was unable to profit from this popularity. Coaches should appreciate

437 this issue and educate the athletes before arriving on campus. Often, a scholarship will not cover
438 the total cost, so the coach needs a plan to help cover the remaining costs. Promising that NIL
439 money will cover the remaining cost, knowingly or unknowingly, when it would not be allowed,
440 would be an unethical way to guarantee to land that star player the coach so desperately wants on
441 the roster.

442 More recently, some progress has been made in this area that might provide opportunities
443 for ISAs to make money from their universities. Typically, an international student would apply
444 and receive an F-1 Student Visa, allowing them to enter the United States as a full-time student
445 and attend an accredited academic institution that culminates in a degree. Under an F-1 Visa, the
446 student is not allowed to work off-campus for at least one year, and after that year, specific
447 requirements must be met to be allowed to work off-campus (USCIS, 2020). As of 2024,
448 students with an F-1 Visa can now apply for immigrant visas, a permanent labor certification,
449 and work for startups, giving them more work opportunities (UpGrad GSP, 2024). Progress like
450 this helps foster a more welcoming environment for ISAs pursuing their goals in the U.S.

451 A coach on a college campus should create good relationships with those responsible for
452 providing jobs to students on campus to help set up the athlete with a job upon arrival. This
453 could be one way of closing the financial gap between the scholarship offered and any remaining
454 tuition costs, housing, meal plans, etc. Receiving money through an active NIL deal is
455 considered working off-campus, which is unauthorized employment that could lead to the loss of
456 the student's F-1 Visa being revoked (International Student Services, 2024).

457 A loophole allows ISAs to earn income through passive NIL deals but not active ones.
458 Active and passive are distinct in that an active deal requires some form of labor from the
459 student-athlete, such as posting on social media or signing autographs. In contrast, a passive

agreement does not require labor from the athlete (Henderson, 2023). An example would be an NCAA football player giving a license to a gaming company to use their likeness in a video game (Henderson, 2023). If a coach is educated on this topic, they can seek out passive deals for their ISAs, which might be the difference between whether they can attend that specific university.

In April 2024, a new federal bill was proposed to amend these rules and allow ISAs to receive compensation for their name, image, and likeness (Villorin, 2024). This bill would remove a colossal hurdle exclusive to the ISA's experience if passed. There is also more legislation attempting to be passed that would determine whether Division I athletes should be classified as university employees and, as such, are entitled to minimum wage and overtime pay (Mericle, 2023). While discussions continue, coaches should pay close attention to these court proceedings because, if passed, ISAs would be university employees and, as a result, could receive active NIL deals.

NIL has also made an entrance into high school sports. Every state has its own legislation surrounding NIL, but overall, high school NIL deals are required to end with high school eligibility. As with collegiate coaches, high school coaches should stay current on local NIL rules (Goldberg, 2024), as each state has different regulations that are changing rapidly.

Scholarships

Due to the limitations on ISAs regarding NIL money, a large portion of their financial support needs to come from a combination of athletic and academic scholarships. Many college students rely on financial aid and loans to cover tuition, housing, books, etc. Once again, there are hurdles for ISAs that prevent them from receiving the same level of financial support that others receive. They are ineligible to receive federal financial aid, apply for a Work Study

Program, or receive federal student loans (NCSA, 2021). However, certain universities might assist ISAs based on need and can apply for private loans (NCSA, 2021). Once again, knowing what options are available to ISAs is crucial to ensuring the individual receives the support they need to succeed. Gathering resources for ISAs when it comes to scholarships and offering that list to them early in the recruiting process is an excellent, practical way to help with this situation. One such resource would be InternationalStudent.com, which offers vast resources such as a list of scholarships for exclusively international students (International Student Scholarship Search, 2023). Being aware of campus-specific scholarships and more general scholarships for ISAs allows coaches to clearly and effectively recruit, increasing the chances that the ISA can attend and remain at the institution.

In the 2022-2023 school year, the average amount given to international students from the top 533 undergraduate schools was \$26,800; however, 20 schools offered nearly \$77,000 of aid on average (Wood, 2023). Acting in the best interest of the ISA might mean pointing them in a different direction than the one both coach and athlete were hoping for, but placing the athlete's needs first is good coaching (Baghurst, 2023). The university may not offer many scholarships, has inadequate support systems for ISAs, and has little to no NIL money. This might mean encouraging ISAs to attend another university and helping set up a meeting with a coach or advisor from the other school. Coaches should make ISAs aware that tuition costs often increase each year. Additionally, the relationship between the cost of attendance and the amount of scholarship offered should be outlined by coaches to their ISAs. Illustrating this point, if a school provides large sums of money to international students but is also very expensive, it might not be worth the more significant scholarship amount.

Minimizing Stress

As a coach, being aware of these cost differences, scholarship opportunities, and having connections built with those at other universities helps put the ISA in a situation where they can be successful. The coach's primary role should be to create an environment where the ISA can access financial support. In a study researching the relationship between life stress (primary stressor), academic stressors (secondary stressor), perceived social support (stress mediator), and reactions to stressors (stress outcome), it was found that financial concerns are a primary stressor. This same study found that financial stress can affect academic performance and the individual's overall well-being (Misra et al., 2003).

One of the best ways to support ISAs is by creating the least stressful environment possible. Convincing an ISA to attend a university needs to be done from a holistic perspective, and it should not be done solely on how their athletic ability might improve a team. Coaches should continually research new legislation regarding financial support for ISAs, build significant connections with financial advisors, and, most importantly, have open, honest communication with prospective recruits.

