

No-Nonsense Meets NIL: Bill Belichick's College Experiment

By Martin J. Greenberg and Harly Johnson

I. WHO IS BILL BELICHICK?

Bill Belichick (“Belichick”) began his football career playing center and tight end at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.¹ As a three-sport athlete, playing lacrosse, squash and football, the young Belichick began his vocation in leadership as the captain of the lacrosse team in his senior year.²

After graduating in 1975 with a degree in economics, Belichick took his first job in coaching with the Baltimore Colts.³ Within 5 years Belichick was coordinating the defense of the New York Giants, which was headlined by Hall-of-Famer Lawrence Taylor.⁴ Belichick earned his first head coaching job with the Cleveland Browns, averaging a .450 winning percentage in 5 seasons.⁵ Belichick was hired by the New England Patriots in 2000,⁶ starting his run as arguably the greatest National Football League (“NFL”) coach of all time. During his time with the New England Patriots (2000-2023), Belichick won 266 games, lost 121 games, and led the New England Patriots to six Super Bowls (in 2002, 2004, 2005, 2015, 2017, and 2019), the most ever for any NFL head coach.⁷ After 24 seasons with the team, the Patriots decided to part ways with Belichick following the 2023 NFL season.⁸ The Patriots’ owner, Robert Kraft, cited the team’s declining

¹ Rosa Bracerias, *Get to know Bill Belichick: Bio, coaching history and more*, NBC SPORTS, (August 11, 2022), <https://www.nbcsportsboston.com/nfl/new-england-patriots/get-to-know-bill-belichick-bio-coaching-history-and-more/262817/>.

² *Id.*

³ Tyler Piccotti, Bill Belichick, BIOGRAPHY.COM, (December 12, 2024), <https://www.biography.com/athletes/a91277838/bill-belichick#who-is-bill-belichick>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ PFR, *Bill Belichick overview*, PRO FOOTBALL REFERENCE, (accessed March 27, 2025), <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/coaches/BeliBi0.htm>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Nick Shook, *Robert Kraft explains decision to part ways with HC Bill Belichick after 24 seasons*, NFL.COM, (January 11, 2024), <https://www.nfl.com/news/robert-kraft-explains-decision-to-part-ways-with-hc-bill-belichick-after-24-seasons>.

performance and losing record as primary reasons for the decision.⁹ After his firing, Belichick took a break from coaching before joining the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (“UNC”) as their head football coach for the 2024-2025 season.¹⁰

During his professional career, Belichick made approximately \$200M during his 24 years as the Head Coach of the New England Patriots.¹¹ His salary reportedly increased throughout his tenure, starting at \$2M in 2000, rising to over \$7.5M by 2010, and exceeding \$10M by 2018.¹² It has been reported that in his final year of his contract, he was earning \$25M annually which made him the highest paid coach in the NFL and in sports in the United States.¹³

This year the NFL reports that the highest paid head coaches are:¹⁴

COACH	TEAM	ANNUAL SALARY
1. Andy Reid	Kansas City Chiefs	\$20 million
2. Sean Payton	Denver Broncos	\$18 million
3. Mike Tomlin	Pittsburgh Steelers	\$16 million
3. Jim Harbaugh	Los Angeles Chargers	\$16 million
5. Sean McVay	Los Angeles Rams	\$15 million
6. Kyle Shanahan	San Francisco 49ers	\$14 million
T7 Ben Johnson	Chicago Bears	\$13 million
T7 Kevin O’Connell	Minnesota Vikings	\$13 million
T9 John Harbaugh	Baltimore Ravens	\$12 million
T9 Liam Cohen	Jacksonville Jaguars	\$12 million
T11 Dan Campbell	Detroit Lions	\$11 million
T11 Sean McDermott	Buffalo Bills	\$11 million
12 Mike Macdonald	Seattle Seahawks	\$9 million

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Angel Nakamura, *Bill Belichick struggles to walk straight without the help of his girlfriend Jordon Hudson and worries fans*, MARCA, (March 10, 2025), <https://amp.marca.com/en/ncaa/2025/03/10/67ce1c6222601de5308b4597.html>.

¹¹ Brandon Sapienza, *Belichick Earned Over \$200 Million Leading New England Patriots*, BLOOMBERG, (January 11, 2024), https://news.bloomberglaw.com/employee-benefits/belichick-earned-over-200-million-leading-new-england-patriots?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Roddy Cons, Andy Hall, Joseph McMahon, *The NFL’s highest-paid coaches: These are the salaries of the top HCs and the new faces in the league*, AS (June 29, 2025), <https://en.as.com/nfl/the-nfls-highest-paid-coaches-these-are-the-salaries-of-the-top-hcs-and-the-new-faces-in-the-league-n/>.

