

## Sneakerhead Stardom

Audrey Carrico

[carrico1323@gmail.com](mailto:carrico1323@gmail.com)

859-307-2275

Magazine Writing- Article Assignment 2

12/8/23

The rise and history of sneakers and its fanbase, sneakerheads. A look at Cincinnati's sneaker impact and the local businesses that have shaped the local culture.

Styles and trends have experienced plenty of ebbs and flows throughout the years.

High-waisted jeans, shoulder pads, perms and even windbreakers have all had their 10 minutes of fame. Sneakers however, have managed to withstand the test of time and have taken Nike's "Just Do It" to a whole new level.

Sneaker-lovers - known as "sneakerheads" to each other, camp outside of shoe stores and travel across the country (or world) to track down the newest release. They're used to paying hundreds to even thousands of dollars and engaging in heated bidding wars just to get their hands on the latest prized sneaker. Whether it be the new Jordan 3's (\$250) or the much anticipated New Balance USA 990s (\$200), it's not uncommon for sneakers to sell out in a matter of minutes. "Regulars drop into the store right on release days," says Micheal Giddens, owner of sneaker store From The Sidewalk. "The second we announce a release on social media, it's like a mad rush to get their first."

You can find sneakerheads lacing-up fresh pairs of kicks right here in Cincinnati, which has a vibrant sneaker culture filled with several shops carrying the latest and most sought after brands. Sneakerheads in Cincinnati have established their name not only with their colorful shoes, but also with their efforts in the community. "I see it everyday" "I'm not from Cincinnati but I call this home," Giddens says. Located on Main Street in Over the Rhine, From The Sidewalk has emerged as an essential part of Cincinnati's rich culture. With a wall filled with

hundreds of top sneakers from Adidas to Jordan to Nike and New Balance, customers scan the wall while looking through the shop's rack of vintage t-shirts. "One of the best parts about this business is instilling confidence in our customers," Giddens says. "They leave our store with fresh kicks and fresh swag."

Since the late '80s, the sneaker market has grown exponentially. Some credit NBA Hall of Famer Michael Jordan and his Jordan brand sneakers for the boost. During his early years with the Chicago Bulls, the Jordan 1s were released in the team's famous black, red and white color combination. Since then, the original price of the sneaker has more than doubled rising from \$64.99 to \$150 and up. Today, the Jordan brand averages profits of over \$200 million a year in sneakers alone with the global sneaker market's revenue at an estimated \$72 billion value. According to Statista's "Global Sneaker Market Value", the market is expected to reach \$100 billion value in 2026.

Without devoted sneakerheads, there would be no market. Meredith Snider, a freshman finance major at the University of Kentucky and self-employed sneaker reseller grew up in a heavy basketball environment, playing and traveling for 15 years. "Basketball was my gateway into the business," Snider says. "I realized I had learned so much about the market that I could make my hobby into a profit." In the last 10 years, resellers have more than doubled in numbers, Snider says, thanks to online shopping. "I find most of my sneakers equally in store and online searching around for deals and discounts," Snider explains. "After purchasing, I ensure the product is reliable and resell at competitive prices."

With millions of sneakers available on the market, experienced sneakerheads such as Snider are able to find undervalued shoes and repurpose them. Snider is a bit of an anomaly, being a female in this male dominated field has both its challenges and benefits. "A lot of sellers

don't always take me seriously and underestimate my knowledge of the market," Snider says. "In a way, I've used their ignorance to my advantage by reselling at better prices and dedicating time to learning the market." Snider isn't the only female breaking barriers: just this year, WNBA star and point guard for the New York Liberty, Sabrina Ionescu announced the release of her own signature shoe "Sabrina 1s." In a partnership with Nike, Ionescu's shoe markets at \$130. The low top is available in five different colorways including pink and orange, black and white, gray, cream, and lavender.

In a community and sport that has long been marketed almost exclusively toward men and young boys, Ionescu is just the 12th professional female athlete with a signature shoe. For Snider, Ionescu's shoe is more than just a number. "Basketball plays such an essential role in the sneakerhead community," Snider says. "It's groundbreaking to see Ionescu's sneaker doing so well in sales because it shows women and their products are just as profitable as any other shoe."

In terms of culture and expression, women aren't the only demographic making their name in the community. Since the introduction of sneakers, Black creators and Black culture have been at the forefront of the shoe's success. Hip hop groups such as Run D.M.C. and Salt-N-Pepa, along with TV shows like "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" have inspired an entire generation of sneakers. Notable contributions have come from Black athletes such as L.A. Lakers Hall of Famer Kobe Bryant and the NBA's all time leading scorer, LeBron James, who have created more than 30 signature shoes in their name. "Outside of Jordan, I don't think sneakers would have the hype they do now without legends like Kobe and LeBron," Snider says.

