



# OWNING THE NARRATIVE

# How Athletes Are Disrupting the Media Landscape, Reshaping Sports Culture and Transforming the Future of Sports Storytelling\*

### \*But Risk Perpetuating Longstanding Inequities

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>3</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>History of Athlete-Owned Media</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Mapping the Athlete-Owned Media Industry</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Content Analysis of Athlete-Owned Video Podcasts</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Athlete-Owned Media Content Themes</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>31</b>	<b>Appendices</b>



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# INTRODUCTION

The influx of athlete-owned production companies, shows, and podcasts have restructured the sports media industry.<sup>1</sup> Athletes are carving out their own media pathways, taking ownership of their narratives, and delivering authentic content directly to fans. Athletes have long played a role in sports media by providing insider analysis and color commentary in traditional sports media programming, but in the last 10 years, athletes have increasingly taken more ownership of their own stories and expertise.

Athlete-owned media is an evolving category of content that features new stories told by new storytellers. Athletes have moved beyond their traditional roles as analysts and commentators to become content creators, owners, and distributors—disrupting an established media culture that has historically dictated how sports stories were told.

*Boardroom*, a leader in this emerging category, notes that “we have officially entered the era of the athlete-led media outlet.”<sup>2</sup> Athletes are launching contemporary media companies, producing, distributing and owning their own intellectual property (IP) across genres and platforms and reshaping the entire media industry in the process. This report examines the ways athletes are disrupting the media landscape, the innovations they make, and the cultural impact they have.

## **Building on a Legacy of Innovation**

This empowering era of athlete-owned media builds upon the foundation laid by trailblazing platforms like *The Players Tribune* and *Uninterrupted*, which established a blueprint for how athletes tell their own stories and express unfiltered viewpoints. These platforms paved the way for the next generation of top athletes to launch their own media ventures, allowing them not only to control their narratives but also to monetize the content they choose to share with the world.

## **Expanding Storytelling Formats**

Today, athletes are innovating with new storytelling formats and leveraging emerging platforms to deliver fresh perspectives directly to fans. From Peyton and Eli Manning’s pioneering “alt-cast” with *ManningCast* to soccer star Midge Purce launching her reality show directly on X, to Giannis Antetokounmpo’s biographical films, and Chris Paul’s experimental projects on Quibi, athlete-driven ventures are diversifying the sports media ecosystem.

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<sup>1</sup> [awfulannouncing.com/streaming/athletes-reign-sports-media-pat-mcafee-shannon-sharpe-gilbert-arenas-jj-redick.html](https://awfulannouncing.com/streaming/athletes-reign-sports-media-pat-mcafee-shannon-sharpe-gilbert-arenas-jj-redick.html)

<sup>2</sup> [boardroom.tv/boardroom-talks-matt-barnes-rich-kleiman](https://boardroom.tv/boardroom-talks-matt-barnes-rich-kleiman)



## A Perfect Storm For Growth

The current media market has created a favorable environment for athlete-owned content. The rise of athlete-owned media has been fueled by the popularity of short form content, the accessibility of social media, the creator-centered media economy, and the ability of over-the-top content to offer media directly to audiences without restrictive subscriptions or paywalls. From their end, athletes aim to deliver a product that feels authentic and is different from what sports media audiences are used to. By owning their own content vehicles, athletes offer unparalleled access to audiences and create spaces for vulnerability, where they and their guests can share unique viewpoints. Athletes' behind-the-scenes storytelling and intimate authenticity can resonate in ways traditional reporting often cannot.

## The Drive for Narrative Control

Many athletes have cited a distrust of traditional sports media on their journey to creating their own media.<sup>3</sup> NBA star LeBron James said he started creating his own content because, "I got sick and tired of the media changing the narrative or picking their own narrative about what I was doing."<sup>4</sup> Athletes who own their own content are now able to control their narrative and ensure that they can serve as decision makers. Businessman Tristen Ross of media company *Athlete Tech Group* said, "Athletes have long been deprived of a seat at the table when it comes to making decisions and these athletes haven't just made a seat for themselves; they've quite literally formed their own boardrooms."<sup>5</sup>

## Persistent Inequities

However, like traditional media, this new landscape reflects long standing inequities. While the rise of athlete-owned media has added a wealth of new voices and stories, particularly among Black male athletes, the benefits of this movement remain concentrated among certain groups. Men's sports, particularly high-revenue leagues like the NFL and NBA, dominate this space, leaving women's sports and lower-profile leagues with fewer opportunities for representation and growth.

## This Report

This report was generated by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the Norman Lear Center—a nonpartisan research and policy center based at USC Annenberg that studies the social impact of media.

In the pages ahead, we outline the landscape and cultural implications of burgeoning athlete-owned sports media while examining whether athlete-owned media is helping drive athlete authenticity and diversity in programming and ownership. **We detail the emergence of athlete-owned media, the changes athletes are**

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<sup>3</sup> [www.cbssports.com/nba/news/how-players-are-controlling-their-own-media-and-what-it-means-for-the-nba/](http://www.cbssports.com/nba/news/how-players-are-controlling-their-own-media-and-what-it-means-for-the-nba/)

<sup>4</sup> [sports.yahoo.com/what-draymond-greens-new-media-ethos-gets-wrong-about-media-player-dynamics-150305293.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHRocHM-6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xLMNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAN7Jw32\\_pHUJJU3w7M\\_l3os7rsBXP7Yc6oJVVa\\_QP\\_OypOEQQOnnTh\\_AvEVJfEuZEB7dSIFapxupZPoEQ2BwP-7wOxAiSbM-LusiTFDGzzaYO1n8crMkqaEkJT12LI2m9SiTGGl7LXxbhfl3aWvgtXc49HWprTyWfWQwDGDdbuDss5](http://sports.yahoo.com/what-draymond-greens-new-media-ethos-gets-wrong-about-media-player-dynamics-150305293.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHRocHM-6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xLMNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAN7Jw32_pHUJJU3w7M_l3os7rsBXP7Yc6oJVVa_QP_OypOEQQOnnTh_AvEVJfEuZEB7dSIFapxupZPoEQ2BwP-7wOxAiSbM-LusiTFDGzzaYO1n8crMkqaEkJT12LI2m9SiTGGl7LXxbhfl3aWvgtXc49HWprTyWfWQwDGDdbuDss5)

<sup>5</sup> [www.athletetechgroup.com/blog/why-athletes-are-starting-media-companies](http://www.athletetechgroup.com/blog/why-athletes-are-starting-media-companies)



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”

LEBRON JAMES

driving in storytelling and distribution, and the broader cultural impact. By analyzing the evolution of this disruptive movement, we reveal how athlete-owned media is reshaping sports culture and highlight the ongoing challenges to creating a more equitable future.

To investigate this, we performed the following research activities:

1. **An investigation of the history of athlete-owned media** to identify the trailblazer athletes and organizations that opened the door for the current athlete-owned media landscape.
2. **A comprehensive analysis of the athlete-owned media landscape** by leveraging diverse secondary sources, including online news outlets, industry publications, IMDb Pro, social media platforms, and traditional media. We gathered detailed data on each media property, such as audience reach metrics, financial performance, and news coverage insights.
3. **An in-depth content analysis of popular athlete-owned media video podcasts**, examining key elements such as the demographics of hosts and guests, the balance of sports-related versus non-sports topics, the variety and spontaneity of discussions, and the level of casualness in the episodes' appearance and language.
4. **Semi-structured, in-depth interviews** with academics, journalists, media executives, and athlete-content creators to uncover insider perspectives on athlete-owned sports media. These interviews revealed anticipated trends, best practices, barriers, challenges, and emerging opportunities within the athlete-owned media industry.



# KEY FINDINGS

## 1 **Athlete-owned media is a multi-billion dollar business.**

Today, athlete-owned media occupies a significant and growing segment of the overall media marketplace. Many athletes have lucrative podcasts, but a few high-profile athletes have much higher media ownership aspirations. We identified 33 athlete-owned production companies, many of which have emerged as significant players in the media landscape, producing over 370 media properties across various formats. These companies not only enable athletes to control their narratives but also represent substantial financial ventures. For example, *The SpringHill Company*, co-founded by LeBron James and media executive Maverick Carter, is valued at \$725 million, while former NFL quarterback Peyton Manning's *Omaha Productions* has reached a valuation of \$400 million. These enterprises demonstrate the growing economic and cultural impact of athlete-driven media, highlighting their ability to shape storytelling while generating substantial value in the media industry.

## 2 **Athletes are monetizing new and emerging platforms.**

Athlete creators are taking advantage of technological access to new media to create and monetize content. Athlete-owned podcasts, in particular, have become a major force in the media landscape, with top shows amassing over 7 billion views on YouTube, 725 million likes on TikTok, and 37 million Instagram followers. While financial details for many podcasts are undisclosed, headline-making deals reveal the significant economic potential of this medium. For example, football's Jason and Travis Kelce's *New Heights* secured over \$100 million from Amazon's Wondery, and former NFL punter Pat McAfee licensed *The Pat McAfee Show* to ESPN for \$85 million. Former NFL tight end Shannon Sharpe also highlighted the profitability of this space, noting that his *Club Shay Shay* interview with comedian Katt Williams, which garnered over 80 million views, earned him \$6 million.

## 3 **Content ownership empowers athlete-creators.**

These platforms have become not only lucrative revenue streams, but also powerful tools for athletes to expand their media presence. The shift from being participants in media to owning their narratives allows athletes to dictate how their stories are told and to directly benefit from their content. Athletes like Chris Paul have emphasized the **importance of creating platforms where they are not just the talent but also the decision-makers, ensuring long-term value and equity in their work.** Similarly, Maverick Carter highlighted that **maintaining athlete ownership was essential to preserving the integrity and authenticity of the stories being told.** This growing emphasis on ownership reflects a broader recognition of the long-term value of intellectual property, enabling athletes to build lasting visibility and revenue streams beyond their playing careers.



## 4 **Athlete-owned media is an untapped opportunity for women athletes.**

Despite the growth in women's sports viewership, monetization, and social media influence, women athletes remain underrepresented in athlete-owned media. While there is a growing appetite for women-centered content, female athletes do not own their narratives at the same scale as their male counterparts. **Only 22% of analyzed athlete-owned podcasts included women as hosts or guests.** High-profile women athletes and initiatives are beginning to address this gap by creating platforms to tell authentic and nuanced stories that challenge the male-dominated marketing formulas of traditional sports media. Athlete-owned media presents a significant opportunity to disrupt the patriarchal structure of sports media, amplifying new voices and creating space for broader representation and storytelling.

