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Eli Willits Sets Record with \$8.2M MLB Signing Bonus, Joins Nationals After No. 1 Pick

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Seventeen-year-old shortstop Eli Willits has made headlines as the top overall pick in the 2025 Major League Baseball (MLB) Draft, quickly finalizing an \$8.2 million signing bonus with the Washington Nationals. His signing marks the highest bonus ever given to a high

school player, highlighting the franchise's long-term investment in young American talent and signaling a promising new era for the struggling ballclub.

Willits, a switch-hitter from Fort Cobb-Broxtton High School in Oklahoma, wasted no time moving forward with his professional career. Just six days after being drafted, he stood before the press at Nationals Park, already focused on his ambitious goals. "I've set a goal to be in the big leagues by the time I'm 20," Willits said confidently. "Hopefully, I get out there and start playing well, and that can be something I can accomplish in the next few years."

The \$8.2 million signing bonus narrowly surpasses the previous high school record set by Jackson Holliday, who signed for \$8.19 million with the Baltimore Orioles in 2022, after being selected first overall. This move by the Nationals shows a clear willingness to invest in foundational American prospects instead of chasing costly international free agents or aging veterans, an approach some franchises have leaned on to mixed results.

Eli comes from a strong baseball lineage. His father, Reggie Willits, played six seasons with the Los Angeles Angels and later served on the coaching staff for the New York Yankees. The younger Willits brings both athletic pedigree and mental maturity, traits scouts say make him a standout beyond just raw talent.

With this signing, the Nationals are signaling their intent to rebuild from within, banking on American-born prospects with deep roots in the game. If Willits continues on his current trajectory, he may become not just a cornerstone for the Nationals but a symbol of a broader shift back to developing homegrown talent through the farm system.

By prioritizing development over short-term spending, Washington is taking a path that aligns with a more conservative and measured approach to franchise growth, something fans and analysts will be watching closely in the seasons ahead.