The lowest paid head coaches in the NFL are reported as:¹⁵

COACH	TEAM	SALARY
Matt LaFleur	Green Bay Packers	\$5 million
Zac Taylor	Cincinnati Bengals	\$4.5 million
Kevin Stefanski	Cleveland Browns	\$3.5 million

II. WHY UNC? WHY COLLEGE?

In late 2024, Belichick announced his plan to return to college football for the first time since 1975.¹⁶ Initially, many expected him to secure another NFL head coaching position.¹⁷ However, to the surprise of the football world, interest from NFL teams appeared to be limited.¹⁸ Belichick reportedly interviewed twice with the Atlanta Falcons, but the team ultimately chose to hire Raheem Morris as their new head coach.¹⁹ From there it was expected by the broader NFL community that Belichick would take another year off from coaching, in hopes that the next coaching cycle would be more fruitful.²⁰

In one of the most stunning moves in football history, it was announced on December 11, 2024, that Belichick had agreed to a 5-year contract to be the head football coach at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (“UNC”).²¹ Given the current unstable, transactional state of college athletics and the tough, grizzly image that Belichick often portrays, the decision came as a

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Pete Thamel, Adam Schefter, Chris Low, *Bill Belichick reaches 5-year deal to coach North Carolina*, ESPN, (December 11, 2024), https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/42917765/sources-bill-belichick-finalizing-deal-unc-coach.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Charles Robinson, *As Falcons pass on Bill Belichick, it's clear what is shutting him out of this NFL head-coaching hiring cycle*, YAHOO! SPORTS, (January 25, 2024), <https://sports.yahoo.com/as-falcons-pass-on-bill-belichick-its-clear-what-is-shutting-him-out-of-this-nfl-head-coaching-hiring-cycle-012324964.html>.

²⁰ Thamel, *supra* note 16.

²¹ *Id.*

shock to many.²² This era of one-year mercenary players and Name, Image and Likeness (“NIL”) seemed antithetical to the professional, no-nonsense culture that Belichick was synonymous with in New England.²³ But Belichick elaborated in his press release, part of the announcement by UNC, that “[he has] always wanted to coach in college.”²⁴ In his year away from coaching, Belichick had multiple positions in the media, but had one goal in mind: returning to the sideline in any capacity.²⁵ Leading up to the decision, Belichick spent time with one of his former assistants, Jedd Fisch, now the head coach of the University of Washington Huskies, to familiarize himself with the current landscape of the college game.²⁶

The job in Chapel Hill is a bit of a homecoming, Belichick’s father was an assistant coach at UNC from 1953-1955.²⁷ Belichick explained that “[he] grew up around college football with [his] dad and treasured those times,”²⁸ and is looking forward to “building the football program”²⁹ up from where it current sits. Continuing the family theme, Bill’s son, Steve Belichick, has joined the UNC coaching staff as the Tar Heel’s defensive coordinator.³⁰

For Belichick, *going to the college game is also going young*. Over the past year, 72-year-old Belichick has begun dating Jordon Hudson, a 24-year-old former cheerleader from

²² John Talty, Richard Johnson, Brandon Marcello, *Bill Belichick to North Carolina reaction: Why college football, NFL figures either love -- or hate – hire*, CBS SPORTS, (December 12, 2024), https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/bill-belichick-to-north-carolina-reaction-why-college-football-nfl-figures-either-love-or-hate-hire/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Thamel, *supra* note 16.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Piccotti, *supra* note 3.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Alexandra Jones, *Previewing UNC football's new coaching staff*, THE DAILY TAR HEEL, (June 30, 2025), <https://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2025/07/sports-mail-home-football-staff-preview-june-2025#:~:text=Defensive%20coordinator%20Steve%20Belichick,University%20of%20Washington%20last%20season.>

Bridgewater State University.³¹ Belichick and Hudson’s relationship began unexpectedly on a JetBlue flight from Boston to Florida on February 11, 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.³² Belichick, then 71, signed Hudson’s college philosophy textbook, *Deductive Logic* by Warren Goldfarb, with an inscription that included his Super Bowl victories (SB 36, 38, 39, 49, 51, 53), marking what Hudson later referred to as their “meetiversary” on social media.³³ By early 2023, after Belichick’s split from long-term partner Linda Holliday, their relationship became more public, with sightings in late summer 2023 and official confirmation by TMZ in June 2024 *People Magazine*, April 30, 2025.³⁴ By February 2025, they had been together for over two years, with Hudson actively involved in Belichick’s professional endeavors.³⁵ According to the *New York Times*, Belichick and Hudson are reportedly engaged.³⁶ The 48-year age gap has sparked considerable controversy, causing some UNC fans to express concern about their new head coach.³⁷

Their relationship extends beyond romance into a professional partnership, with Hudson managing Belichick’s personal brand as the CEO of Trouble Cub Enterprises and COO of Belichick Productions.³⁸ She has been copied on all UNC football staff emails since March of

³¹ Devon Forward, *Bill Belichick, 72, and Girlfriend Jordon Hudson, 24, Pose for Rare Loved-Up Selfie*, *PARADE*, (February 26, 2025), <https://parade.com/news/bill-belichick-girlfriend-jordon-hudson-pose-rare-loved-up-selfie-photo>.