## 5 **Athlete-owned media expands the scope of storytelling beyond sports.**

Athlete-owned podcasts have redefined the boundaries of traditional sports media by venturing into diverse and deeply personal topics such as personal interests, upbringing, family, and mental health. These platforms foster an environment where athletes can share unfiltered perspectives on complex and often underrepresented issues, challenging traditional norms of sports commentary. For instance, *All The Smoke* offers candid narratives about life off the court, while former WNBA player Sue Bird and former soccer star Megan Rapinoe use their platform to address societal topics like gender pay equity and couples therapy. Many episodes feature high-profile guests from beyond sports or they provide behind-the-scenes glimpses into cultural moments that demonstrate the versatility of athlete-owned media as a space for expansive and impactful storytelling that transcends the confines of sports.

## 6 **These media create an authentic place for athletes.**

A personal and intimate vibe has become a standard in the athlete-owned podcast space: casual, uncensored, unmediated, and authentic. Forty-four percent of the episodes we analyzed took place in a living room setting and 93% of analyzed episodes showed hosts and guests wearing casual clothing. LeBron James created *The Shop* in an effort to emulate the conversations that take place “in a real barbershop, like the ones where I grew up,” James said. Shannon Sharpe sits with guests in a living room setting with relaxed leather chairs and an environment that prompts guest Katt Williams to tell Sharpe, “You’ve made a safe space here to tell the truth.”

# HISTORY OF ATHLETE-OWNED MEDIA

Legendary Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter had a reputation among sports reporters for not saying anything substantive in interviews.<sup>6</sup> Jeter said “[Reporters’] job was to get a headline, and I wasn’t going to give it to them.”<sup>7</sup> This stance toward journalism made it all the more surprising when, just days after ending his hall of fame career, Jeter launched a venture that would eventually shift the course of sports media.

In 2014, Jeter started ***The Players’ Tribune*** as a “place where athletes have the tools they need to share what they really think and feel. We want to have a way to connect directly with our fans, with no filter.”<sup>8</sup> Athletes were already using Twitter to bypass journalists and directly engage with the public, but the Tribune would provide a space for first-person in-depth storytelling and many high profile athletes leapt at the opportunity. Former NBA star Kobe Bryant announced his retirement on *The Players’ Tribune* by authoring a piece titled “Dear Basketball,” which he later turned into an Oscar-winning short film.<sup>9</sup> Baseball’s David Ortiz and former NFL quarterback Tom Brady also used the site to author their retirement announcements, while others took to the site to weigh in on important societal issues:

- After the murder of George Floyd, several athletes—like Atlanta Dream star [Tina Charles](#) and Philadelphia 76ers forward [Tobias Harris](#)—penned *racial justice* pieces for *The Players’ Tribune*. Additionally, NBA Hall of Famer [Bill Russell](#) detailed his decades of fighting racism, former Hockey player [Mark Fraser](#) explained the anti-Black racism he endures in his predominantly white sport, and former Cleveland Browns lineman [Joe Thomas](#) and former Utah Jazz guard [Kyle Korver](#) wrote about their roles as white allies in the pursuit of racial justice.
- Team USA gymnast [Aly Raisman](#) and New York Liberty star [Breanna Stewart](#) both opened up about *sexual abuse*.
- Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Russell Wilson [wrote about](#) the importance of taking *domestic violence* head on and former Detroit Lions linebacker [DeAndre Levy](#) wrote about masculinity and the dehumanization of women.
- Los Angeles Sparks guard [Layshia Clarendon](#) and retired NBA journeyman [Jason Collins](#) both wrote about being *LGBTQ* in sports and former Steelers quarterback [Kordell Stewart](#) detailed how gay rumors impacted his career.
- NBA star [Kevin Love](#) wrote multiple pieces about *mental health* and retired NFL linebacker [Marcus Smith II](#) talked about overcoming suicidal ideation.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Daily/Issues/2022/07/19/Technology/derek-jeter-the-captain-documentary-media-revolution.aspx](http://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Daily/Issues/2022/07/19/Technology/derek-jeter-the-captain-documentary-media-revolution.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/gYQlmd7MAow?si=VvwG652idt2DzPy8>

<sup>8</sup> [www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/introducing-derek-jeter](http://www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/introducing-derek-jeter)

<sup>9</sup> [www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/dear-basketball](http://www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/dear-basketball)



***Uninterrupted*** was also launched in 2014 by Maverick Carter and LeBron James as a destination for video testimonials from professional athletes. Carter quickly realized that *Uninterrupted* offered more than a media delivery system. “We realized that we were a media company that’s become a brand. We were an athlete empowerment brand,” Carter said.<sup>10</sup> Carter and James tapped a diverse group of current and former athletes as producers and executive producers of *Uninterrupted* media projects.

Sites like *The Players’ Tribune* and *Uninterrupted* established a blueprint for how athletes could tell their own stories and express their own unmediated views. They also opened the door for the next generation of top athletes to create their own media ventures and to not only control their own narrative, but to monetize what they choose to share.

Kevin Durant and Rich Kleinman created *Thirty Five Ventures (35V)* in 2016, which produced several movies under its media production pillar, and laid the foundation for many athletes to create their own production companies. The pair later also founded *Boardroom*, a media network for sports, entertainment, and culture.

In 2019, *Minute Media* acquired *The Players’ Tribune* from Jeter,<sup>11</sup> but *The Players’ Tribune* continues to publish first-person athlete stories and it has left an indelible impact on the shifting landscape of athlete-owned media. Jeter originally said his goal for the site was “to ultimately transform how athletes and newsmakers share information, bringing fans closer than ever to the games they love.”<sup>12</sup>

Jeter was clear from the start that he did not want to eliminate sports media. He said, “We don’t have sports highlights. This is completely different. We’re starting the conversation. I think we can coexist [with sports reporters].”<sup>13</sup>

This evolution of athlete-owned media, sparked by ventures like *The Players’ Tribune*, *Uninterrupted*, & *Thirty Five Ventures*, represents a seismic shift in how athletes communicate with the public. These platforms have empowered athletes to shape their narratives and paved the way for innovative approaches to content creation and audience engagement. As the influence of these trailblazing efforts continues to resonate, athlete-owned media today reflects a dynamic landscape defined by creativity, activism, and unprecedented opportunities for connection and monetization.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.sportspromedia.com/insights/features/from-the-magazine/uninterrupted-lebron-james-maverick-carter-devin-johnson-interview](http://www.sportspromedia.com/insights/features/from-the-magazine/uninterrupted-lebron-james-maverick-carter-devin-johnson-interview)

<sup>11</sup> [variety.com/2019/digital/news/minute-media-buts-derek-jeter-players-tribune-1203411595/](http://variety.com/2019/digital/news/minute-media-buts-derek-jeter-players-tribune-1203411595/)

<sup>12</sup> [www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/introducing-derek-jeter](http://www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/introducing-derek-jeter)

<sup>13</sup> [www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/derek-jeter-aspiring-media-mogul-811572/](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/derek-jeter-aspiring-media-mogul-811572/)

# MAPPING THE ATHLETE-OWNED MEDIA INDUSTRY

The athlete-owned media landscape is rapidly evolving, so we took a snapshot in Fall 2024 to understand where the athlete-owned media industry is currently. We mapped the athlete-owned media industry by identifying and categorizing key media properties, creating a structured overview of the field. This process involved examining a range of secondary sources, including online news outlets, industry publications, IMDb Pro, social media platforms, and traditional media. We gathered detailed data on each media property, such as audience reach metrics, financial performance, and news coverage insights.

We cast a wide net to map this industry—this report focuses on two athlete-owned media networks, 33 athlete-owned production companies, and the 45 most popular athlete-owned shows and podcasts.

This section analyzes athlete-owned media at three different levels:

1. Athlete-owned media networks
2. Athlete-owned production companies
3. Athlete-owned shows and podcasts

## Athlete-Owned Media Networks

As the media landscape evolves, new sports media networks have emerged—some including prominent athletes as part of their ownership groups.

### PlayersTV

*PlayersTV* launched in 2020 as “**the first-ever athlete-owned media network and content provider.**”<sup>14</sup> The ownership group includes over 50 prominent athletes including Chris Paul, Chiney Ogwumike, Alysha Clark, Natasha Cloud, Dwyane Wade, Travis Kelce, Kyrie Irving, Austin Ekeler, and Damian Lillard.

*PlayersTV* says “[Their] goal is to humanize athletes, allowing fans to connect with them on a deeper level beyond the competitive arena. We are committed to presenting athletes as they truly are, providing them with a platform to express their opinions and voices freely.”<sup>15</sup> The ad-supported platform features reality, comedy, documentaries and scripted and reality content and it is available on Amazon Prime Video, YouTube TV, among other platforms.

The network’s co-founder Deron Guidrey said that hiring longtime media executive Michele Ghee as its chairwoman and bringing in prominent women athletes as investor owners is part of *PlayersTV*’s

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<sup>14</sup> [www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/playerstv-expands-its-reach-athlete-fan-owned-network-hits-major-distribution-milestone-with-directv-302223042.html#:~:text=PlayersTV%20is%20the%20first%20Dever,PlayersTV%20distribution%20deal](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/playerstv-expands-its-reach-athlete-fan-owned-network-hits-major-distribution-milestone-with-directv-302223042.html#:~:text=PlayersTV%20is%20the%20first%20Dever,PlayersTV%20distribution%20deal)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Deron Guidrey in “AfroTech: First-Ever Athlete-Owned Media Network *PlayersTV* Inks Distribution Deal With Amazon Prime Video” [finance.yahoo.com/news/first-ever-athlete-owned-media-204808814.html?guccounter=1](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/first-ever-athlete-owned-media-204808814.html?guccounter=1)



“[commitment] to investing in women athlete content and ensuring they have an equal seat at the table.”<sup>16</sup> *PlayersTV* has demonstrated this investment with shows like *The Chiney Show* with Chiney Ogumike and *Off-Seasoning with Alysha Clark*.

### **Just Women's Sports**

While *PlayersTV* aims to feature women's sports, the *Just Women's Sports* network is going all-in on the power of women's sports content and the importance of including athletes in the ownership group. *Just Women's Sports* is backed by several high-profile athletes like Billie Jean King, Allyson Felix, Abby Wambach, Sam Kerr, Lynn Williams, Kelley O'Hara, Elena Delle Donne, Sam Mewis, Hilary Knight, Arike Ogunbowale, Kevin Durant and Apollo Ohno. It streams on FuboTV and YouTube TV.

