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How This Company Uses Pro Athletes to Teach Sports Skills

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Co-founders of Apex Sports, Connor Morris (L), Marcus Davis (C) and Austin Fenstermaker (R). Courtesy photo.

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Picture one of your favorite athletes. Now, imagine that athlete teaching the ins and outs of the sport, making you a better player in return.

[Apex Sports](#) wants to make that vision more of a reality for any amateur athlete, connecting the interested user to professional coaching for a low cost.

It works like this: Buyers purchase a course for \$30. The course includes an hour of video content and written curriculum, and stars professional athletes as the viewer's coach. While the courses offered currently only focus on football (with a forthcoming foray into lacrosse), there are plans to majorly increase the type of sports coaching the site

offers.

"We want to make great coaching accessible for everybody."

The product was developed by three Miami University class of 2017 graduates: Connor Morris (CMO), Austin Fenstermaker (CTO) and Marcus Davis (CEO). But Apex Sports didn't start as Apex Sports — in fact, the original startup, developed when they were students, was called "Sweet Feet" and had a much more data-driven purpose.

Fast forward to 2018, when the trio was accepted into local tech accelerator UpTech's program. There, they spent time analyzing their idea and interviewing potential customers for insight.

"A huge part of the UpTech program and accelerators in general is challenging your business model," Davis said. "We went through that process in the first few months of the program, [and] throughout that process, we were doing a ton of interviews. We found that there's this new problem of [unattainable] coaching, and we were hearing this from athletes, coaches and athletic directors that this was a huge issue."

They found that coaching for youth athletes was also incredibly expensive — think \$100 an hour, in some cases — and not offered at all in some parts of the country.

As a result, "young athletes are limited to their network," Davis said.

The team went into problem-solving mode. Considering what they gleaned from interviews and Davis' own powerful experience learning the ins and outs of football from his uncle, NFL player Chris Carter, the founders had an idea.

The result? A pivot that resulted in Apex Sports, which officially launched in January.

"We want to make great coaching accessible for everybody," Davis added.

That meant in terms of pricing and approach, while not sacrificing high-quality content. So, Apex Sports began initially working with football players for their first round of six courses. There's a quarterback package with Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Cardale Jones and offensive line package with Minnesota Viking Storm Norton, to name just a few.

And just last month, Apex Sports announced that it was adding another sport to its roster: lacrosse, thanks to a partnership with Under Armour Lacrosse. Davis added that the team was just recently in Maryland shooting new content with athletes like Taylor Cummings of the U.S.A. Nationals.

These two sports are where Apex is looking to place its primary focus in the months ahead. However, that doesn't mean the team doesn't have big plans.

"As we build our catalogue up with top of the line athletes ... [we hope to cover all] major sports in the U.S.," Davis added.

How did the team build said catalogue? Davis and the other founders, who were life-long athletes who payed in college, leveraged their personal networks to get athletes onboard. And, from the six players they're working with, three of them signed on as investors.

They're not the only ones helping fund the company. In fact, Apex has raised a pre-seed round and concluded a campaign with Wunderfund, which gained more than 40 investors, "a couple thousand dollars" and increased notoriety in the local community. There are also plans to launch a seed round in the middle of 2019, too.

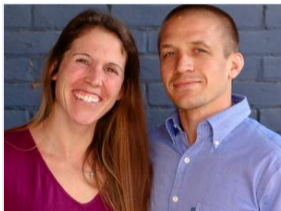
Customers are responding to Apex. Davis said that users as far as Europe are engaging with the platform, with high school and middle school athletes being the most common. So far, there's been 5,000 users to the platform every month; Davis said that's nearly 100 percent growth.

Part of the reason for that success, Davis added, was #StartupCincy.

"The Cincinnati startup ecosystem had a huge impact on getting to Apex, especially as entrepreneurs right out of school," Davis said. "So many people who knew more know than we were at the time and willing to help us; the whole community helped us get to where we are."

Editor's Note: Davis, Fenstermaker and Morris were all named to the Cincy Inno 25 Under 25 list. Read it [here](#).

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