³² Rebecca Aizin, *Who Is Bill Belichick's Girlfriend? All About Jordon Hudson*, *PEOPLE*, (May 1, 2025), https://people.com/who-is-jordon-hudson-bill-belichick-8667616?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

³³ Katherine Rosman, *Bill Belichick Was Always in Control. Then He Fell for Jordon Hudson*, *NEW YORK TIMES*, (May 20, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/20/sports/bill-belichick-age-girlfriend-jordon-hudson.html>.

³⁴ Athena Sobhan, *Jordon Hudson Shows Boyfriend Bill Belichick's First Handwritten Note to Her as She Celebrates Their 'Meetiversary'*, *PEOPLE*, (February 12, 2025), https://people.com/jordon-hudson-and-bill-belichick-celebrate-4-year-meetiversary-11678598?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

³⁵ Rosman, *supra* note 33.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

2025, indicating her involvement in his career at the university.³⁹ Hudson contributed creatively to Belichick's book, *The Art of Winning: Lessons from a Life in Football*, published in May of 2025, with Belichick acknowledging her as his "idea mill and creative muse" in the acknowledgments.⁴⁰ She has also negotiated business deals, such as demanding content approval and partial ownership for a potential *Hard Knocks* HBO series, which led to its cancellation, and applied for trademarks like "Chapel Bill" and "Do Your Job (Bill's Version)."⁴¹

The controversy has found new heights on April 27, 2025, when a "CBS Sunday Morning" interview intended to promote Belichick's new book, "The Art of Winning: Lessons from My Life in Football" aired which portrayed Hudson as a "constant presence."⁴² Reports from the interview stated that Hudson interrupted several times, stormed out of the room, causing a 30-minute delay, and refused to let Belichick speak when he was asked how the couple met.⁴³ Belichick issued a statement claiming CBS violated an agreement to focus solely on the book, calling the segment "selectively edited" to create a "false narrative" that Hudson was controlling the conversation.⁴⁴ CBS refuted this, stating the interview was agreed to be "wide-ranging" with no preconditions.⁴⁵ The repeated incidents have gone viral leading some to believe that Hudson has become too much of a distraction for Belichick and may even be hurting UNC's reputation.⁴⁶ There have been additional tensions, such as rumors in May of 2025 that U.N.C. banned Hudson from football

³⁹ Nora Princiotti, *A Dozen Questions About Bill Belichick's Relationship With Jordon Hudson*, THE RINGER, (March 19, 2025), <https://www.theringer.com/2025/03/19/nfl/12-questions-about-bill-belichicks-relationship-girlfriend-jordon-hudson>.

⁴⁰ Glamour, *Bill Belichick and Jordon Hudson: A Complete Relationship Timeline*, GLAMOUR MAGAZINE, (May 20, 2025), <https://www.glamour.com/story/bill-belichick-and-jordon-hudson-a-complete-relationship-timeline>.

⁴¹ Rosman, *supra* note 20.

⁴² Jacob Lev, *Bill Belichick defends girlfriend Jordon Hudson after viral CBS interview*, CNN, (May 1, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/30/sport/bill-belichick-jordon-hudson-spt>.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Scott Polacek, *Julian Edelman Says Jordon Hudson 'Becoming a Distraction' for Bill Belichick at UNC*, BLEACHER REPORT, (May 7, 2025), https://bleacherreport.com/articles/25193993-julian-edelman-says-jordon-hudson-becoming-distraction-bill-belichick-unc?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

facilities, which the school denied, and reports of Belichick addressing the media attention with his team, stating, “she doesn’t have anything to do with football.”⁴⁷