Other networks focused on women sports like the *Women's Sports Network* and Whoopi Goldberg's *All Women's Sports Network* provide women's sports content for fans, but neither publicly lists athletes as owners.

### **Athlete-Owned Production Companies**

Athlete-owned production companies are transforming the media landscape by putting narrative control in athletes' hands and creating content that feels authentic and purposeful. These ventures empower athletes to showcase their personal stories, address societal issues, and highlight underrepresented perspectives, offering audiences a unique lens into the world of sports and beyond. From documentaries that explore athletic highs and lows to podcasts, scripted series, and social media content that delve into entrepreneurship, activism, and personal growth, athlete-owned media stands out for its depth and diversity. These companies are bridging the gap between athletes and their audiences, redefining sports storytelling and driving meaningful cultural conversations.

We identified 33 athlete-owned production companies that have produced over 370 separate media properties. **Notable examples of content include:**

#### ● **Scripted Feature Films**

- LeBron James and his *SpringHill* production company have 90 producer credits, including feature films like *Space Jam*, *House Party*, *Hustle*, and *Rez Ball*.
- *White Men Can't Jump*, which was produced by Mortal Media (owned by former NBA player Blake Griffin and NFL center Ryan Kalil)
- *King Richard*, which was executive produced by tennis stars Serena and Venus Williams. Serena later created her production company, 926 productions, which has many projects in production.
- Tom Brady's 199 Productions company produced the feature film *80 for Brady*.

#### ● **Scripted Television Shows**

- *Mr. Throwback*, produced by *Unanimous Media* (owned by NBA star Steph Curry).

<sup>16</sup> [advertisingweek.com/athlete-fan-owned-media-company-players-tv-lands-30-year-media-veteran-michele-ghee-as-first-ever-chairwoman-with-entrepreneur-and-media-personality-chiney-ogumike-and-3-time-wnba-champion-alysha-clark/](https://advertisingweek.com/athlete-fan-owned-media-company-players-tv-lands-30-year-media-veteran-michele-ghee-as-first-ever-chairwoman-with-entrepreneur-and-media-personality-chiney-ogumike-and-3-time-wnba-champion-alysha-clark/)

- LeBron James' *SpringHill* Company scripted television series credits include *The Crossover* and *Hello Kitty: Super Style*.

### ● Documentaries

- Kobe Bryant's Granity Studios won an Oscar for Best Short Documentary with *Dear Basketball*.
- Former NBA star Dwyane Wade's 59th & Prairie production company created *The Dads* for Netflix, which follows a fishing trip among 5 fathers of trans children.

### ● Docuseries

- Peyton Manning's *Omaha Productions* has produced several prominent docuseries like *Quarterback* and *Receiver* for Netflix and *Peyton's Places*, *Eli's Places*, *PK's Places*, *McEnroe's Places*, and *Sue's Places* for ESPN.
- Former football player turned TV host Michael Strahan has partnered with Tom Brady's *Religion of Sports* production company to develop several docuseries like *In The Arena: Serena Williams*, *Simone Biles Rising*, and *McGregor Forever*.

Public information about the valuation of most production companies is scarce, but some notable examples include The *SpringHill* Company, founded by LeBron James and Maverick Carter, which is valued at \$725 million, and Peyton Manning's *Omaha Productions*, valued at \$400 million.

## **Athlete-Owned Shows & Podcasts**

The most visible shift in sports media is the popularity of athlete-owned shows and podcasts, which have found an extensive audience in both audio format and visual platforms like YouTube and social media. This is part of a larger ecosystem of emerging video podcast dominance. In 2024, podcasts generated \$8.7 billion<sup>17</sup> and YouTube is now the most preferred podcast consumption service.<sup>18</sup> Video podcasts were pitched by almost every major media company in the May 2025 upfronts for media advertisers.<sup>19</sup>

For this analysis and the subsequent deep-dive, we identified every athlete-owned video podcast with at least 100,000 views on YouTube, resulting in the 45 most-consumed athlete-owned video podcasts. In order to be considered athlete-owned, a current or former professional athlete has to be credited with a role indicating ownership, like owner, creator, founder, producer, executive producer, etc. In the following tables, we identify key metrics for these 45 video podcasts (as of October 15, 2024), and list the top 10 in each category.

As of October 2024, the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts had an aggregate of:

- 7 billion views on over 45,000 YouTube episodes
- 725 million likes on TikTok
- 37 million Instagram followers

<sup>17</sup> [www.owlandco.com/insights/the-global-podcast-economy-a-complete-picture](http://www.owlandco.com/insights/the-global-podcast-economy-a-complete-picture)

<sup>18</sup> [www.edisonresearch.com/youtube-is-the-preferred-podcast-listening-service/](http://www.edisonresearch.com/youtube-is-the-preferred-podcast-listening-service/)

<sup>19</sup> [www.cnn.com/2025/05/14/upfront-advertising-pitches-video-podcasts.html](http://www.cnn.com/2025/05/14/upfront-advertising-pitches-video-podcasts.html)



TABLE 1

YouTube

Key Metrics for the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts (October 25, 2024):

No.	YouTube Subscribers		YouTube Videos		YouTube Views	
	Podcast	Subscribers	Podcast	Videos	Podcast	Views
1.	Club Shay Shay	3,450,000	The Pat McAfee Show	8,636	The Pat McAfee Show	2,023,495,274
2.	The Pat McAfee Show	2,630,000	Pro Football Focus	8,369	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	847,727,550
3.	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	2,450,000	CITIUS MAG & Podcast	2,887	Club Shay Shay	755,381,539
4.	Cam Newton	1,490,000	Nightcap	2,501	Gil's Arena	450,019,411
5.	Nightcap	1,470,000	Club Shay Shay	2,377	Nightcap	404,802,491
6.	I Am Athlete	1,050,000	All the Smoke	2,126	All the Smoke	389,162,072
7.	All the Smoke	1,000,000	Green Light with Chris Long	2,091	Cam Newton	321,416,023
8.	Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson	971,000	Gil's Arena	1,615	I Am Athlete	241,157,078
9.	The ETCs with Kevin Durant	827,000	The Uninterrupted	1,376	The Uninterrupted	208,936,768
10.	Gil's Arena	761,000	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	1,308	Club 520	160,144,435
	Total for all 45 podcasts:	22,936,259	Total for all 45 podcasts:	45,199	Total for all 45 podcasts:	6,939,790,902

TABLE 2

Instagram

Key Metrics for the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts (October 15, 2024):

No.	Instagram Followers		Instagram Posts	
	Podcast	Followers	Podcast	Posts
1.	Cam Newton	4,700,000	Pro Football Focus	19,255
2.	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	2,700,000	The Uninterrupted	8,358
3.	The Pat McAfee Show	2,100,000	The Pat McAfee Show	7,574
4.	Porzingis' Comeback	1,500,000	CITIUS MAG & Podcast	5,886
5.	Club Shay Shay	1,400,000	Club Shay Shay	2,083
6.	The Uninterrupted	1,200,000	Green Light with Chris Long	2,013
7.	Pro Football Focus	787,000	The RE-CAP Show	1,880
8.	Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson	736,000	All the Smoke	1,775
9.	I Am Athlete	443,000	Nightcap	1,380
10.	Nightcap	400,000	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	1,296
	Total for all 45 podcasts:	37,165,123	Total for all 45 podcasts:	64,872

**TABLE 3****TikTok****Key Metrics for the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts:**

	TikTok Followers		TikTok Likes	
	Podcast	Followers	Podcast	Likes
1.	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	4,400,000	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	183,100,000
2.	Club Shay Shay	1,600,000	The Pat McAfee Show	127,000,000
3.	The Pat McAfee Show	1,600,000	All the Smoke	46,200,000
4.	The Uninterrupted	1,200,000	Pro Football Focus	40,600,000
5.	All the Smoke	760,500	Club Shay Shay	39,000,000
6.	Pro Football Focus	644,200	The Uninterrupted	38,700,000
7.	Cam Newton	571,400	Nightcap	16,800,000
8.	Nightcap	370,900	Cam Newton	7,200,000
9.	I Am Athlete	266,600	I Am Athlete	6,000,000
10.	Mind the Game	128,300	Green Light with Chris Long	5,900,000
	Total for all 45 podcasts:	19,843,000	Total for all 45 podcasts:	725,339,200

**TABLE 4****Facebook****Key Metrics for the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts:**

No.	Facebook Followers		Facebook Likes	
	Podcast	Followers	Podcast	Likes
1.	Cam Newton	2,500,000	Cam Newton	2,417,119
2.	Club Shay Shay	2,400,000	The Pat McAfee Show	545,922
3.	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	1,400,000	Club Shay Shay	319,000
4.	The Pat McAfee Show	659,000	The Uninterrupted	280,000
5.	Porzingis' Comeback	614,000	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	275,000
6.	The Uninterrupted	566,000	Pro Football Focus	62,000
7.	Nightcap	328,000	Green Light with Chris Long	51,367
8.	Pro Football Focus	190,000	Nightcap	42,987
9.	I Am Athlete	85,000	Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson	24,000
10.	Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson	74,000	CITIUS MAG & Podcast	4,100
	Total for all 45 podcasts:	10,387,686	Total for all 45 podcasts:	5,395,713

TABLE 5

Twitter/X

Key Metrics for the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts:

No.	Twitter/X Followers	
	Podcast	Followers
1.	The Pat McAfee Show	3,100,000
2.	Pro Football Focus	1,400,000
3.	Cam Newton	1,100,000
4.	The Uninterrupted	469,300
5.	New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	458,600
6.	Porzingis' Comeback	390,100
7.	Club Shay Shay	168,000
8.	Nightcap	92,800
9.	Mind the Game	66,500
10.	CITIUS MAG & Podcast	65,000
	Total for all 45 podcasts:	11,510,465

TABLE 6

Apple Podcasts

Key Metrics for the top 45 athlete-owned video podcasts (October 15, 2024):

Total Episodes: 8,674

No.	Apple Podcast Episodes	
	Podcast	Episodes
1.	The Pat McAfee Show	1,200
2.	Pro Football Focus	848
3.	CITIUS MAG & Podcast	728
4.	Green Light with Chris Long	704
5.	Club Shay Shay	676
6.	I Am Athlete	553
7.	SANDCAST	412
8.	All the Smoke	397
9.	Nightcap	306
10.	Gil's Arena	277

Athlete-owned shows and podcasts are a significant way in which sports fans engage with athletes and content. These platforms give athletes control over their stories, delivering unfiltered insights, entertainment, and community-building that traditional media rarely provides.

