

# Coaches race to master art of retention amid NIL

**BY MAURA CAREY**  
AP SPORTS WRITER

Whether it was an ACC, SEC, Big Ten or Big 12 coach taking the podium at media days, one theme remained consistent: In an era where revenue sharing and NIL opportunities can swiftly steer athletes toward the transfer portal, programs across the country are racing to master the art of player retention.

Its importance is clear to Arkansas coach Sam Pittman, who has seen all but five players from his 2023 recruiting class leave for different programs.

“Here’s what it’s not because of: the way they’re treated, because of the way they’re developed, because of the way they’re taught,” he said. “That’s not the reason. It could be playing time. It could be finances. Probably the majority of it is

finances, but you’d have to ask those guys.”

More than 3,000 Bowl Subdivision players reportedly entered the transfer portal this past spring, which would average out to about 22 players per team. For the Razorbacks, 10 starters will be back and one of them is senior defensive lineman Cam Ball. He has remained with Arkansas his entire career, a somewhat rare occurrence for an NFL hopeful these days.

“I’m just a loyal guy. I’m loyal to the state of Arkansas; Arkansas has been loyal to me,” Ball said.

Arkansas, like many schools, is also trying to scare up more money from donors as it faces the financial ramifications of the \$2.8 billion House settlement; last fall, the athletic director said the school needed some

\$12 million more annually to “be in the NIL game from a football perspective.” Besides the money, the Razorbacks have to find talented players; Ball grew up in Atlanta, just barely within the regional footprint in which Pittman prefers to recruit.

“We have to go outside our state,” Pittman said. “In-state recruiting has changed over the last three or four years because of NIL. So you have to think about the talent — who it is versus what pay is expected. So that’s been a little bit more difficult in our state.”

Pittman isn’t the only coach who wants prospects to be familiar with what their college experience will look like before making any life-changing decisions. Florida coach Billy Napier paints a clear picture

of life in Gainesville and the challenges and perks that come with it.

“We present our product in a way where we’re selling the degree, the alumni network, the Gator-made program, and you have to be up for the challenge of trying to get Florida back to where it’s been before,” he said. “And I think that’s one of the reasons we’ve been able to keep it together.”

Florida’s 2023 recruiting class remains mostly intact, and from Napier’s perspective, hungrier than ever. Compared to other SEC teams, the Gators have had more success with retention. Napier doesn’t think it’s a coincidence.

“We told them when they came in, you know, look, it’s not going to be all sunshine and rainbows here. We’re in this thing for the long haul,” Napier said. “I think a lot

of this is how you pitch it in recruiting. We’re going to continue to do that, and retention is more important than it’s ever been.”

Coaches scrambling to prevent transfers and maintain consistency isn’t exclusive to the SEC. The approval of the House settlement is a double-edged sword when it comes to retention, and Power Four schools and beyond are feeling the effects. Third-party NIL deals are no longer the only negotiation tactic schools need to worry about.

Complex contracts are becoming common and legal risks grow for athletes and programs alike as college football increasingly resembles the pros. Some deals are being negotiated solely by athletes as young as 18.

As a redshirt senior,

Louisville linebacker TJ Quinn is used to the process.

“I wouldn’t say I was nervous (to negotiate) because this is my third year of having to do that,” Quinn said. “You’ve got to kind of stand your ground with what you feel like is your worth. If you’re comfortable with their offer, then sign. Then you have some guys that’ll leave and go to schools to get more money and stuff. That was never really like a big pusher for me, to go out and get more money because I feel like I’m in a good situation here at Louisville.”

Quinn’s loyalty could be the most convincing negotiation tactic of them all. While programs use revenue-share dollars to sway prospective transfers, coaches have begun to reward loyalty.

## TRADE

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weeks because management has had to make a tough decision whether to buy or sell. Arizona had a 50-50 record after sweeping the St. Louis Cardinals following the All-Star break but were then swept by the Houston Astros, lost two of three to the Pittsburgh Pirates and two more to the Tigers.

Naylor’s already gone and he’ll help a Seattle lineup that could use a little more punch. Suárez is having one of the best seasons of his career,

slugging 36 homers over 104 games, and is arguably the best bat on the market.