Unfortunately, coaches do not consistently enact the recommendations above. For example, James, a hockey player, was verbally committed to a small Division I university because of the promises made to him. Before attending this university, he was highly successful and had the opportunity to withdraw his verbal commitment and gain offers to bigger and better universities. He remained loyal to his original choice and attended this school; however, he quickly realized that his situation was not what he was promised. The coach berated players, broke NCAA guidelines, and encouraged them to focus strictly on sports rather than academics. "The coach did what he needed to do to get James, even if that meant lying to him. James was

also promised a starting position, which had him extremely excited about his opportunity to attend this university” (Dechiario, 2018).

This situation could have been even worse had James been an ISA. He could have been thousands of miles away from home, struggling with a language he might barely understand, and with no way to get out due to a lack of finances. This case study example underscores the importance of honesty with ISAs and supporting them rather than misleading them.

Conclusion

This article presented many reasons why coaches should take the time to educate themselves on the issues presented. “Although there are many barriers associated with being from another country, coaches are placed in a unique situation that allows them to assist in integrating the athlete into the local community and culture” (Baghurst et al., 2018, p. 84). As has been discussed, culture, athletics, academics, and financial situations can all act as potential challenges for ISAs. However, coaches are vital stakeholders in supporting ISAs. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that coaches appreciate and understand the range of strategies shared in this article. Resources are available, but in practice, they are not always coordinated across coaching practices, student-athlete support services, and educational programming in collegiate sport settings. This article compiles the information together, and Tables two through five pair the challenges ISAs experience with practical actions for coaches. Finally, it is proposed that coaches consider partnering with their athletic departments and other high school and college campus resources to offer proactive support and opportunities for growth and development for ISAs and their entire team.

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Table 1

Overall Trends in International Student-Athlete Participation in Divisions I and II

Percentage of First-Year ISAs

Year	Division I	Division II
2017	11.9	6.8
2018	12.2	6.9
2019	12.6	7.3
2020	13.1	7.3
2021	12.3	6.5
2022	12.8	7.4

Note: Data shown is for first-year student-athletes (NCAA Research, 2023).

Table 2*Cultural Issues*

Issue	Effects on ISA	Coach Actions
Homesickness		
Culture shock	Experience depression, rejection, and isolation	Take on the role of caretaker or surrogate parent
Far from home and in different time zones	Miss family and have trouble connecting	Remind them to call home and work with them when opportunities conflict with practice schedules
Language Barriers		
Challenge of English as a second language	Time spent translating and a lack of understanding	Speak more slowly and clearly, and refrain from using terms and expressions only used in the U.S.

Saying culturally inappropriate things	Feel embarrassed and left out	Patience with ISA language errors
Food		
Trouble finding healthy options	Weight gain	Connect with nutrition staff
	Experience LEA (low energy availability)	Educate about American fast food
	Changes in mood	Share the “Athlete Plate” resource
		Provide options in an athletic environment
The system is different (tipping, using hands to eat, dorm-style meals)	Pressure to fit in and adapt quickly	Help explain the American system
		Take grocery shopping
		Connect with a host family for monthly meals
Food selection	Miss certain meals and comfort food	Be accepting and supportive of food preferences
		Consider restaurant selection when traveling
Cultural Differences		
Differences in greetings, punctuality, tipping, ways people dress, personal hygiene, and distinctions between social and professional interactions	Feel like they do not fit in	Ask about their culture and explain American culture
American culture is more relaxed and less formal	Misunderstand things like the treatment of elders	Explain what is appropriate in different situations
Religion	Trouble fitting in because they may have different religious beliefs	Work training schedules around religious practices

Holidays	May not understand American holidays, and teammates may not appreciate their holidays	Ask about their holiday traditions and invite them to your celebrations
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702 **Table 3**703 *Athletics*

Issue	Effects on ISA	Coach Actions
Recruiting		
Intense schedules	Trouble navigating athletic, academic, and campus life	Be honest about what to expect and be available to help ISAs transition
Team-Family Atmosphere		
ISAs rely on peers more than staff for help	Initially may not have the peer relationship	Pair with a seasoned teammate
		Host team social events
		Schedule regular check-ins
Communication		

Different verbal communication styles	Feel excluded	Have the team learn five words in ISA's language
Different non-verbal communication styles	Feel less connected	Ask about their background and culture

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713 **Table 4**714 *Academics*

Issue	Effects on ISA	Coach Actions
Campus Orientation		
Unfamiliar with collegiate lifestyle and U.S. culture	Lack of a solid foundation of support during their transition	In-person campus visit before the transition to begin making support connections
English Language Proficiency		
Fear of asking for help	Lack of classroom participation	Connect with campus resources, provide a tutor, pair with a domestic buddy, and ask professors to utilize subtitles

Inability to communicate	Poor social and language skills	Use and explain online translation applications and resources
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U.S. Academic Structure

Prevalence of class participation and presentations	Require creativity and communication skills	Provide tutors and connect with the international support center
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High-performance expectations	Academic stress	Candidly inform about the educational structure
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Academic Pace

Fast and intense	Trouble with time management	Work with athletic and international academic assistance services to determine the best support, such as study hall opportunities
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717 **Table 5**718 *Financial*

Issue	Effects on ISA	Coach Actions
NIL		
Expect NIL deals	Often ineligible to receive NIL funds	Stay current on NIL legislation
Ineligible for active NIL deals	Limits financial opportunities	Help find passive NIL deals
Scholarships		
Ineligible for federal financial aid and loans	Limits the ability to participate in work-study programs	Know available scholarships

Fixed scholarships with increasing tuition	The financial burden and stress increases	Be honest about tuition increases and consider increasing athletic scholarships each year to cover the difference
Stress		
Lack of financial support	Affects academic performance and overall well-being	Care for the athlete holistically and have open and honest conversations about finances during recruiting Connect with campus counselors and/or other licensed professionals

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