Given their explosive growth across YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms—garnering billions of views and millions of followers—we conducted a deep-dive content analysis of the top 45 most consumed athlete-owned video podcasts. This allowed us to quantify their cultural and commercial reach and to analyze how athletes are reinventing sports media through ownership and storytelling. The next section explores key themes and content strategies that define this new wave of athlete-driven media.



# CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ATHLETE-OWNED VIDEO PODCASTS

The influx of athlete-owned media promises opportunities for athletes to showcase their unfiltered and authentic selves, unencumbered by the editorial restraints and commercial pressures of traditional sports media. But what kinds of content do fans get when athletes take control of the narratives? What is the “value add” of athlete-controlled content in a crowded media marketplace?

To address these questions, we analyzed the single most viewed episode from each of the top 45 YouTube podcast series identified in the mapping analysis. We examined the following through a combination of human coding and automated language analysis:

- What are the demographics of podcast hosts and guests?
- How much conversation in each episode is devoted to sports-related topics (vs. topics that are unrelated to sports)?
- What other topics are discussed in these episodes? (How freewheeling is the conversation in these episodes?)
- How casual and informal are these episodes in appearance and language?

## Overview of Findings

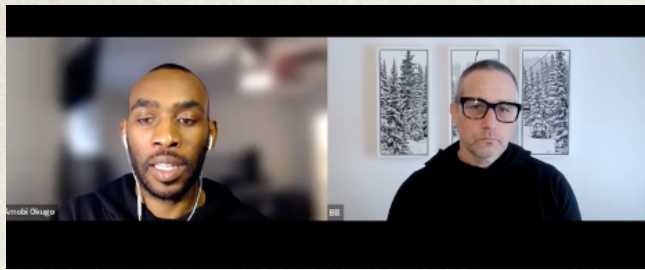
Our findings indicate that athlete-controlled media allows for free-flowing conversations that touch on a wide range of topics—both directly related and unrelated to sports. Indeed, the diversity of topics in our sample suggests that athletes in sampled episodes were able to present themselves as multidimensional individuals who live full lives outside of their sports-related identities. Athletes shared information related to more personal issues like mental health and upbringing, which have the potential to build intimacy and parasocial relationships with audiences and fans.

The unrestrained nature of these conversations was accentuated by the informality of episode settings and attire. Most episodes showed hosts and guests sitting on couches, and very few showed any formal clothing—such as sports coats or button-down shirts. This informality is in stark visual contrast to traditional sports media programs that typically show hosts and guests in a professional studio setting.

Whereas traditional sports media have historically suffered from a lack of representation of people of color (POC),<sup>20</sup> 75% of the episodes in our sample featured at least one Black athlete. Still, there is room for improvement regarding gender representation, as only 22% of episodes featured at least one woman guest or host.

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<sup>20</sup> Lapchick, R. (2022). The 2022 Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) Racial and Gender Report Card. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), University of Central Florida.



Former soccer star Amobi Okugo's *A Frugal Athlete* takes place over Zoom and shows nondescript indoor locations as well as casual clothing (sweaters).



*7PM in Brooklyn* with former NBA star Carmelo Anthony & writer Kid Mero features a relaxed living room setting and casual clothing.



An episode of *Nobody Asked Us* features Olympic runners Des Linden and Kara Goucher and takes place outside at a restaurant.

## Demographics

Most episodes had POC hosts or guests. However, women were underrepresented in our sample, suggesting a massive opportunity for women to participate in the athlete-owned media space.

- 22% of episodes had at least one woman as guest or host
- 78% of episodes had only men as guests or hosts
- 27% of episodes had only white guests/hosts
- 40% of episodes had only POC guests/hosts
- 38% of episodes had a mixture of white and POC guests/hosts

## Informal and Casual

Most episodes took place in a casual setting<sup>21</sup> and featured informal clothing, suggesting a personal and intimate atmosphere.

Podcast episodes reflected the casual atmosphere, with conversations happening on loveseats and outdoors patios rather than traditional studio settings. And unlike the suit-and-tie look common among traditional sports reporters, athlete-led media featured a more casual style.

- 45% of episodes took place in a living room setting (couches, loveseats, and/or comfortable chairs).
- 35% of episodes took place in a podcast studio setting (table, visible microphones, desk chairs).
- 18% of episodes had at least one guest recorded over Zoom.
- 5% of the episodes took place outside.
- 93% of episodes showed hosts and guests wearing *only* casual clothing (sneakers, jeans, sweaters, etc.).<sup>22</sup>
- 7% of episodes showed hosts and guests wearing at least one formal article of clothing (sports coat, button-up shirt, etc.).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This item was found to be only marginally reliable ( $\alpha = 0.43$ ). As such, setting-related findings should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>22</sup> As some options for this item did not appear in our reliability sample, we were unable to calculate a reliability score for this item. As such, this finding should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>23</sup> As some options for this item did not appear in our reliability sample, we were unable to calculate a reliability score for this item. As such, this finding should be interpreted with caution.

**Hosts and guests used casual language—everyday speech that included slang, humor, and informal expressions—creating an environment of informality. Conversations reflected the authenticity of everyday conversations.**

- Compared to the average *natural conversation*, episodes in our sample had nearly twice as much swearing.
- Compared to the average *New York Times sports article*, episodes in our sample had 50 times as much swearing.
- Episodes in our sample were just as “authentic”<sup>24</sup> as the average natural conversation.

## **Sports Content**

**On average, 66% of all discussions in our sample revolved around sports-related issues.**

- 93% of episodes had some kind of substantive discussion of sports.<sup>25</sup>
- Episodes with at least one woman devoted 54% of discussion to sports topics, while episodes with only men devoted 68% of discussion to sports topics.
- Sports-related topics included:
  - Sports performance (67% of episodes)
  - Relationships with other athletes (49% of episodes)
  - Mental performance (42% of episodes)
  - Sports industry (34% of episodes)
  - Game analysis (32% of episodes)
  - Athlete finances and branding (26% of episodes)
  - Coaching (29% of episodes)

## **Non-Sports Content**

**Hosts and guests had open discussions about topics other than sports.**

In the average episode, 35% of discussion was centered on topics other than sports. The proportion of episodes that covered the most common non-sports topics were as follows:

- Hobbies (26% of episodes)<sup>26</sup>
- Upbringing (24% of episodes)
- Entertainment industry (22% of episodes)
- Family (22% of episodes)
- Mental health (18% of episodes)
- Celebrities (18% of episodes)
- Social media (16% of episodes)
- Other topics discussed in 3-5 episodes: fame, social media, food, romantic relationships, popular culture

<sup>24</sup> Authenticity scores were calculated using an empirically verified LIWC dictionary composed of a multivariate linguistic profile of deception: “Liars tend to tell stories that are less complex, less self-relevant, and more characterized by negativity.” Newman, M. L., Pennebaker, J. W., Berry, D. S., & Richards, J. M. (2003). Lying words: Predicting deception from linguistic styles. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 29(5), 665-675.

<sup>25</sup> An episode was coded as containing substantive discussion of sports if at least 5% of episode dialogue was devoted to sports-related discussion.

<sup>26</sup> These hobbies included hiking, gambling, video games, golf, classic cars, fishing, and yoga.



In addition to identifying the most frequently discussed topics, we measured the extent to which episodes included previously-identified topics that would not be common in the sample, including issues related to race, gender, and money.

**Compared to the average *New York Times* (NYT) sports article, these podcast episodes discussed race and ethnicity relatively infrequently.**

- On average, episodes discussed race and ethnicity less than half as much as the average NYT sports article.

**While the average episode devoted less attention to women's issues—and more to men's issues –than the average NYT article, this trend was reversed when at least one woman was featured on an episode.**

- The average episode discussed issues related to men 20% more and women's issues 50% less than the average NYT sports article.
- Women's episodes discussed issues directly related to women 30% more than the average NYT sports article, and 4.5 times more than men's episodes.<sup>27</sup>
- Men's episodes discussed men's issues 41% more than the average NYT sports article, and 3.6 times more than women's episodes.

**Episodes involved politics and money much less than the average NYT sports article.**

- Politics was discussed equally among all demographic groups.
- Episodes discussed politics much less than the average NYT sports article.
- White people discussed money 45% more than POC.
- Men discussed money twice as often as women.
- All episodes discussed money much less than the average NYT sports article.

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<sup>27</sup> A men's episode was defined as one that had no hosts or guests who were women, while a women's episode was defined as an episode that had at least one woman as host or guest.

# ATHLETE-OWNED MEDIA CONTENT THEMES

To further explore the importance of the athlete-owned media landscape, we conducted secondary background research along with eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with academics, journalists, media executives, and athletes producing their own content.

Key themes that emerged from this background research and our in-depth interviews included:

- Authentic storytelling
- Opportunity for creating deeper/richer stories
- The importance of ownership
- The opportunity for women athletes
- The economics of athlete-owned media
- Relationship with traditional sports media
- The role of social media

## **Authentic Storytelling**

When former NBA players Matt Barnes and Stephen Jackson started their popular podcast *All The Smoke* in 2019, they knew they needed to make something different. “I really didn’t know what a podcast was,” Barnes said. “But I knew working for ESPN and FOX, it was a straight line you had to walk. A podcast was probably a little more flexible, where we could smoke and drink, if the guest wanted. A little more relaxed setting—more of us.”<sup>28</sup> *All The Smoke* has been described as an “intimate hang with a worldwide audience” and the relaxed feel is very intentional. Barnes successfully pitched the podcast as putting a camera on a “group of guys watching the game in the mancave.”<sup>29</sup>

This vibe has become a standard in the athlete-owned space—casual, uncensored, unmediated, and authentic. LeBron James created *The Shop* in an effort to emulate the conversations that take place “in a real barbershop, like the ones where I grew up,” he said. Shannon Sharpe sits with guests in a living room setting with relaxed leather chairs and an environment that prompts guest Katt Williams to tell Sharpe, “You’ve made a safe space here to tell the truth.”