Belichick follows several former NFL coaches who have shifted to the college game in recent years. Jim Harbaugh coached the 49ers from 2011-2014, then joined the University of Michigan as Head Coach from 2015-2024 and returned to the NFL as Head Coach of the Los Angeles Chargers 2024.⁴⁸ Before heading to the Pacific Northwest to help build the “Legion of Boom,” Pete Carroll made his mark in Los Angeles as the head coach of the USC Trojans.⁴⁹ From 2001 to 2009, he compiled a 97–19 record, won two national championships, and captured four Rose Bowl victories.⁵⁰ Before his success at USC, Carroll served as head coach of the New England Patriots from 1997 to 1999, posting a 27–21 record and leading the team to two playoff appearances.⁵¹ Chip Kelly, former Eagles and 49ers head coach returned to college in 2018-2024 serving as UCLA head coach and then Ohio State offensive coordinator.⁵² Before becoming arguably the greatest college coach of all time, Nick Saban spent the 2005-2006 seasons coaching the Miami Dolphins before heading to Tuscaloosa to coach at the University of Alabama where he won 6 national championships.⁵³ Bill O’Brien held different offensive roles with the Patriots from 2007 to 2011, when he became offensive coordinator.⁵⁴ Another South Eastern Conference (“SEC”) coach, Lane Kiffin, coached the Oakland Raiders before eventually becoming the University of Mississippi Rebels head coach.⁵⁵ O’Brien took the helm as the Houston Texans head

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Sanjesh Singh, Like Bill Belichick, these NFL coaches went ‘back to school’ for NCAA football, NBC SPORTS BOSTON (December 11, 2024), <https://www.nbcsportsboston.com/ncaa/ncaaf/nfl-coaches-back-to-school-ncaa-football/673519/>.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

coach from 2014-2020. O'Brian is now head coach at Boston College looking to rediscover the Eagle's early 2000s success.⁵⁶

III. OFFSEASON ACTIVITIES

Despite the constant drama in the news, the offseason for Belichick's roster has been relatively promising. UNC has reportedly added 41 players via the transfer portal, while losing only 16, managing to retain 6 players who had previously entered their names in the portal.⁵⁷ The transfer haul has UNC ranked 9th overall in the transfer class ratings according to 247Sports.⁵⁸ On top of that, Belichick brought in 30 freshmen, ranking as the 8th best 2025 recruiting class in the Atlantic Coast Conference ("ACC").⁵⁹ Moreover, Belichick and Co. are off to a hot start in the 2026 recruiting cycle, gaining 16 commitments, ranking them as the 6th best class in the ACC so far.⁶⁰ At ACC media days, Belichick spoke on how he spent the offseason "reinforcing the [UNC] roster."⁶¹ He shared his enthusiasm for coaching at the college level, noting that student-athletes are generally more open to instruction and haven't developed as many bad habits as veteran NFL players.⁶²

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ Adam Smith, UNC Football Transfer Portal Tracker, INSIDE CAROLINA, (May 26, 2025), <https://247sports.com/college/north-carolina/longformarticle/unc-football-spring-ncaa-transfer-portal-tracker-bill-belichick-248801595/#2652914>.

⁵⁸ 247Sports, North Carolina 2025 Football Commits, INSIDE CAROLINA, (*last visited* June 11, 2025), <https://247sports.com/college/north-carolina/season/2025-football/commits/>.

⁵⁹ 247Sports, 2025 Recruit ACC Football Team Rankings, INSIDE CAROLINA, (*last visited* June 11, 2025), <https://247sports.com/season/2025-football/compositeteamrankings/>.

⁶⁰ 247Sports, 2026 Recruit ACC Football Team Rankings, INSIDE CAROLINA, (*last visited* June 11, 2025), <https://247sports.com/season/2026-football/compositeteamrankings/>.

⁶¹ Blake Toppmeyer, *Bill Belichick sounds like North Carolina football coach, not someone under a girlfriend's spell*, USA TODAY, (July 25, 2025), <https://sports.yahoo.com/article/bill-belichick-sounds-north-carolina-100347507.html?guccounter=1>.

⁶² *Id.*

A report has surfaced in late July, following an annual tradition, questioning UNC's and the ACC's future in the modern, lawless college athletics landscape.⁶³ UNC has been included in a group of schools "interested in seeking a potential departure from the ACC."⁶⁴ Following the settlement of the ACC's lawsuit with Clemson University and Florida State University, "the ACC's decreasing exit fees dip from \$93M to a flat \$75M threshold with the 2030-31 school year" has given member universities a potential opportunity to depart to another conference.⁶⁵ If UNC chooses to leave the ACC, it would be continuing a troubling trend in modern college athletics: schools abandoning long-standing rivalries and regional affiliations in favor of joining mega-conferences, often prioritizing short term financial gain over tradition and fan loyalty. UNC's alleged "desired landing spot" is the SEC⁶⁶, where their closest regional opponents would be the University of South Carolina and the University of Georgia, rather than staying in the ACC with their historical in-state "Big 4" rivalries with NC State, Wake Forest, and Duke.

