



The ATJ Weekly: What Athletes Can Learn from Modern NIL Stars

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The New Era of Student-Athlete Opportunity

College sports have quickly changed over the years, and the expectations for student-athletes with it. Today, performance is only one part of what defines opportunity. Athletes are being watched for how they present themselves, how they build their identity, and how they position themselves for opportunities beyond their sports. So what should young athletes be learning from those who have already adapted to this new reality?

What is Athlete Brand?

A modern athlete brand is how an athlete is perceived beyond just their performance. It includes much more, like how they show up in their sport, how they present themselves on social media, the values they represent, and the opportunities they create outside of competition. For athletes today, this matters because the path to success is no longer limited to stats, trophies, or game results. Coaches, recruiters, brands, and fans are all paying attention to more than just performance. They are paying attention to your **identity**.

This is where athletes like Flau'jae Johnson stand out, she isn't only known for what she does in her basketball games, she builds her presence as a musician, speaks confidently in interviews, and makes intentional choices about how she is represented in the public eye. This combination of, "**Performance + Personality + Presence**" is what can make an athlete's brand so powerful.

For young athletes, the idea is simple. Your brand is already being built every day, whether you plan for it or not. Everything you do, on the field, in practice, online, and how you carry yourself, all contribute to the way people see you as an athlete. The goal is to start being intentional about that story early, instead of trying to shape it later.



Performance



Personality



Presence



Athlete Spotlight

Flau'jae Johnson is a strong example of what a strong modern athlete brand can look like when it's built with intention. As a high-level college basketball player at LSU, she is known for her performance on the court, but she also stands out for what she does off the court. She pursues music, appears in interviews and media content, and consistently presents herself as more than just an athlete. What makes her different is not just that she has multiple other interests, but that she actively embraces them as part of **who she is** instead of separating them from her sport.

The key lesson from her approach is that athletes don't have to wait until after their playing career to start building who they are outside of it. Every interest, skill, and platform can become a part of a larger personal brand when it's developed with **purpose**. The most successful athletes today are the ones who start shaping their story early, instead of reacting to it later when opportunities are already on the line.

Key Takeaways:

- Your athlete brand is built every day through your actions both on AND off the field/court.
- Performance matters, but identity and how you present yourself based on that performance also shapes opportunities.
- The most successful athletes are intentional about how they present themselves.
- Everything you do contributes to the story people associate with you, so be deliberate about it.

Take some time this week to learn more about NIL and how it can change your opportunities as a student-athlete, especially how it can build value beyond your sport while still competing. Understanding this shift early on is an important step in preparing for the future.

To keep learning and stay updated on athlete development, follow A.T.J. Sports for more insights, resources, and guidance on building your athlete brand and preparing yourself for opportunities beyond the game.

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At A.T.J. Sports, we believe preparation goes beyond performance. We help athletes build their mindset, identity, and habits needed to succeed both in their sport and in their future.

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