And the truth is definitely coming out. This environment encourages guests to open up and share stories rarely heard in traditional sports media. Barnes and Jackson created an environment where guests do not need to be polished. Former NBA player and guest Kendrick Perkins joked that the success of *All The Smoke* “proved that he, too, could speak ‘broken English’ and find a home in the media.”<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, they fostered a space where any topic could be discussed openly. Jackson said, “We can talk about child support, losing family members, losing money. We can talk about anything and not judge anybody because we put ourselves in those shoes.”<sup>31</sup>

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28 [boardroom.tv/all-the-smoke-meadowlark-media-business/](https://boardroom.tv/all-the-smoke-meadowlark-media-business/)

29 [boardroom.tv/all-the-smoke-meadowlark-media-business/](https://boardroom.tv/all-the-smoke-meadowlark-media-business/)

30 [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/05/the-rise-of-the-athlete-podcaster](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/05/the-rise-of-the-athlete-podcaster)

31 [boardroom.tv/all-the-smoke-meadowlark-media-business/](https://boardroom.tv/all-the-smoke-meadowlark-media-business/)

Similarly, research interviews revealed that athlete-driven content presents a less mediated way for athletes to connect with audiences. One academic put it this way:

*“[W]e’re seeing it at an unprecedented level with the athletes themselves being able to talk directly to an audience and feel like it’s unfiltered.”*

—Academic/journalist (interview)

Interviews pointed to key advantages of athlete-driven media: content that reads as unfiltered, honest, casual, and authentic. One academic put this development in context:

*“We’re at a time in the evolution of sports media where we’re used to getting things that are more raw.”*

—Academic/journalist (interview)

In response, according to our interviews with athlete creators, audiences valued and sought more unfiltered narratives from the athletes they follow:

*“I think people appreciate... my honesty and getting to see how it all played out.”*

—Academic/creator (interview)

## **Opportunity for Creating Deeper/Richer Stories**

When former NBA star Carmelo Anthony launched his podcast, *7PM in Brooklyn*, he made it clear that he wanted it to go deeper than regular sports talk. “It is not just a sports show; it’s an immersive journey that dives into the heart of the game and the rich culture that surrounds it [...] I’m looking forward to bringing a unique blend of storytelling to fans, merging our passion for sports and culture with our commitment to creating intentional, purpose-driven content,” he said.<sup>32</sup>

Most of our interviews highlighted the power of athlete-driven media to tell novel, nuanced, and deeper stories with an eye toward personal and social issues. We heard about athlete-driven stories and topics not normally discussed in sports media, especially those that touch on discrimination and mental health.

Particular examples of the kind of stories we will see more of in athlete-driven content given by the interviewees focused on NBA star Kevin Love, tennis star Naomi Osaka, and gymnast Simone Biles:

*“Athletes have told difficult personal stories, have dug deep. Kevin Love talking about mental health and some of the struggles that he’s had... it was really eye opening. I think it empowered athletes to be able to share sometimes painful stories.”*

—Academic/journalist

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<sup>32</sup> [www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/carmelo-anthony-the-kid-mero-podcast-1235647113/](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/carmelo-anthony-the-kid-mero-podcast-1235647113/)



*“I think of Osaka—often, female athletes have been much more willing to broach the question of mental health. Also, Simone Biles talking about the twisties.... What was remarkable to me was how both of these women in different ways were viciously attacked by fans and male commentators.”*

—Academic

Stories where athletes shed light on social issues were lauded by our interviewees as making inroads not only in entertainment, but in public health and society.

Many athlete-driven podcasts make it clear that they want to tell stories far beyond sports. This is evident in the non-athlete guests they have on, like former Vice President Kamala Harris appearing on *All the Smoke* and many pop culture entertainers appearing on Shannon Sharpe’s *Club Shay Shay*.

## **The Importance of Ownership**

Chris Paul said the impetus for creating *PlayersTV* was about players having ownership, “Players for so long have just been the talent right and never really on the ownership side.”<sup>33</sup> Michael Strahan echoed this in his address to the 2024 USC Next Level Sports Conference saying, “Ownership is everything. When you own the IP, you are basically working for yourself and you benefit the most from it financially.”<sup>34</sup>

Almost all of our interviews pointed to a perceived trend toward more athlete agency in sports media. Ownership, they noted, means more control and influence over their own narratives. As athletes watch their colleagues open up new avenues of running and driving media, these possibilities appeal to them.

*“Ownership is a big thing in the athlete community in terms of... ‘OK, well, am I owning my content or am I giving it to somebody?’”*

—Entertainment executive

According to interviewed athletes, having the rights to their own likeness and their own experiences in the sport has been an important shift.

*“Now you don’t just let any and everybody take pictures of you... everyone wants to figure out how they can have ownership in their overall business.”*

—Athlete

Ownership stake was a key advantage of athlete-driven media mentioned by athletes and commentators. According to interviews, athletes are seeing and gaining the value of intellectual property as they are focusing on the long term.

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33 “Chris Paul Investing for the Future and Eyeing NBA, WNBA Team Ownership” <https://playerstv.com/chris-paul-investing-for-the-future-and-eyeing-nba-wnba-team-ownership/>

34 2024 USC Next Level Sports Conference

***“There’s an increased awareness among some athletes that their career is very short. Once they stop playing, they have to work out, ‘How do I sustain income and visibility?’”***

**—Journalist**

Maverick Carter said that when he and LeBron James created *The Shop*, ownership was important for the stories they were telling. He said, “Controlling the IP was hard to do but it is very important to maintain that integrity of the show.”<sup>35</sup>

## **The Opportunity for Women Athletes**

Media coverage for women’s sports is at an all time high—it now represents 15% of all sports coverage..<sup>36</sup> The 2024 Women’s NCAA tournament averaged nearly 19 million viewers for its championship game, the WNBA has had its highest viewed season ever, and there are similar increases internationally for the National Women’s Soccer League, England’s Women’s Super League, and women’s tennis.<sup>37</sup> Networks and media companies are racing to better meet the needs of women’s sports fans—the *Women’s Sports Network*, *Just Women’s Sports Network*, and *All Women’s Sports Network* are all among those aiming to engage with women’s sports viewers.

While this increase in media and content is leading to more fan engagement, there are still significant opportunities for growth in terms of women athlete-owned media. Women athletes largely do not own their own media content at the rates of their male counterparts. Only 22% of our analyzed athlete-owned podcasts included a woman as either host or guest.

There are some high profile women athletes who own their own media content at a significant level of influence. Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka, Sue Bird, and Megan Rapinoe have all created their own production companies and several top stars joined forces to create large media companies like *Just Women’s Sports Network* and *TOGETHXR*.

*TOGETHXR* is “a sports and lifestyle media company created for women to amplify their voice with a strong focus on representation and equality.”<sup>38</sup> It is created by star athletes Alex Morgan, Sue Bird, Chloe Kim, Simone Manuel, and others. They have produced a documentary on WNBA player AD Durr’s return to the league after battling long COVID and a short film about Manuel’s diagnosis with overtraining syndrome, among other projects.”<sup>39</sup>

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35 2024 USC Next Level Sports Conference

36 [www.forbes.com/sites/lindseyedarvin/2023/10/31/media-coverage-for-womens-sports-has-nearly-tripled-in-five-years-according-to-new-research/](https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindseyedarvin/2023/10/31/media-coverage-for-womens-sports-has-nearly-tripled-in-five-years-according-to-new-research/)

37 “What’s next for women’s sports: Fueling growth by proving value” (July 2024) Nielsen [https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2024/whats-next-for-womens-sports-fueling-growth-proving-value/?utm\\_source=media-pulse&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=2024-product-audience-measurement-always-on\\_nlsn\\_global&utm\\_content=\\_whats-next-for-womens-sport\\_2024](https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2024/whats-next-for-womens-sports-fueling-growth-proving-value/?utm_source=media-pulse&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2024-product-audience-measurement-always-on_nlsn_global&utm_content=_whats-next-for-womens-sport_2024)

38 [www.togethxr.com/](https://www.togethxr.com/)

39 “The Ten Most Innovative Companies in Sports of 2023” <https://www.fastcompany.com/90849121/most-innovative-companies-sports-2023>

Other women athletes who own their content have spoken out about the importance of providing outlets for fans to engage with athletes. Olympic champion Katie Hoff, who runs the *Unfiltered Waters* podcast with fellow Olympic champion Missy Franklin, said, “We’re giving you genuine conversations to get to know the person beneath the athlete, unfiltered.”<sup>40</sup>

In our interview with soccer star Midge Purce, the co-creator of *The Offseason* docuseries, she spoke of the need for women to tell their own stories. She said, the way women athletes are marketed “is typically very derivative of the formula that they use to market men and the way that they see them... there’s just so many nuances and they don’t add up to telling, I think, the real raw, authentic story of female professional athletes.”

There is a lot of opportunity for growth in women-owned sports podcasts as well. Over half of women’s sports fans listened to audio sports content in the past year.<sup>41</sup> Soccer star Christen Press, who hosts *The RE-CAP Show* alongside Tobin Heath, said that the women’s sports podcast space is not crowded and that she would like to see a lot more podcasts be developed. Press said, “The business of women’s sports in a lot of ways fails the athletes and the fans because it was just a copy-paste of what men built, but the product of women’s sports is quite different. [...] Now we have these new kinds of media opportunities and entities that are able to start to redesign what the media landscape looks like for women’s sports.”<sup>42</sup>

The *A Touch More* podcast with Sue Bird and Megan Rapinoe is owned by the couples’ production company, and it aims to provide fans with a mix of sports and personality. In their appearance on *The Today Show*, Rapinoe said, “I think ultimately we want to talk about women’s sports from a nuanced perspective, but in a fun way. [...] We want to bring the perspectives from our long careers, our funny stories, and our experiences to educate people on women’s sports, because there are a lot of new fans.”<sup>43</sup>

Beyond the shows included in our core video podcast analysis, there is a wider ecosystem of women athlete-owned-and-hosted podcasts that highlight the momentum in this space:

- **Olympic voices:** *The Female Athlete Project* (Chloe Dalton) and *Keeping Track* (Alysia Montaño, Molly Huddle, and Roisín McGettigan) amplify women’s athletics through conversations rooted in elite competition.
- **Crossover appeal:** *The Nikki & Brie Show* (WWE Nikki & Brie Garcia) and *The Caroline Gleich Show* (ski mountaineer Caroline Gleich) blend sports, lifestyle, politics, and entertainment.
- **Endurance and running:** *Choose Strong* (Sally McRae), *More Than Running* (Dana Giordano), *Run Hard Mom Hard* (Nikki Parnell & Stefanie Wenninger), and the *Ultra Ladies Podcast* (Nancy Shura-Dervin & Sarah Ter Har) bring strong voices from running and ultrarunning communities.

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40 [app.podscribe.ai/episode/96535971](https://app.podscribe.ai/episode/96535971)

41 [www.edisonresearch.com/sports-audio-report-female-fans-released-by-edison-research-siriusxm-media-and-groupm/](https://www.edisonresearch.com/sports-audio-report-female-fans-released-by-edison-research-siriusxm-media-and-groupm/)

42 [www.si.com/soccer/in-a-growing-media-landscape-christen-press-is-finding-her-own-voice](https://www.si.com/soccer/in-a-growing-media-landscape-christen-press-is-finding-her-own-voice)

43 *The Today Show* (NBC), September 10, 2024



- **Advocacy platforms:** *Voice in Sport* (Stefanie Strack) and *Hear Her Sports* (Elizabeth Emery) focus on elevating women athletes' stories and broadening representation.