IV. THE 2025-2026 SEASON SO FAR

UNC and Belichick opened the 2025-2026 season against Texas Christian University ("TCU") expecting to begin the season with a big non-conference win over a solid Big XII team. After an impressive opening drive by UNC, sports media personality Skip Bayless reacted on X (formerly Twitter), posting, "Wow, Belichick has a national championship offense. The Heels just shredded the Frogs' defense."⁶⁷ However, that would be one of only two touchdowns scored by UNC, as the Tar Heels went on to suffer a 48–14 blowout loss to TCU.⁶⁸ After only six games into

⁶³ SBJ, *Report: UNC leading group looking to leave ACC with next realignment*, SPORTS BUSINESS JOURNAL, (July 23, 2025), <https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2025/07/23/report-unc-leading-group-looking-to-leave-acc-with-next-realignment/>.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ Matt Connolly, *Skip Bayless called out after his crazy Bill Belichick take*, PENN LIVE, (October 10, 2025), <https://www.pennlive.com/sports/2025/10/skip-bayless-called-out-after-his-crazy-bill-belichick-take.html>.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

the season, Belichick's team has spiraled into a national laughingstock going 2-4 with zero Power 4 wins.⁶⁹ Major problems have been exposed: breakdowns on both lines of scrimmage, lack of third-down or red-zone effectiveness, frequent turnovers, and an overall lack of cohesion and discipline that one would not expect from a coach with Belichick's pedigree.⁷⁰ Indeed, post-game commentary described the roster as out-matched, ill-prepared, and structurally lacking.⁷¹ Off the field, reports indicate that the program is under strain: internal "unstructured mess" complaints, issues with communication, recruiting questions, and media speculation about the coach's commitment to college-football dynamics.⁷² The hype wave that greeted Belichick's arrival has given way to a growing narrative of urgency, and potential instability, in Chapel Hill.

In mid-October 2025, speculation surfaced that discussions between UNC and Belichick about "soft exit" options were underway, the coach was even reported as being willing to trigger the \$1 million exit fee if he found another job or media role.⁷³ However, sources close to Belichick strongly denied that he was pursuing a buyout, calling the reports "sensational drama."⁷⁴ On the other side, reports suggest that UNC may be looking for an exit strategy amidst the embarrassing start to the season.⁷⁵ Behind the scenes, frustration has been mounting over both the on-field

⁶⁹ ESPN, North Carolina Tar Heels, ESPN, (accessed October 22, 2025), https://www.espn.com/college-football/team/_/id/153/north-carolina-tar-heels.

⁷⁰ Jason Gay, *Bill Belichick Gets Schooled*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, (September 2, 2025), https://www.wsj.com/sports/football/bill-belichick-unc-football-e3dec96a?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWetsqc3TMDvUWb8LcaZhGCNo4ca3zJxziZW57S0ec35o1FBq6VQ9rVv9ucjeKElmKc%3D&gaa_ts=68f9302a&gaa_sig=t7DVLGAe6X6Z7Wn5Y4bm2-TtHsKhI7l96eBWIRh0x4vd0r9BwAS_iXuHLbBXYECAeW0XDG8d4rOg1Ab572m9Q%3D%3D.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² Sean Neumann, *Bill Belichick 'Never' Considered Taking Buyout From UNC: 'It's All Sensational Drama,' Source Says (Exclusive)*, PEOPLE, (October 10, 2025), <https://people.com/bill-belichick-never-considered-unc-buyout-source-11828246>.

⁷³ Matt Geagan, *Bill Belichick says he's "fully committed" to North Carolina amid buyout rumors*, CBS NEWS, (October 9, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/bill-belichick-unc-north-carolina-buyout-rumors-joint-statement-ncaa/>.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ Matthew Beighle, *UNC administration has begun exit strategies regarding Bill Belichick, per report*, TAR HEELS WIRE, (October 8, 2025), <https://tarheelswire.usatoday.com/story/sports/college/tarheels/football/2025/10/08/unc-bill-belichick-exit-strategy/86590276007/>.

