**With Wearable Tech Deals, New Player Data Is Up for Grabs**

**By MARC TRACY**

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The University of Michigan football team took the field for its season opener on Sept. 3 accompanied by Michael Jordan, the team’s honorary captain for the game, in uniforms bearing his signature Jumpman logo. Such pageantry is the fruit of a new apparel contract, worth about $170 million, between the university and Nike.

But one significant aspect of the deal, among the richest in college sports, was not apparent to the crowd. A clause in the contract could, in the future, allow Nike to harvest personal data from Michigan athletes through the use of wearable technology like heart-rate monitors, GPS trackers and other devices that log myriad biological activities.

As debates about athletes’ rights intensify in big-time college sports, the next frontier, independent experts say, could be privacy issues related to wearable tech, which in coming years could expand beyond health trackers like Fitbit and the Apple Watch to “smart clothing” with sensors embedded in the material itself.

The most ambitious projects are still on the drawing board. But at Michigan, a range of devices could eventually collect data including “speed, distance, vertical leap height, maximum time aloft, shot attempts, ball possession, heart rate, running route” and other measurements, according to the contract.

Though other universities have deals with technology companies governing health- and fitness-monitoring devices, Michigan’s contract drew notice not only because of the Wolverines’ high profile, but because the contract appears to allow for more comprehensive data collection than is typical and grants Nike, the world’s biggest sportswear company, broad rights “to utilize” that information.

“My question is, how would players’ interests be represented?” said Leslie Saxon, a cardiologist who runs the University of Southern California Center for Body Computing, noting that college athletes’ designation as amateurs gave them limited leverage to influence such deals.

At the professional level, Saxon said, there is a “players’ association part of this,” with several unions engaged in discussions over wearable tech.

Michigan’s contract, obtained by several news media organizations, including The New York Times, stipulates that the data collection be anonymous and comply with “all applicable laws.”

But privacy experts say those stipulations provide limited security given the threat of hacking and the lack of regulation in this area. The experts also say that the data, if matched to certain players — something the experts say could prove less difficult than it sounds — could harm their career prospects and, depending on what is measured, reveal intimate details.

“There’s not a lot of protections for players,” said Tatiana Melnik, a health care lawyer, who noted that the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act applied to medical records but not biometric data like that covered by Nike’s contract.

She, too, noted that college athletes might lack say over how their data was used.

“How does a player know you’re not going to turn around and share this information with the N.F.L.?” she said.