Our interviewees were split on whether the wave of athlete-driven media has led to more racial, gender, and sport diversity in the voices we hear from. One academic interviewee explained that this space is still male-dominated:

*“The dominant thing is still blokes talking to other blokes. The NBA gets more coverage and discussion out of season than the WNBA does when they are actually playing.”*

—Academic

One academic pointed to athlete-driven media as potentially adding to a disruption of sports media as a deeply patriarchal space:

*“It’s created more possibilities for people who aren’t white men to enter into sports commentating and discussion. The Burn It Down feminist podcast would be a good example of that... New interesting voices challenging the traditional male space.”*

—Academic

## **The Economics of Athlete-Owned Media**

Athlete-owned media has become a highly profitable and strategically significant sector within the broader media landscape. One of the most notable examples is the \$100 million deal for *New Heights* by the Kelce brothers with Amazon’s Wondery, which underscores the immense financial potential of athlete-owned content. Such partnerships are driven not only by the popularity of athletes but also by their ability to transcend traditional sports media, positioning themselves as cultural icons. As noted by Wondery CEO Jen Sargent, *New Heights* has evolved beyond a sports podcast, becoming a cultural

“There’s an increased awareness among some athletes that their career is very short. Once they stop playing, they have to work out, ‘How do I sustain income and visibility?’”

phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> These deals reflect a broader trend of growing monetization opportunities within athlete-driven media, where athletes are not just athletes but entrepreneurs and media moguls.

In addition to major sponsorships like Wondery, athlete-owned media outlets are increasingly attracting high-profile partnerships with brands such as Red Bull, Fanatics Sportsbook, and DraftKings. These partnerships enable athletes to monetize their media through sponsorships and integrate new revenue streams like sports betting. Furthermore, companies like The *SpringHill* Company, valued at \$725 million, and *Omaha Productions*, valued at \$400 million, highlight the long-term value of athlete ownership, as these ventures expand across various media platforms. The ability for athletes to retain ownership of their intellectual property and control the distribution of their content is becoming a cornerstone of their business success.

The financial success of athlete-owned media also reflects an ongoing shift in the media landscape, where new forms of distribution and audience engagement are reshaping traditional media models. Athlete-driven media is part of a broader transformation in which digital content and decentralized models replace older, centralized media platforms. This shift is facilitated by athletes' growing ownership of their content, giving them a significant stake in the future of media distribution. As sports gambling and new media continue to shape the global media environment, athlete-driven ventures are poised to thrive in this rapidly changing landscape.

Athletes can monetize their content directly through sponsorships, advertisements, and partnerships without revenue sharing. Advertisers are increasingly working with athletes to deliver natural, non-intrusive branding messages. Interviews positioned “smart” partnerships as one of the key factors in the success of athlete-driven content, enterprises, and partnerships.

***“The other thing that factors in with the breaking through or not breaking through is a lot of these guys aren’t necessarily the sole host. They’re getting partnered with other people. A lot of the time, it’s their friends or maybe people that they know in the industry”***

—Journalist

## **Relationship With Traditional Sports Media**

The prominence of athlete-owned media has created a complicated relationship with traditional sports media. Sports media analyst Brendon Kleen of *Awful Announcing*, says we are in “Generation 3.0” of athletes in sports media. Athletes started as sidekicks to journalists, then they achieved equal billing, and now they are playing a leading role, he says.<sup>45</sup>

NBA player Draymond Green has framed the athlete-owned podcast movement as a juxtaposition between old and new media. He said, “the old media lies a lot and they don’t keep it too real. In new media—we keep it

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44 [variety.com/2024/digital/news/kelce-brothers-podcast-wondery-new-heights-1236118594/](https://variety.com/2024/digital/news/kelce-brothers-podcast-wondery-new-heights-1236118594/)

45 <https://awfulannouncing.com/streaming/athletes-reign-sports-media-pat-mcafee-shannon-sharpe-gilbert-arenas-jj-redick.html>

real.”<sup>46</sup> Athletes are “actually analyzing the game of basketball,” he says, while old media is about “headlines and hot takes for clickbait.”<sup>47</sup> Journalist Ben Rohrbach is critical of Green’s old vs. new media framework. He said, “All too often, though, the self-proclaimed ‘new media’ swims in the same waters as the ‘real media’ it criticizes. Narratives diverge, and fans are left to wonder which to follow — the one, say, Bayless scripts about LeBron James or the one James crafts about himself. Any real substance is lost in the undercurrent.”<sup>48</sup>

Traditional sports media has largely adapted to the new media by incorporating it into their ecosystem. Pat McAfee’s popular content started as an outsider, but it now is broadcast directly on ESPN, while McAfee maintains ownership. In *The Atlantic*, journalist Devin Gordon, was critical about Pat McAfee’s role in a traditional journalistic space. He wrote, “McAfee is an athlete, not a reporter, and when it comes to stuff like accuracy, he’s careful to set the bar very low. He has become the epitome of athlete encroachment on terrain historically controlled by non-athlete journalists, and to put it mildly, the journalists are not happy about it. McAfee couldn’t care less.”<sup>49</sup>

In discussing the sports media landscape, almost all interviews mentioned the dwindling of traditional local sports journalism, in terms of funding, authority, and public trust. At the same time, interviewees see a resurgence in public interest in sports as a form of entertainment. These two trends might have facilitated an opening for the wave of athlete-driven media we are seeing.

One sports entertainment executive put it this way:

***“Athletes and sports are just the center of the cultural universe right now with fashion and music and everybody wanting to be connected to it.”***

## **The Role of Social Media**

According to the interviews, social media has been an instrumental force in this wave of athlete voices in three ways: setting the tone, inspiring participation, and helping distribute athlete-driven media content. It also lowered the bar to entry, offered access to creators, and allowed them to bypass gatekeepers.

Social media provided initial venues for athletes to speak directly with large audiences and the “live” confessional social media genre shaped the way many athletes began shaping their narratives. The lowered barriers to entry to make and distribute media on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter/X, and now TikTok, helped athletes connect more directly with their audiences.

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46 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BF6jS7bj\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BF6jS7bj_o)

47 [sports.yahoo.com/what-draymond-greens-new-media-ethos-gets-wrong-about-media-player-dynamics-150305293.html?guce\\_referrer=aHRocHM6Ly93d-3cuZ29vZ2xllmNvbS88guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAN7Jw32\\_pHUJJU3w7M\\_l3os7rsBXP7YC6oJVVa\\_QP\\_OypoEQQOnnTh\\_AvEVJEUZEB7dSIFapxupZPoEQ2BwP7wOx-AiSbM-LusITFDGzzaYO1n8crMkqaEkJT12Ll2m9SiTGGl7LXxjbhfl3aWv9tXc49HWprTvWfWQwDGDbuDss5&guccounter=2](https://sports.yahoo.com/what-draymond-greens-new-media-ethos-gets-wrong-about-media-player-dynamics-150305293.html?guce_referrer=aHRocHM6Ly93d-3cuZ29vZ2xllmNvbS88guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAN7Jw32_pHUJJU3w7M_l3os7rsBXP7YC6oJVVa_QP_OypoEQQOnnTh_AvEVJEUZEB7dSIFapxupZPoEQ2BwP7wOx-AiSbM-LusITFDGzzaYO1n8crMkqaEkJT12Ll2m9SiTGGl7LXxjbhfl3aWv9tXc49HWprTvWfWQwDGDbuDss5&guccounter=2)

48 [sports.yahoo.com/what-draymond-greens-new-media-ethos-gets-wrong-about-media-player-dynamics-150305293.html?guce\\_referrer=aHRocHM6Ly93d-3cuZ29vZ2xllmNvbS88guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAN7Jw32\\_pHUJJU3w7M\\_l3os7rsBXP7YC6oJVVa\\_QP\\_OypoEQQOnnTh\\_AvEVJEUZEB7dSIFapxupZPoEQ2BwP7wOx-AiSbM-LusITFDGzzaYO1n8crMkqaEkJT12Ll2m9SiTGGl7LXxjbhfl3aWv9tXc49HWprTvWfWQwDGDbuDss5&guccounter=2](https://sports.yahoo.com/what-draymond-greens-new-media-ethos-gets-wrong-about-media-player-dynamics-150305293.html?guce_referrer=aHRocHM6Ly93d-3cuZ29vZ2xllmNvbS88guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAN7Jw32_pHUJJU3w7M_l3os7rsBXP7YC6oJVVa_QP_OypoEQQOnnTh_AvEVJEUZEB7dSIFapxupZPoEQ2BwP7wOx-AiSbM-LusITFDGzzaYO1n8crMkqaEkJT12Ll2m9SiTGGl7LXxjbhfl3aWv9tXc49HWprTvWfWQwDGDbuDss5&guccounter=2)

49 [web.archive.org/web/20240527145307/https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/05/pat-mcafee-threat-sports-journalism/678480/](https://web.archive.org/web/20240527145307/https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/05/pat-mcafee-threat-sports-journalism/678480/)

***“[The rise of social media] has also opened the door for athletes... to begin to cover their own stories, tell their own stories, and have some autonomy and power over those stories.”***

**—Academic**

Athletes ability to speak directly to their built-in audiences has shifted the role of the sports journalist and sports media editor to more curatorial roles.

***“Social media provides a change in the distribution platform that enables much more direct conversations to take place between athletes and [their audiences.] So the journalist’s privileged position between the athletes and the audience is changing.”***

**—Academic**

The academics and journalists we interviewed saw the role of social media not as removing intermediaries, but shifting them. For example, they saw less editorial filtering and more algorithmic filtering as playing a role in new audiences’ access to athlete-produced social media content.

***“You’re going through the hands of editors. They’re not editors who are trained in journalism and not editors who are trained in communication, they’re editors who are following algorithmic patterns in order to edit.”***

**—Academic**

Social media was seen as both a platform for sharing athletes’ personal views and takes on social issues, and a driver of divisive, argumentative content that tends to get views and shares due to the structure of most social media algorithms.

