

Athletes doing good through Sports Philanthropy

ATHLETE ACTIVISM



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ATHLETE ACTIVISM

noun

the idea of athletes using their name and brand to make a difference for a cause. Whether political, social or economical, these causes all aim to improve some part of the world around them.

WHAT IS THE BIG FUSS ABOUT IT?

Athlete activism has become a common buzzword in today's highly volatile political environment. Nowadays, every sport, team and player has their own social responsibility initiatives, and it is expected that players give back in some way.

This expectation and the requirement to give back can lead many athletes to do so just because they are supposed to, without actually investing in some sort of sustainable project that can continue to make a difference.

AS AN ATHLETE, IS CREATING A FOUNDATION THE BEST ROUTE?

Not always. In fact, for most athletes, it's not the best course of action for a number of reasons.

1. There is a LOT of paperwork, legal, accounting and administrative work that goes into starting a 501c3. Then there is reporting that is required throughout the years. If the athlete and his/her team do slip up at all, or don't live up to a claim they've made, these are public records. That means that any media person or individual can see, for example, that 50% of their funds went to overhead instead of social programs.

2. There are already thousands of foundations that already exist. Instead of re-creating the wheel, going through the paperwork and dealing with the day to day running a non profit, find a great nonprofit that does the work that fits what the athlete wants to do. Love animals? An athlete can use their brand to create a program with the ASPCA or a local shelter. An athlete does not have to create their own foundation to be an activist.

3. Having their own foundation means that the athlete needs to keep it active with programming. It's tough to be consistent when moving from city and city and it's important to not let things lie dormant so they loses its impact or influence.

WHY SHOULD ATHLETES CARE ABOUT ATHLETE ACTIVISM?

An athlete has a voice that people will listen to. People respect and look up to athletes from as young as middle school. Activism is important because today's consumers and fans EXPECT it. They want to know what athletes are doing with their influence and opportunity to make the world a better place.

But it's important to do it the right way. Promoting and sharing on social media may get people's attention, and may bring awareness to an issue, but it's all about action. What can be done to solve the problem? How can that athlete's brand specifically help?

As an professional athlete, it's important to understand the influence they have over change makers in any industry. People will take meetings with athletes they want to be associated with the "star power". The key is to use that influence to create something sustainable for the community or solve a problem afflicting the world.

HOW DOES AN ATHLETE START TO FIND A PHILANTHROPIC FOCUS?

It can be overwhelming thinking about all the nonprofits and causes out there that could benefit from an athlete's support. But it's important to focus in on what matters most to the athlete. If you are an athlete, it's important to take time to think about your family, your friends, your community.

What matters to you most? Create a list of those causes or values. Once you have a list going, start to think about the problems that may be involved with some of these things.

- Does an athlete have a family member with an illness that affects their day to day life?
- Did an athlete or his/her family member undergo a tragedy that has also afflicted others?
- Does the athlete's community have a problem that is recognizable and matters to them?

The process of finding a focus takes time. An athlete won't get there overnight and it will probably take time and conversations with a number of individuals to narrow it down. Once an athlete does find the problems that matter, then it's time to think about how he/she could help solve them.

REMEMBER, ATHLETE ACTIVISM DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN ANY ONE THING.

Athlete activism can be done in hundreds of different ways. An athlete can:

- Sponsor a program within a non-profit foundation that focuses on their cause.
- Attend a fundraiser for cancer research.
- Write an article on their experience and advice going through a hard time or a specific problem.
- Host a conversation at the local police department with inner city community members.
- Write a check.
- Go to a local school and speak on anti-bullying. Any and all of these (and much more) is athlete activism.

Whatever commitment the athlete is willing and able to give is what matters.

Most importantly, athletes should surround themselves with experts. The non-profit world is still a business and it's important to ensure that whatever an athlete decides to do, they are being advised by individuals who understand the industry and can steer them away from pitfalls. An athlete should know their limits and how you can bring others in to solve them.

THANK YOU!

For more information:



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