

NCAA Five-Year Eligibility Gives Athletes More Time, but Not More Security, K Altman Law Warns

More NCAA eligibility doesn't guarantee roster security. Athletes face legal, financial, and career risks many never see coming.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, August 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The NCAA's new Division I eligibility framework—and a recent federal injunction extending eligibility to certain athletes who began competing during the 2022-23 academic year—may give more college athletes the ability to pursue a fifth season.



A fifth year may extend eligibility but it doesn't guarantee the opportunity athletes believe they're returning for.

But K Altman Law cautions that being eligible to compete does not guarantee an athlete a place to compete.

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Keith Altman

The NCAA adopted a new age-based eligibility model in June that can permit qualifying Division I student-athletes to compete for as many as five seasons. The model eliminates several longstanding season-of-competition, redshirt, waiver and sport-specific eligibility rules while establishing a new eligibility window based principally on an athlete's age and college-enrollment timing.

The transition became more complicated when a Colorado federal court issued a class-wide preliminary injunction affecting certain Division I athletes who began competing during the 2022-23 academic year and completed four seasons by the end of 2025-26.

As The Associated Press reported, U.S. District Judge Charlotte Sweeney subsequently clarified

that the injunction grants eligible members of the affected class an additional season but does not override other NCAA requirements, including restrictions involving professional contracts, transfers, roster management and school-funded compensation. The NCAA has appealed the ruling.

The result is a potentially significant distinction for athletes and their families: eligibility may be expanded by rule or court order, but the athlete must still secure an actual opportunity from a school.

"An additional season can be valuable, but athletes should not assume that eligibility creates a right to a roster position, scholarship, revenue-sharing allocation or comparable role on the team," said Candice Lapham, Senior Litigator at K Altman Law. "For many athletes, this will be a high-stakes legal, financial and career decision.

Before committing to another year - or entering the transfer portal - they need to understand exactly what the school is offering, what conditions apply and what opportunities they may be giving up."



Keith Altman

The Fifth-Year Decision Extends Beyond NCAA Eligibility

K Altman Law recommends that athletes considering an additional season evaluate several separate issues.

Roster Position and Playing Role

An athlete should determine whether the school is offering a confirmed roster position and whether any representations concerning playing time, team role or competitive opportunity are documented or merely aspirational.

Coaching changes, incoming transfers, high school recruits, roster limits and changing team needs can materially alter an athlete's expected position.

Scholarship and Financial Support

Eligibility does not necessarily guarantee renewal or continuation of an athletic scholarship.

Athletes should understand:

- Whether athletic aid will continue;
- Whether the amount or terms of that aid may change;
- Whether graduate-school tuition and fees are covered;
- Whether housing, meals, medical treatment and other benefits continue;
- Whether the school can reduce or terminate assistance; and
- What appeal rights apply if financial support changes.

Revenue Sharing and NIL

A fifth season may create additional earning opportunities, but those opportunities should be evaluated independently.

Athletes should determine whether anticipated compensation comes from school-funded revenue sharing, third-party NIL arrangements, collectives, endorsements or some combination of those sources.

Any agreement should address compensation, required services, exclusivity, content ownership, termination rights, injury, transfer consequences, eligibility changes, payment deadlines and dispute procedures.

Transfer Consequences

An athlete who is eligible for another season may still face transfer-portal deadlines, admission requirements, graduate-program limitations, credit-transfer issues and school-specific roster restrictions.

Before entering the portal or leaving an existing institution, the athlete should understand whether another school has made a concrete offer and what happens if the expected opportunity does not materialize.

Academic and Professional Tradeoffs

A fifth season may allow an athlete to complete a degree or obtain graduate education. It can also delay employment, professional licensing, military service, additional schooling or entry into a professional sports career.

The relevant question is not simply whether the athlete can return. It is whether returning advances the athlete's broader educational, financial and professional objectives.

Written Commitments

Athletes and families should distinguish between informal recruiting conversations and enforceable written commitments.

Statements by coaches, staff members, collectives, donors or other representatives may not bind the university. Material terms involving roster status, financial aid, revenue sharing, NIL compensation, academic placement and support services should be reviewed carefully and documented whenever possible.

Broader Effects on High School Prospects

The additional eligibility available to older athletes may also affect younger players seeking their first college opportunity.

Returning fifth-year athletes may occupy roster positions, scholarships, revenue-sharing allocations and playing roles that otherwise would have been available to incoming freshmen or less-experienced college athletes.

High school prospects should therefore ask more detailed questions during recruiting, including:

- How many current athletes may return for an additional season;
- How many roster positions are genuinely available;
- Whether offers depend on another athlete leaving or declining to return;
- How the program plans to allocate scholarships and revenue-sharing funds;
- Whether the school is actively recruiting transfers for the same position; and
- What protections exist if the roster or coaching staff changes before enrollment.

"The eligibility change does not affect only athletes deciding whether to return," Lapham said. "It can move through the entire recruiting pipeline. A returning veteran may gain another opportunity, while an incoming athlete discovers that the roster position discussed during recruitment is no longer available. Both groups need clear information before making irreversible decisions."

K Altman Law advises student-athletes and families regarding NCAA eligibility, roster and scholarship disputes, transfers, NIL agreements, school-funded compensation, recruiting representations, disciplinary matters, Title IX and related civil-rights concerns.

Athletes and families facing time-sensitive eligibility, transfer or roster decisions may request a confidential consultation through K Altman Law.

Pending litigation note: The Colorado ruling is a preliminary injunction rather than a final adjudication of the parties' claims. The NCAA has appealed. Eligibility determinations remain dependent on the applicable court orders, NCAA rules, institutional policies and the athlete's individual circumstances. This release provides general information and does not constitute legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship.

About K Altman Law

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