One entertainment professional argued that sports fans are experiencing social media and algorithmic fatigue, since following each athlete means following separate media channels. They saw an opportunity in curatorial roles in the future:

***“I think people are sick of the algorithm like I think they’re sick of the Internet being their only source of engaging content. Like I think there’s a lot of there’s a lot of energy and people who are curating like kind of like going back to curating.”***

**—Entertainment executive**



# CONCLUSION

Athlete-owned media represents a powerful transformation in the sports media landscape—one that redefines not just how stories are told, but who gets to tell them. This industry now represents a robust media ecosystem, where athletes are producers, owners, and cultural influencers. This movement has produced billion-dollar companies, massive audience engagement, and a new standard of authenticity in sports storytelling.

By leveraging new platforms and shifting audience expectations, athlete-creators are building media properties that are intimate, unfiltered, and expansive—moving beyond scores and statistics to include deeply personal, social, and cultural narratives. These ventures are not only changing what sports content looks and sounds like, but also expanding the economic and professional possibilities for athletes beyond their competitive careers.

Yet this promising evolution is not without its challenges. As with the broader sports and media industries, issues of gender equity, access, and representation persist. While some women athletes are beginning to break through, the full potential of athlete-owned media will only be realized when diverse athletes across all sports and identities have equal opportunities to own, shape, and profit from their stories.

The rise of athlete-owned media is ultimately a story of reclamation—of athletes asserting their voices, building their own platforms, and reshaping an industry that once spoke for them. As this movement continues to grow, it will be crucial to support more equitable access to ownership, invest in underrepresented voices, and ensure that this new era of storytelling truly reflects the diversity of the sports world it represents.



# APPENDIX 1:

## Athlete-Owned Media Mapping

### **Sample Selection**

To identify athlete-owned media, we started with broad online research to populate a catalog of potential media properties to include in the analysis. From there, we searched secondary sources, including online news outlets, industry publications, IMDb Pro, social media platforms, and traditional media to ensure that we had a wide universe of potential athlete-owned media properties to analyze.

Next, we identified the ownership of each piece of content to figure out whether the content was actually owned by an athlete or if the content was just driven or hosted by an athlete. In order to be considered athlete-owned, a current or former professional athlete has to be credited with a role indicating ownership like owner, creator, founder, producer, executive producer, etc.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

Once our catalog was refined to include only athlete-owned content, we distinguished between networks (2), production companies (33), and video podcasts with at least 100,000 YouTube views (45) and then analyzed each outlet for the following variables:

#### **Overall Information**

1. Outlet/Program/Company Name
2. Associated Athletes
3. Athlete Roles (Owner, Co-Owner, Host, Creator, etc.)
4. Production Company
5. Primary Sport
6. Current athletes vs. retired athletes
7. Type (e.g. Show/Podcast/Network)
8. How long has the outlet been in operation?

#### **Demographics of Hosts/Key Personnel**

9. Race of hosts/key personnel
10. Gender of hosts/key personnel
11. Other notable demographic info (e.g. LGBTQ)

#### **YouTube Statistics**

12. Number of YouTube Videos
13. YouTube Subscribers
14. Most popular YouTube video name
15. Most popular YouTube video views

## Social Media Statistics

16. Instagram Followers
17. TikTok Followers
18. TikTok Likes
19. Facebook Followers
20. Twitter/X Followers

## Podcast Statistics

21. Apple Podcast Number of Episodes
22. Chartable Podcast Rank Highlights

## Economic Impact

23. Primary Sponsors & Advertisers
24. How the outlet is funded
25. Any publicly available information on revenue sources (e.g. subscriptions), drivers or economics of the content

## Notes & Limitations

- **Athlete-Driven vs. Athlete-Owned**—There are numerous successful podcasts, TV shows, and films that are driven or hosted by prominent athletes, but this analysis focuses on athlete-owned content only. In order to be considered “athlete-owned,” the athlete(s) must be publicly listed as an owner, founder, creator, executive producer, or another title that makes it clear that they have an ownership stake in the content.
- **Bounded Comprehensiveness**—While every effort was made to identify all athlete-owned media properties, the vastness of the space and the occasional lack of publicly available ownership details limited full coverage. This analysis reflects the athlete-owned media content identified by our researchers.
- **Rapidly Changing Environment**—The athlete-owned media space is evolving quickly and reasonable efforts have been made to include new content developments. In late 2024, several new athlete-owned media changes were announced. For example, J.J. Redick moved on from his successful podcasts to coach the Los Angeles Lakers, Bill Belichick and Peyton Manning launched a new show, Marshawn Lynch and Mike Robinson launched a new podcast, and Jason Kelce announced a new late-night talk show.

**TABLE 7****Athlete-Owned Production Companies**

<b>Production Company</b>	<b>Athlete Owner(s)</b>	<b>Sport(s) of Athlete(s)</b>
199 Productions	Tom Brady	Football
59th & Prairie	Dwyane Wade	Basketball
900 Films	Tony Hawk	Skateboarding
A Touch More	Megan Rapinoe & Sue Bird	Soccer & Basketball
Authentic Studios	Shaquille O'Neal	Basketball
Boardroom	Kevin Durant	Basketball
Creative 7 Productions	Carmelo Anthony	Basketball
CTRL Media	Steve Nash	Basketball
Dirty Mo Media	Dale Earnhardt, Jr.	Auto Racing
Granity Studios	Kobe Bryant	Basketball
Hana Kuma	Naomi Osaka	Tennis
Improbable Media	Giannis Antetokounmpo	Basketball
Mortal Media	Blake Griffin & Ryan Kalil	Basketball & Football
Nine Two Six Productions	Serena Williams	Tennis
Ohh Dip	Chris Paul	Basketball
Omaha Productions	Peyton Manning	Football
One Media Marketing Group	Mookie Betts	Baseball
Religion of Sports	Tom Brady & Michael Strahan	Football
Shay Shay Media	Shannon Sharpe	Football
SMAC	Michael Strahan	Football
SpringHill Entertainment	LeBron James	Basketball
The Uninterrupted	LeBron James	Basketball
Thirty Five Ventures	Kevin Durant	Basketball
ThreeFourTwo Productions	J.J. Redick	Basketball
TMRW Sports	Tiger Woods & Rory McIlroy	Soccer
TOGETHXR	Alex Morgan, Chloe Kim, Simone Manuel, Sue Bird, Rory McIlroy	Multiple Sports
Unanimous Media	Steph Curry	Basketball
Well Off Media	Deion Sanders	Football
Why Not You Productions	Russell Wilson	Football



**TABLE 8****Analyzed Athlete-Owned Shows & Podcasts**

Media Program Name	Primary Athlete(s)	Primary Sport of Primary Athlete	Job Status of Primary Athlete	Race of Primary Athlete	Gender Of Primary Athlete	Link to episode analyzed in content analysis
7PM in Brooklyn: Melo & Mero	Carmelo Anthony	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i34EAht3s48ab_channel=7PMinBrooklynwithCarmeloAnthony%26idMero">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i34EAht3s48ab_channel=7PMinBrooklynwithCarmeloAnthony%26idMero</a>
A Frugal Athlete	Amobi Okugo	Soccer	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJTyvJaAUKY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJTyvJaAUKY</a>
A Touch More With Megan Rapinoe + Sue Bird	Megan Rapinoe and Sue Bird	Soccer	Retired	White	Woman	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGoA2ATvbw5">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGoA2ATvbw5</a>
All the Smoke	Stephen Jackson & Matt Barnes	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_KjN0kaj_Y8list=PL6fkKAMsPY-HOH482G26vcQavn-JwOqx&amp;index=241">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_KjN0kaj_Y8list=PL6fkKAMsPY-HOH482G26vcQavn-JwOqx&amp;index=241</a>
Cam Newton	Cam Newton	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDg-ckm4xEU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDg-ckm4xEU</a>
CITIUS MAG & Podcast	Chris Chavez founder	Running/Track	Retired	Latine	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVt5-IOFX27M&amp;list=PLixh-fu108a102XUzr0h0JmLzOg4pkbk&amp;index=14">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVt5-IOFX27M&amp;list=PLixh-fu108a102XUzr0h0JmLzOg4pkbk&amp;index=14</a>
Club 520 Podcast	Jeff Teague	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOVviYajPi8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOVviYajPi8</a>
Club Shay Shay	Shannon Sharpe	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oRR2IRQxTs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oRR2IRQxTs</a>
From the Point by Trae Young	Trae Young	Basketball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ros5mlXvFjk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ros5mlXvFjk</a>
Gil's Arena	Gilbert Arenas	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDPcYsrYuw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDPcYsrYuw</a>
Green Light with Chris Long	Chris Long	Football	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGoiUdNnOzQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGoiUdNnOzQ</a>
Hawk vs. Wolf	Tony Hawk	Skateboarding/Extreme Sports	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wZcEsmG68">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wZcEsmG68</a>
Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson	Mike Tyson	Boxing	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZTC_Arlxjg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZTC_Arlxjg</a>
I Am Athlete	Brandon Marshall	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsyCoikP3no">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsyCoikP3no</a>
Mind the Game	LeBron James	Running/Track	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX2VtWfancQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX2VtWfancQ</a>
New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce	Kelce Brothers	Football	Current Professional	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvnX8qMRLSw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvnX8qMRLSw</a>
Nightcap	Shannon Sharpe	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k10SRcwCCaM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k10SRcwCCaM</a>
Nobody Asked Us with Des & Kara	Des Linden & Kara Goucher	Running/Track	Current Professional	Latine	Woman	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEzemgTamY8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEzemgTamY8</a>
On Base With Mookie Betts	Mookie Betts	Baseball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2VgoAbn4CE&amp;list=PLoqDI-JHyN3P5T7mgeVHpeGSyYHQPElr&amp;index=18">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2VgoAbn4CE&amp;list=PLoqDI-JHyN3P5T7mgeVHpeGSyYHQPElr&amp;index=18</a>
Power Athlete Radio	John Welbourn	Football	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8Ktmgeo-vo&amp;t=14s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8Ktmgeo-vo&amp;t=14s</a>
Pro Football Focus	Cris Collinsworth	Football	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrHomidRtX4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrHomidRtX4</a>
R2C2	CC Sabathia	Baseball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKU-KpjJvM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKU-KpjJvM</a>
Reach the People Media	Darius Sanders	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heF-fsBNag">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heF-fsBNag</a>