Here’s a look at some of the top players who could be available as teams try to upgrade for the stretch run:

### **EUGENIO SUÁREZ, 3B, ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS**

Suarez is just an average defensive third baseman these days, but that’s not why teams want to acquire him. He’s got the kind of bat that can carry a team for weeks at a time, major pop from the right side of the plate. He has 312 career homers,

is well-liked in the locker room and has been productive in limited post-season at-bats with a .300 average.

### **MITCH KELLER, SP, PITTSBURGH PIRATES**

The 29-year-old Keller has been overshadowed in the Pirates’ rotation thanks to the emergence of young star Paul Skenes, but the right-hander has been a reliable starter for the past four seasons and was an All-Star in 2023. The one catch is it’ll take a sizable haul for the Pirates to make a deal: He’s under contract through 2028 as part of a relatively reason-

able \$77 million, five-year deal.

### **ZAC GALLEN, SP, ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS**

Gallen is having the worst full season of his career with a 7-12 record and 5.60 ERA but could still be an attractive add for a team that needs a starter. The 29-year-old right-hander has been one of the top pitchers in the National League over the past five years, finishing in the top 10 of the Cy Young Award voting in 2020, 2022 and 2023. His stuff is still good and he’s had a handful of dominant starts this season.

## BRAVES

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“I was worried that that was an oblique the way he reacted there. I don’t know, it’s just one of those things, you just have to deal with it. It’s not fun dealing with it, easy dealing with it,

but you just have to.”

Acuña walked off the field before a trainer followed him into the locker room.

Acuña is batting .306 with 14 homers and 26 RBIs in 55 games this season. He went 2 for 4 with a homer on Monday night.

Snitker said Eli White will play right field in Acuña’s absence.

## STOOPS

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chance to properly see game action against FCS Murray State, completing 10 of 14 passes for 130 yards and two touchdowns in a 48-6 victory.

From there, it was clear Boley was being molded into the future, not being left out of games at Texas and against Louisville, though these ventures were far less successful, resulting in 16 completed passes for 208 yards and three interceptions.

Nonetheless, he was a redshirt freshman and, coming out of Hodgenville, Kentucky, the Wildcats seemed eager to properly develop their in-state quarterback.

Over the summer before the beginning of workouts, Kentucky football Head Coach Mark Stoops refused to close the door on Boley being the next star at UK.

“We have a ton of faith and confidence in Cutter Boley, so I’m not saying that it’s over,” Stoops told The Cats’ Pause regarding picking up Calzada. “But it would have been hard for me to walk into this season with a redshirt freshman with only three games experience.”

Stoops doubled down on this stance and his statement that he “doesn’t ever guarantee anybody as a starter” on Monday, speaking at the podium in the Kroger Field media room.

“Zach and Cutter are two guys that we feel very good about,” he said. “On Saturday you’ll see them participate and you’ll see what they can do. But we have a lot of

confidence in both guys and we’ll go from there.”

While Stoops would say quite definitively that, if Kentucky were to play a game this week, “Zach would be under center,” he furthered that by saying, “It’s all open to move by the first game.”

The longest-tenured coach in the SEC didn’t stop the conversation regarding quarterbacks there, though, addressing the elephant in the room that many felt contributed to frustrating play from Levis, Leary and Vandagriff in years prior.

“We all know we need to play better at that position, but we all know we need to play better around them,” Stoops said. “We need to give them some time, we need to make tough catches, we need to have

balance and we need to help those QBs out.”

He also went on to describe the importance of having a third option like returning Wildcat Beau Allen as an unselfish mentor to Boley and even Calzada as he learns a new program.

“Having Beau Allen back... such a mature, smart, almost player-coach,” Stoops said. “We can invest a ton of reps in the top two guys and they need a ton of reps, just continuity and continuing to develop that rapport with the new receivers and the O-line.”

Stoops would move away from the QB room not long after with plenty more to talk about, but the message seemed clear as the Wildcats inch closer to the kickoff of the 2025 season.

Calzada is a guy the

staff has a lot of faith in, but Boley is the future it is trying to build toward and, for most of BBN, that is an exciting prospect.

