



ATJ Weekly: Meeting the King of NIL

By Maria Trevino Nunez

A Different Path to Success

When people think about successful NIL athletes, they often picture star quarterbacks at major universities or athletes with millions of followers. Rayquan Smith proved otherwise. Through determination, strategic networking, and a commitment to building his personal brand, he became known as the athlete known as the “*King of NIL*” and created opportunities that many athletes dream about.



Who is Rayquan Smith?

Rayquan Smith earned this title by showing athletes that success in the NIL era is about much more than athletic performance. While competing as a student-athlete, Smith took a proactive approach to building his personal brand. Instead of waiting for opportunities to come to him, he reached out to companies, created many professional relationships, and consistently promoted himself as a valuable partner for brands.

What makes his story unique is that he did not attend one of the larger athletic programs in the nation, Smith went to Norfolk State University from 2019-2022 and Virginia State University from 2023-2024. Despite going to these smaller schools, he secured dozens of NIL partnerships by understanding the importance of networking, communication, and personal branding. His success demonstrated that athletes from any school can create opportunities if they are willing to put in the work.

Smith's journey serves as a reminder that NIL is not just about making money, it's about developing skills that can benefit athletes long after their playing careers end. Learning how to market yourself, build relationships, and represent a brand professionally can open many doors in both sports and future careers.

From Outreach to Impact

One example of Rayquan Smith's determination happened when NIL opportunities first became available in 2021. While many athletes waited around for brands to contact them, Smith took matters into his own hands. He sent emails to more than 100 companies introducing himself and asking about potential partnerships. But these results were not immediate. Out of those 100 emails, he received only a few responses and his first opportunities were actually unpaid partnerships that provided free products rather than money. Instead of becoming discouraged, Smith used those early deals to build his portfolio, gain experience, and establish credibility with brands.

His persistence paid off. Those first few partnerships eventually led to larger opportunities with nationally recognized brands, helping him secure more than 80 NIL deals from brands like *Coach*, *Pedalyte*, *Crocs*, and *CVS*. It also earned him the nickname “*King of NIL*.” Smith's story demonstrates that success in NIL often comes from consistent effort, strategic networking, and the willingness to create opportunities rather than wait for them to appear.

Key Takeaways:

- Be proactive instead of waiting for opportunities to come to you.
- Build genuine relationships with brands, coaches, and professionals in your network.
- Treat your personal brand like a long-term investment, not a one time opportunity.

This week, take one step toward building your personal brand. Update your social media bio, create a professional profile picture, connect with someone in your network, or research brands that align with your values and interests. ***Small actions taken consistently***, can create big opportunities over time.

100 emails sent

→ **20 responses**

→ **5 deals**

**1
breakthrough
moment**

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.

Sign up for the A.T.J. Sports newsletter to stay updated on athlete development, NIL education, and tools to help you build your brand beyond the game.