product and alleged off-field disarray, including reports of miscommunication among staff, disorganization in recruiting, and a lack of cultural fit between Belichick's rigid NFL-style approach and the demands of the modern college game.⁷⁶ UNC administrators have reportedly held preliminary internal discussions about what a separation could look like if the program continues to spiral.⁷⁷ The conversations allegedly center on minimizing the school's financial toll should they decide to part ways.⁷⁸ Contained in Belichick's unconventional contract is a clause that "outlines UNC's financial obligations if it fires Belichick without cause at any point before the end of his five-year contract."⁷⁹ Belichick earns \$10.1 million per year, but his contract provides no financial severance if he's dismissed during the final two years of the deal.⁸⁰ Regardless, if UNC decided to fire Belichick after this season, UNC would owe him \$20 million in financial severance. This particular clause in the contract could prove as a timeline for when UNC will eventually move on from Belichick. Despite the speculation, UNC Athletic Director Bubba Cunningham issued a statement reaffirming the school's support for Belichick, however, multiple insiders have reportedly said that some within the athletic department question whether Belichick will finish the season in Chapel Hill.⁸¹

V. THE CONTRACT

Amidst the tumultuous hiring, Belichick's contract details have even stirred up controversy. According to the contract details, Belichick is scheduled to make in excess of Ten

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ Blake Toppmeyer, *Inside Bill Belichick's 'first of its kind' escape hatch in North Carolina contract*, USA TODAY, (October 9, 2025), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/2025/10/09/bill-belichick-contract-buyout-salary-north-carolina-football/86280794007/>.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ Matthew Beighle, *UNC administration has begun exit strategies regarding Bill Belichick, per report*, TAR HEELS WIRE, (October 8, 2025), <https://tarheelswire.usatoday.com/story/sports/college/tarheels/football/2025/10/08/unc-bill-belichick-exit-strategy/86590276007/>.

Million Dollars (\$10,000,000) annually, slotting him in the top 5 highest paid college football coaches.⁸²

A. The Base Salary:

During the Term, UNC will pay Belichick “an annual Base Salary of One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000) per year. . . . The annual Base Salary shall be based on a twelve-month employment period commencing on December 12, 2024.”⁸³

B. Term:

“Unless otherwise terminated in accordance with its terms or extended by subsequent agreement of the parties, the Term runs from December 12, 2024, until December 31, 2029.”⁸⁴

C. Supplemental Income (Talent Fee):

UNC will pay Belichick “supplemental income in the aggregate amount of Nine Million Dollars (\$9,000,000) annually, paid monthly on the last business day of the calendar month so long as Coach is employed as Head Coach.”⁸⁵

D. Bonuses:

1. Competitive Performance - Post-Season:

In any “season during the Term in which the [football] program appears in any non-College Football Playoff (“CFP”) bowl game, [Belichick] will receive a bonus in the amount of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000).”⁸⁶

In any season during the Term in which the [football] program appears in any non-CFP Tier I/Elite bowl game, [Belichick] will receive additional compensation from the

⁸² USA Today, *College Football Head Coach Salaries*, USA TODAY, (October 16, 2024), <https://sportsdata.usatoday.com/ncaa/salaries/football/coach>.

⁸³ UNC, *UNC Belichick Agreement [98] Redacted*, UNC CHAPEL HILL, (December 12, 2024), https://goheels.com/documents/2025/1/23/UNC_Belichick_Agreement_98_Redacted.pdf.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 2.

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 8.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 5.

University in the form of a bonus in the amount of Three Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$350,000). “Non-CFP Tier 1/Elite bowl game” shall be defined as the Pop-Tarts Bowl, TaxSlayer Gator Bowl, and the Duke Mayo Bowl.⁸⁷

“In any [football] program season during the Term in which the Program competes in the CFP, Coach will receive a single bonus in the amount that corresponds to the Program's CFP participation, as follows:”⁸⁸

<u>CFP Participation</u>	<u>Bonus Amount</u>
Participant	\$750,000
Quarterfinal Appearance	\$1,000,000
Semifinal Appearance	\$1,250,000
Championship Game Appearance	\$1,500,000
Win Championship Game	\$1,750,000

Belichick is eligible for only one bonus each season, such that the maximum bonus for any season is \$1,750,000.⁸⁹

2. Competitive Performance - Final CFP Polls:

“In any year during the Term in which the [football] program finishes in the top 25 of the final CFP poll following a season, [Belichick] will receive a single bonus in the amount that corresponds to the football program’s final CFP poll finish, as follows:”⁹⁰

<u>Final CFP Poll Finish</u>	<u>Bonus Amount</u>
Top 25	\$250,000
Top 20	\$300,000
Top 15	\$375,000
Top 10	\$425,000

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 5-6.