"Growing up in a predominantly white area, sneakers helped me find an identity and embrace my culture," says 19-year-old Wiley Baker. "I've collected Jordan's shoes since I was a kid," Baker said. "I don't think they'll ever go out of style. They're timeless." To Baker's point,

the Jordan brand has continued its predominant success year in and year out. Jordan's 2022 year end report shows its revenue has increased by more than \$2.4 billion since 2018. Ultimately, Jordan and his collaborator Nike have shown no signs of stopping their statistical sneaker dominance. "Although I'd say New Balance has grown a lot in the past few years, a majority of our stock is made up entirely of Jordan and Nike," Giddens says. "There's just a nostalgic feel to their brands."

For some sneakerheads, markets and cultures are more analytical than what meets the eye. Jacob Cain, owner of Covington, Kentucky's Sole By Style, says sneakerheads come in from all backgrounds. Cain, a former University of Cincinnati graduate, and his business partner Mitchell Wolfe took their IT and finance degrees to the sneaker market. "I've always had a slight obsession with sneakers," Cain says. Since its opening in 2018, Sole By Style has sold exclusive sneakers to customers in the Greater Cincinnati area. "We try our best to market the store towards local sneakerheads," Cain says. "There's really no other place doing what we're doing in Northern Kentucky."

Customers who enter Sole By Style are greeted by the store's mascot, a brown French bulldog named Rose. The store has sneakers stacked along both side walls and an open yet comfortable space for customers to explore. "I'm constantly researching sales and exclusive items," Cain says. "We offer sneakers you aren't going to find anywhere else." Included in their selection is a Nike Air Force 1 collaboration with rapper Travis Scott, which retails for up to \$530. The store also contains the Nike Air Force 1 Tiffany & Co. which can be purchased for up to \$1,200 in store. Cain says sneakers are much more than a piece of leather. "Our sneakers and collaborations are a form of art," he explains. "Just as art collectors search for one-of-a-kind pieces, sneakerheads share their affinity for collecting."

Although sneaker hubs are mainly centered in cities such as New York and Los Angeles, Cincinnati has made its own name in the market too. This past March, creator and host of the world famous show “Sneaker Shopping,” Joe La Puma visited Cincinnati’s, From The Sidewalk. La Puma was accompanied by former Cincinnati native and successful YouTuber and streamer, Darren Watkins Jr. or “Speed”. From The Sidewalk was featured in an episode of La Puma’s show alongside Speed who was interviewed and shown shopping at the store. “I felt so incredibly honored that they came to our store,” Giddens says. “It’s done so much for Cincinnati’s sneaker culture.” The show’s channel, Complex, has a current following of over 11.2 million on Instagram followed by Speed’s 13.9 million followers. Together, the episode brought in more than 3.8 million views and counting.

Despite the national spotlight from the “Sneaker Shopping” episode, From The Sidewalk hasn’t forgotten its roots. This past fall, the store partnered with the local nonprofit organization Make A Kid Merry and FC Cincinnati striker, Brandon Vasquez, to provide local inner-city children with fresh kicks. Not only did the event provide children with new shoes, but it also inspired a brand new generation of sneakerheads. “We’ve dubbed the term 'beautiful people on the sidewalk,’” says Nick Carter, an employee at From the Sidewalk. “Each time a customer buys a pair of sneakers, we commemorate it with a photo to remember the beautiful people who make this store so special.” Photos however, aren’t the only thing that lasts a lifetime.

“Words can’t describe how much of an impact sneakers have had on my life,” Baker says. “I’ve made so many connections through the community.” For others, it’s a brand. “I was able to take my degree and combine it with my ultimate hobby,” says Cain. “Sneakers are forever.”

**Sources:**

**Micheal Giddens:** owner of From The Sidewalk- [therealmikegidd@gmail.com](mailto:therealmikegidd@gmail.com)

**Meredith Snider:** college student and buyer/seller of sneakers- 859-380-6871

**Wiley Baker:** consumer and customer of From the Sidewalk- 859-444-1595

**Jacob Cain:** founder and co-owner of Sole By Style- 513-206-3762

**Nick Carter:** employee at From The Sidewalk- [nickmcarter@gmail.com](mailto:nickmcarter@gmail.com)

**Article:** <https://www.statista.com/>