Media Program Name	Primary Athlete(s)	Primary Sport of Primary Athlete	Job Status of Primary Athlete	Race of Primary Athlete	Gender Of Primary Athlete	Link to episode analyzed in content analysis
Roommates Show with Jalen Brunson & Josh Hart	Jalen Brunson & Josh Hart	Basketball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3CsoED7aYk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3CsoED7aYk</a>
SANDCAST	Tri Bourne & Travis Mewhirter	Volleyball	Current Professional	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE-6oUlFgsbE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE-6oUlFgsbE</a>
Served with Andy Roddick	Andy Roddick	Tennis	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JimSSDsnbCs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JimSSDsnbCs</a>
The 25 10 Show	DeSean Jackson	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7npU_xQwRQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7npU_xQwRQ</a>
The Big Podcast with Shaq	Shaquille O'Neal	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1QpSdcyOKU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1QpSdcyOKU</a>
The BTM Podcast [Behind the Mask]	Takeo Spikes & Tutan Reyes	Football	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc-QMOTMW8xE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc-QMOTMW8xE</a>
The Draymond Green Show	Draymond Green	Basketball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f5vUyoKpow">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f5vUyoKpow</a>
The Edge with Micah Parsons	Micah Parsons	Football	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHMLsxm3BOg&amp;list=PLoqDl-JHlyN3PWwUHVDMbexYOQp2PtHr&amp;index=1">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHMLsxm3BOg&amp;list=PLoqDl-JHlyN3PWwUHVDMbexYOQp2PtHr&amp;index=1</a>
The ETCs with Kevin Durant	Kevin Durant	Basketball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-byH8V3S8PE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-byH8V3S8PE</a>
The OGs	Udonis Haslem & Mike Miller	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-7NPIRqETBo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-7NPIRqETBo</a>
The Old Man and the Three with J.J. Redick and Tommy Alter	J. J. Redick	Basketball	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l8D7tQwnJA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l8D7tQwnJA</a>
The Other 3 Years   Olympian Journey Podcast	Kristi Wagner	Rowing	Current Professional	White	Woman	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lcKrwugzVQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lcKrwugzVQ</a>
The Pat McAfee Show	Pat McAfee, AJ Hawk, Others	Football	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PYzIRu6zUQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PYzIRu6zUQ</a>
The Pure Athlete Podcast	Jeff Francoeur	Baseball	Retired	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llg68zN9oSx">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llg68zN9oSx</a>
The RE-CAP Show	Tobin Heath & Cristian Press	Soccer	Retired	Black & White	Woman	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/@re_inc">https://www.youtube.com/@re_inc</a>
The Rush	Maxx Crosby	Football	Current Professional	White	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsmXD7Xb8vo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsmXD7Xb8vo</a>
The Shop with LeBron James	LeBron James	Basketball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vtes2FbBoI4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vtes2FbBoI4</a>
The Uninterrupted	LeBron James	Basketball	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_8oz_VxPSQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_8oz_VxPSQ</a>
The Voncast	Von Miller	Football	Current Professional	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neMdpBP4czc&amp;list=PLoqDIJH-lyN3OQh6d2xE4kaoozE5PGPeGW&amp;index=15">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neMdpBP4czc&amp;list=PLoqDIJH-lyN3OQh6d2xE4kaoozE5PGPeGW&amp;index=15</a>
The Why with Dwayne Wade	Dwayne Wade	Basketball	Retired	Black	Man	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw85LfGyJ8w">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw85LfGyJ8w</a>
The Women's Game	Sam Mewis	Soccer	Current Professional	White	Woman	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzoGCMceBSS">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzoGCMceBSS</a>
Unfiltered Waters	Katie Hoff & Missy Franklin.	Swimming	Retired	White	Woman	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv-jsoK_CINQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv-jsoK_CINQ</a>

# APPENDIX 2:

## In-Depth Content Analysis of YouTube Podcasts

### Coding Procedure

USC students located the transcripts for these episodes on YouTube and prepared them for additional textual analysis.

Variables of interest were analyzed through several methods:

1. **Manual coding:** After several rounds of rigorous training, three student interns manually coded each episode for demographics of hosts and guests, the proportion of sports-related discussion in each episode, and visual variables related to setting and attire. Human-coded variables were subjected to additional reliability analysis (see Table 9).
2. **ATLAS.ti:** To address open-ended questions (like “what topics are athletes talking about?”), we conducted an inductive topic modeling analysis using qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. Sports-related conversation was separated from non-sports conversation, and prominent topics in each sub-sample were identified using ATLAS.ti’s AI-powered qualitative summary functions. Identified topics were then manually recategorized into broad variables of interest (i.e., “discussion of Marvel movies” was re-coded to fall under a “popular culture” category). This method was used to identify subjects that were discussed most frequently and substantively in podcast episodes.
3. **LIWC:** To precisely investigate previously determined variables of interest, we analyzed each episode using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (LIWC). Scores for linguistic and thematic variables of interest were computed by calculating the number of words in each episode that corresponded to original and previously validated term dictionaries. Unless otherwise noted, LIWC scores refer to the percentage of words in episode transcripts that are contained in a given dictionary (e.g., a dictionary composed of swear words). Authenticity scores were calculated using an empirically verified LIWC dictionary composed of a multivariate linguistic profile of deception.<sup>50</sup> Scores for each variable were then measured against a baseline sample of NYT sports articles and natural conversations. This method was used to determine the presence or absence of pre-identified topics that were related to research questions, but were not necessarily discussed frequently or substantively in podcast episodes.

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<sup>50</sup> “Liars tend to tell stories that are less complex, less self-relevant, and more characterized by negativity.” Newman, M. L., Pennebaker, J. W., Berry, D. S., & Richards, J. M. (2003). Lying words: Predicting deception from linguistic styles. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 29(5), 665-675

**TABLE 9****Human-coded content analysis items and reliability scores<sup>51</sup>**

Item	ALPHA
How long is this episode in minutes?	0.99
What proportion of dialogue is devoted to sports?	0.92
How many people are in this episode?	0.86
How many people in this episode are women?	1.00
How many people in this episode are men?	0.87
How many people in this episode are White?	0.88
How many people in this episode are POC?	0.89
What was the setting of this episode?	0.43
Is any relaxed or casual attire visible in this episode?	NA
Is any formal attire visible in this episode?	NA



<sup>51</sup> Krippendorff's Alpha values of 1.00 indicate "perfect" reliability for the item. Alpha values greater than .6 indicate adequate reliability. Alpha values between .4 and .6 indicate marginal reliability. "NA" indicates that there were no positive cases identified in our reliability sample (20% of the total sample), such that we were unable to compute reliability for the item.



# APPENDIX 3:

## In-Depth Interviews

### Interviewee Identification

The research team generated a list of practitioners who have established a point of view on athlete-owned media. We then conducted eight 30-60-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with academics, journalists, media executives, and athletes producing their own content. Interviewees included:

- Ben Carrington, Associate Professor, USC
- Brendon Kleen, Awful Announcing
- Brenda J. Elsey, Hofstra University, Burn It All Down podcast
- Chris Paul, San Antonio Spurs, Ohh Dip!!! Productions
- Dan Durbin, Professor, USC
- Jeff Fellenzer, Professor, USC
- Midge Purce, NJ/NY Gotham FC, *The Offseason* docuseries
- Michaela Hammond, Media Executive, OffBall

### Interview and Analysis Procedure

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by two trained researchers.

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

#### I. For all: Context and perspective of interviewee

1. Please describe your background and your current role[s] in connection to sports media.

#### II. For all—especially experts: Trends in sports media, contextualizing athlete-owned media

2. How is the sports media landscape changing?
  - 2.1. What are the changes that you have seen in content creation, production, distribution, and ownership in the last few years?
  - 2.2. Tell us about athletes creating their own **media content** in the context of these landscape changes.
    - 2.2.1. What is gained and what is lost as more athletes create their own media content?
  - 2.3. What are the factors behind the success or failure of media produced/owned/written by athletes?
3. In your view, are there any differences between media produced/owned/written by athletes and traditional sports media?
  - 3.1. *[If yes]* How would you characterize the differences between media produced/owned/written by athletes and mainstream sports media content?

4. What are the opportunities and challenges of media produced/owned/written by athletes, in general?  
*Prompt for examples.*
5. What are the implications of media produced/owned/written by athletes for sports journalism and traditional sports media outlets?
6. How do you see this space evolving over the next 5-10 years? What implications do you see for its effect on athletes, fans and the media landscape?

### **III. For hosts/owners/executive producers: Questions about particular media/company Origin story and value proposition**

7. Why did you develop the [media, company, venture]?
  - 7.1. Do you believe [media, company, venture] has an edge over traditional sports media outlets?
  - 7.2. Can you share any examples of when [media, company, venture] has influenced or shaped the conversation within sports/popular culture?
8. What are the opportunities and challenges faced by your [media, company, venture] in particular?  
*Prompt for examples.*
9. Does [media, company, venture] bring a unique perspective to sports journalism or media generally?  
*Prompt for examples.*
10. Have you faced obstacles in establishing and growing [media, company, venture]?
  - 10.1. *[If yes]* Have you developed strategies to overcome them?
11. How do you make your [media, company, venture] stand out in a crowded media landscape? And among other outlets owned/operated by athletes?

### **IV. Diversity, authenticity, impact**

12. Who are your listeners/fans/audience members?
  - 12.1. What kind of **feedback** do you get from them?
  - 12.2. What content has resonated most with your audience?
13. Has [media, company, venture] helped you gain **access** to stories that traditional media outlets couldn't?
14. We've heard that one benefit of media produced/owned/written by athletes is **authenticity**.
  - 14.1. What are your thoughts on this?
  - 14.2. How would you define authenticity in this context?
  - 14.3. What role, if any, does authenticity play in your content? How do you maintain it?
15. How do you think about the **impact** of your [media, company, venture] ?
  - 15.1. Do you measure this impact?
    - 15.1.1. *[If yes]* How do you measure the impact and effectiveness of your outlet's content?
16. What role, if any, does **diversity** play in your [media, company, venture]?
  - 16.1. Do you employ any particular strategies to ensure diverse representation on air and behind the scenes?
  - 16.2. Are there any particular voices you want to lift up with this [media, company, venture] ?
    - 16.2.1. *[If yes]* Have you encountered resistance or pushback from within the industry or from your audience regarding diversifying voices? If so, how do you address it?
  - 16.3. *[If applicable]* Can you share any lessons learned from this focus on diversity?

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# OWNING THE NARRATIVE

How Athletes Are Disrupting the Media Landscape, Reshaping Sports Culture  
and Transforming the Future of Sports Storytelling

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PHOTOS: Cover (clockwise from top) Pat McAfee; Megan Rapinoe and Sue Bird; LeBron James; Midge Purce, Taylor Smith and Ifeoma Onuonu; Matt Barnes and Stephen Jackson; Page 2 Travis and Jason Kelce. Page 30 Kara Gaucher and Des Linden. Page 37 Tobin Heath and Christen Press.



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