Top 5

\$500,000

Belichick is eligible for only one bonus each season, such that the maximum bonus for any season is \$500,000.⁹¹

3. *Awards - Coach of the Year:*

Conference Coach of the Year: In any year in which [Belichick] is recognized as the Coach of the Year in the University's athletic conference following a Program season in which Coach served as Head Coach of the football program, [Belichick] will receive additional compensation from the University in the form of a bonus in an amount equal to One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000).⁹²

National Coach of the Year: In any year in which [Belichick] is recognized as the Coach of the Year by (a) the Associated Press, (b) ABC/ESPN, (c) the Walter Camp Foundation, (d) the Football Writers Association of America (FWAA), (e) the Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year Foundation, (f) the Paul "Bear" Bryant Coach of the Year Award, (g) CBSSports.com, (h) ABCSports.com, (i) The Sporting News, or (j) the Maxwell Football Club (or any successor organization) following a season as Head Coach, [Belichick] will receive additional compensation from the University in the form of a bonus in an amount equal to Two Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000).⁹³

Belichick is eligible for only one bonus each season, such that the maximum bonus for any season is \$250,000.⁹⁴

4. *Academic Performance:*

⁹¹ *Id.* at 6.

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *Id.*

In any year during the Term in which the annual team GPA of members of the football program equals or exceeds 2.7 but is less than 2.8, while [Belichick] serves as Head Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus in the amount of Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000).⁹⁵

In any year during the Term in which the annual team GPA of members of the football program equals or exceeds 2.8 but is less than 2.9, while [Belichick] serves as Head Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus in the amount of Seventy-Five Thousand Dollars (\$75,000).⁹⁶

In any year during the Term in which the annual team GPA of members of the [football] program equals or exceeds 2.9 but is less than 3.0, while [Belichick] serves as Head Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus in the amount of One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000).⁹⁷

“In any year during the Term in which the annual team GPA of members of the [football] program equals or exceeds 3.0 while Belichick serves as Head Coach, [Belichick] will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus in the amount of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000).”⁹⁸

5. *Academic Progress Rate (“APR”)*:

“In any year during the Term in which the single-year APR for the [football] program reported by the University to the NCAA is between 950-969, while [Belichick] serves as Head

⁹⁵ *Id.* 6-7

⁹⁶ *Id.* at 7.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ *Id.*

Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus of One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000).”⁹⁹

“In any year during the Term in which the single-year APR for the [football] program reported by the University to the NCAA is between 970-989, while [Belichick] serves as Head Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus of One Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$125,000).”¹⁰⁰

“In any year during the Term in which the single-year APR for the [football] program reported by the University to the NCAA is between 990-999, while [Belichick] serves as Head Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000).”¹⁰¹

“In any year during the Term in which the single-year APR for the [football] program reported by the University to the NCAA is 1,000 or above, while [Belichick] serves as Head Coach, Belichick will receive additional compensation in the form of a bonus of Two Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$200,000).”¹⁰²

E. Termination by University Without Cause:

The contract “may be terminated unilaterally by the Chancellor or the Athletics Director at any time upon written notice to [Belichick], in the absence of cause.”¹⁰³

In the event this Agreement is terminated prior to December 31, 2027, and following Belichick’s execution of the general release, [UNC] shall pay [Belichick] the total sum of any remaining unpaid Base Salary and earned but unpaid bonuses and Supplemental

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 8.

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ *Id.* at 18.

Income through December 31, 2027, only. If such termination occurs, in no event shall [UNC] pay [Belichick] any remaining unpaid Base Salary or Supplemental Income associated with any Contract Year or portion of a Contract Year after December 31, 2027.¹⁰⁴

F. Liquidated Damages

In the event that [Belichick] terminates his contract prior to June 1, 2025, [Belichick] shall pay UNC liquidated damages of Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000). In the event [Belichick] terminates his contract on or after June 1, 2025, [Belichick] shall pay the [UNC] liquidated damages of One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000). [Belichick] shall pay the liquidated damages amount within 180 days of Belichick's termination.¹⁰⁵

G. Termination by UNC for Cause:

The UNC may terminate the deal for cause at any time upon written notice to Belichick. "Cause" will mean the following:¹⁰⁶

1. [Belichick]'s material failure to perform any of the duties specified in the contract.
2. A violation by [Belichick], or knowing participation by [Belichick] in a violation, or a violation which [Belichick] condoned, of a regulation, bylaw, rule, policy, or other requirement of [UNC]'s athletics association (e.g. NCAA), the [UNC]'s athletics conference (e.g. ACC), or another Governing Requirement. For the foregoing to constitute cause, the violation must be (i) found to be a major or serious by the NCAA, conference, or other applicable governing body.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ *Id.* at 19-20

¹⁰⁶ *Id.* at 16-18.

