Kenyon Gregory

Professor Amey

Sportscenter

March 22, 2023

**NIL in Tennis**

When people think about who would receive name, image, and likeness deals (NIL), their attention turns to football and basketball players. However, two tennis athletes at Virginia Tech are making a case for athletes in their sport to receive significant deals.

“I am very excited to get a NIL deal and I never could imagine that this opportunity could happen to me,” said Charlotte Cartledge, a sophomore tennis player.

Cartledge along with Frank Thompson became the first two tennis athletes to sign with Triumph NIL. The sports-marketing agency that partners with Virginia Tech has signed over 60 athletes to endorsement deals.

Thompson is thrilled to work with Triumph.

“Just to be able to partner with an organization that is at the top of the landscape in NIL opportunities and to do it in my hometown is something that I am proud of,” Thompson said.

Both Cartledge and Thompson understand the importance of having NIL deals in their sport. As tennis players, opportunities for endorsements are rare and incomparable to other sports such as football and men’s basketball.

However, both understand the importance of this moment and hope that the trend of tennis players receiving deals does not stop with them.

“I hope that more people realize that tennis athletes can make as much as the other popular sports,” Thompson said.

Cartledge sees this as an opportunity to increase awareness of tennis.

“I want more people to realize that this is not a one-off, I hope more players on our team get deals because it would bring more intrigue and interest to our sport, which I think will be good for the game,” Cartledge said.

There is also the notion that fewer female athletes receive NIL deals. Out of the 60 athletes Triumph has signed, they have signed only 10 female athletes. Cartledge is happy to be a part of this group of women, but not satisfied.

“Obviously being in the same group as Elizabeth Kitley is kind of impressive and for me honestly, I just hope that Triumph recognizes the importance of having female athletes as part of its roster and I hope they sign more female athletes that are deserving of deals,” said Cartledge.

She mentions that there are athletes in sports such as women’s lacrosse, swimming and diving, and track and field that deserve NIL opportunities.

Thompson sees this as an opportunity to promote equal NIL opportunities.

“I did not know that there was such a disparity in the roster of athletes receiving deals here,” Thompson said. I do not know what some of the best ways are to promote change in a sense I would have to ask around and do some research.

The landscape of NIL deals is new, and Virginia Tech is still trying to figure it out in order to help its athletes in the best way possible. Through a partnership with INFLCR, an app design company to increase brand awareness for collegiate athletics, Virginia Tech launched a platform called Hokie Exchange.

Hokie Exchange allows businesses and student-athletes to interact and make NIL deals. Both Thompson and Cartledge have deals with local tennis stores in Roanoke, VA.

They are both ecstatic to have deals connected to their sport.

“It is just so awesome to think that the store that I bought my tennis rackets from when I was in middle school and high school now wants to use my name and image in their store,” Cartledge said.

Thompson likes the opportunity to represent his hometown.

“I am from Blacksburg and to represent where I came from is truly special to me,” Thompson said. “I never dreamed that this opportunity could have come my way.”

Cartledge and Thompson both started off with the love of the game and now that love has been reciprocated into an opportunity for themselves to enhance their image and monetary gains, while also showing their love for the game.