Facing a top 10 schedule in college football in 2025, how good Kentucky can be is still up in the air, but as far as the staff is concerned, it seems the effort to “fix” the problems last year are not shortsighted in nature. Stoops knows Kentucky needs to be better in 2025, but he made it clear he is also focused on rebuilding the program more long-term as well.

Both Boley and Calzada will be seen in action on Friday as part of UK football’s open practices before taking the field for the opening game of the 2025 season on Saturday, August 30, against Toledo.



## LEGAL NOTICE

### REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR PURCHASE OF IV/INFUSION PUMPS

The Trigg County Hospital requests proposals for new patient IV/Infusion pumps.

#### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Proposals (bids) must be in writing. Proposals are due on or before August 25, 2025 4:00pm cst. Paper-based submissions must be received at Trigg County Hospital (TCH), 254 Main St., Cadiz, KY 42211.

TCH reserves the right to reject any bid it deems incomplete or insufficient.

TCH is not liable for failure to receive any submitted proposals. It is the responsibility of the bidder to ensure that proposals are timely received.

Extension of this RFP is not a promise of a contract to any individual or entity. All material provided in response to the RFP will become the property of TCH and will be subject to any public disclosure required by the rules and regulations of that entity.

TCH reserves the right to select multiple providers or no providers after the review process.

TCH reserves the right to cancel the RFP at any time and with no notice to applicants. TCH will not compensate Applicants for time spent responding to the RFP. Applicants not selected will not be contacted.

TCH is an equal opportunity employer and not discriminate against individuals protected by state or federal law.

The selected provider will be required to enter into a contract with TCH.

All contracts between the bidder and TCH must comply with all requirements of state and federal law and any additional information required by the funding source.

TCH may use competitive bidding in accordance with KRS 45A.370.

Bidders will provide best-estimated date of delivery.

#### BIDDER AFFIRMATIONS

By submitting this RFP, the bidder represents that:

(A) The proposal amount has been arrived at by the offeror independently. It has been submitted without collusion with, and without any agreement, understanding or planned common course of action with any other contractor, vendor of materials, supplies, equipment or services described in the RFP, that is designed to limit independent bidding or competition.

(B) The contents of the proposal have not been communicated by the offeror or its employees or agents to any person not an employee or agent of the offeror, and will not be communicated to any such person before the proposal opening.

(C) The offeror is legally eligible to enter into a contract with TCH and the award of a contract shall not create any conflict of interest.

(D) Neither the offeror, nor its subcontractors, nor any of their principles are presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from covered transactions by any federal or state department or agency, local organization, hospital or entity.

#### GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

Trigg County Hospital requires the following elements (or comparable):

- 26 infusion pumps and 36 pump battery modules or the equivalent of 36 infusion pumps
- All applicable software at current versions
- Implementation and training
- Proposal will include all preparation, shipping, installation, and other applicable costs
- One-year full service warranty
- Cost of full-service agreement coverage (after warranty period) to include uptime, response times by phone and onsite. Service agreement should be for 5 years.

#### ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS OF PROPOSAL

All bidders must submit warranty information.

Bidders may include other options. TCH will review those options and suggestions in furtherance of patient care and utility.

TCH reserves the right to request that any bidder submit additional information or provide an in-person presentation upon request.

#### QUESTIONS REGARDING PROPOSAL

Contact Lisa Kight at Trigg County Hospital, lkight@trigghospital.org for any questions and specifications. All questions will be answered via email and shared publicly with all bidders. Deadline for questions is August 11, 2025. TCH will answer no additional questions after that date. TCH will not answer any verbal or telephone questions from any bidder.

#### SUBMISSION OF BID

Sealed proposals shall be delivered to and received by Trigg County Hospital, Attn: Don Michael CFO, 254 Main Street Cadiz, KY 42211.

Proposals will be reviewed on August 28, 2025 and evaluated. Evaluation will include, but not be limited to price, quality, warranty, availability of unit, time until delivery of completed product, reputation of vendor, and past experiences with vendor/similar units. Winning bidder will be contacted after evaluation and decision. No set date is provided for a determination as to any successful offer.

Trigg County Hospital reserves the right to reject any or all proposals or portions thereof.

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