

The Impact of Social Media on Modern Athlete Branding



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Social Media has played a huge role in changing the way modern-era professional athletes go about creating their brand. Players and teams have a much easier time being showcased to the public, and a lot more attention can be grabbed from outside of the world of just sports.

Today's world is shaped by social media, so it's no shocker that most pro sports leagues, teams, and players are utilizing the benefits of its existence. Let's take a look at how social media has transformed the way athletes build their brands, interact with fans, and acquire different sponsorship and endorsement deals.

Building a personal brand

The main reason you'll see a player try to separate their full identity from a team is to try and build their brand. Besides achieving victory in their sport, building a personal brand is each player's bread and butter. It defines who you are not just in the sport, but outside it as well. Think of monikers like "CR7" where the brand is automatically associated with a person like Cristiano Ronaldo, rather than the team (like Real Madrid) or sponsorship (like Nike) of the player getting to decide what the brand looks like. Take LeBron James for example, who has played for

multiple teams in the NBA as well as the American men's national team, yet he will always be recognized by his brand under the King's Domain recognized as the "LeBron James" brand.

This process would be extremely hard without the use of social media, as there is a higher chance average everyday people will associate you with the larger group you are a part of such as your team, not the individual identity you created for yourself. Through the creation of social media accounts like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and much more, individual athletes have had a much easier time voicing their ideals from their own accounts.

More engagements with fans

Using social media goes hand in hand with building a personal brand and upping your engagement with fans from all over. Almost any professional athlete you can think of nowadays has at least one of the big social media accounts such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, or X. The more accounts an athlete has, the higher chances the player has to connect with completely new fans.

Players like Cristiano Ronaldo (with 1 billion followers across all social media platforms), Lionel Messi, Virat Kohli, Neymar Jr., LeBron James, Kylian Mbappe, David Beckham, and Andy Murray have all been able to bolster their relationships with fans by sharing some aspects from their personal lives, or at least what they're doing outside of the sport. Allowing fans to hear more about the player through their social media accounts is one inevitable aspect of creating these accounts, the other is to help with new business opportunities, such as endorsements.

Higher endorsement opportunity

At the height of any player's professional sports career, they should be receiving a multitude of endorsement deals. Now with the use of these social media accounts, it's a lot easier for companies to learn more about the athlete without even having to meet them. A good reputation is valuable when these opportunities come around, and with enough practice of social media use, it's very easy to maintain that positive reputation.

With a combination of a popular name/brand and a great reputation, any player can become the face of a brand or product, as your reputation and other accounts proceed with you. Most of the time this is a great thing, especially for newer pro athletes deserving of money-making opportunities when they may have not gotten the chance without a popular social media account. A player backed by a popular brand, product, and highly reputable social media accounts will more likely experience success at a faster rate than others.