3. [Belichick]’s final conviction of (i) any felony or (ii) any criminal act that involves fraud or moral turpitude.
4. [Belichick]’s material failure to promote the fair and responsible treatment of athletes with regards to their health, welfare, safety and discipline.
5. [Belichick]’s prolonged absence from duty without the consent of the Director of Athletics.
6. [Belichick]’s material breach of this Agreement, which is not cured within fifteen (15) days of written notice to [Belichick] by [UNC]; or
7. Any of those causes applicable to EHRA non-faculty employees specified in university policies and/or the [UNC] Code, as adopted and revised from time to time.¹⁰⁷

H. Perquisites/Extra Benefits:

Each Contract Year during the Term, Belichick will receive an annual expense allowance of One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) to be used for entertainment and other appropriate purposes to advance the Program.¹⁰⁸

Belichick is entitled to receive all employee-related benefits available to other employees in Belichick’s employee classification at UNC. UNC will also provide Belichick the following additional benefits:

1. Relocation and moving expenses to North Carolina of One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000).¹⁰⁹
2. A vehicle allowance of up to \$7,500 or use of a leased vehicle, including customary insurance, maintenance, and operating costs, for the primary purpose of conducting

¹⁰⁷ *Id.*

¹⁰⁸ *Id.* at 10-11.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 11.

- University business. In addition, [Belichick]’s ten (10) assistant coaches, as well as key staff members (as designated by Belichick), shall be provided with an automobile for their use in accordance with [UNC] policy.¹¹⁰
3. A membership to Chapel Hill Country Club. [Belichick] may use guest access privileges for staff members and their families according to the applicable policies of Chapel Hill Country Club.¹¹¹
 4. Tickets in accordance with Department of Athletics policies, including:¹¹²
 - a. Four (4) tickets and access to ten (10) additional tickets for all football games, including bowl and championship games.
 - b. Four (4) tickets to all home sporting events.
 - c. In addition, each football program coach and other key staff member (as designated by [Belichick]) shall be provided with a ticket for every family member to each football program home game, championship game, and bowl/playoff game (a maximum of four (4) tickets for each coach or key staff member).
 5. [Belichick] or an entity controlled by [Belichick] will be entitled to operate and retain all revenues from athletic camps or clinics in accordance with the Governing Requirements.¹¹³
 6. [Belichick] and Athletics Director shall mutually agree on the football program’s scheduling of UNC intercollegiate athletic competition during the Term.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ *Id.*

¹¹² *Id.*

¹¹³ *Id.*

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

7. Access to a suite at all home football games and access to the Athletics Director's suite at away football games.¹¹⁵
8. Personal use of a private aircraft for not more than twenty-five (25) hours per contract year.¹¹⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

Belichick's arrival at the University of North Carolina marks a pivotal moment for the Tar Heels' football program, bringing an unparalleled NFL pedigree and a proven track record of success to a program seeking to elevate its standing in the competitive landscape of college football. With six Super Bowl titles and a reputation for strategic brilliance, Belichick's extensive experience in building winning cultures could transform UNC into a powerhouse, despite initial skepticism about his transition from the professional to the collegiate level. His no-nonsense approach, honed over decades in the NFL, aligns with his stated goal of building a disciplined, competitive program at Chapel Hill, leveraging his ability to adapt complex strategies to a younger roster eager for instruction.¹¹⁷ The significant offseason roster enhancements, including a top-10 transfer class and a strong 2025 recruiting class, signal early success in attracting talent, a critical factor in navigating the modern era of NIL dynamics and the transfer portal.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Belichick's personal connection to UNC through his father's legacy adds a layer of commitment to establishing a lasting impact, potentially redefining the program's identity and competitiveness within the ACC and beyond. While controversies surrounding his personal life and the unconventional nature of his hire have sparked debate, Belichick's proven ability to focus on performance and results suggests he can overcome distractions and skepticism. If successful, his

¹¹⁵ *Id.* at 12.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ Talty, *supra* note 22.

¹¹⁸ Inside Carolina, *supra* note 58.

tenure could not only elevate UNC's football program to new heights but also cement his legacy as a transformative figure in both professional and college football, bridging the gap between the two with a blueprint for sustained excellence.

Harly Johnson is a law student at Marquette University Law School, on track to earn his Juris Doctor degree and a Sports Law Certificate from the National Sports Law Institute by May 2026. Originally from San Francisco, he is an avid bay area sports fan. He earned his bachelor's degree in history with a minor in interdisciplinary writing from Wake Forest University in 2023. As a student intern for Wake Forest Athletics, Harly worked in the communications department, drafting articles for the athletic department's website, and helping plan content while managing six social media accounts for NCAA Division I teams. In the summer of 2025, he completed an internship with Attorney Marty Greenberg, where he worked on both sports law and real estate law matters. Beyond his professional experience, Harly contributes to the law school community as a member of the Marquette Sports Law Review and Sports Law Society. His education, legal experience, and background in athletics provide him with a unique perspective on sports law and management.