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Social Media in Sports Paper
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SCENARIO: You are a social media manager for a star college athlete who is attempting to make their name as a social media influencer. Given what you know about social media audiences and the functions of individual social networks, create a strategy for that athlete which gives them the greatest chance of building and maintaining an audience.

The first thing that I would tell this college athlete is that he/she needs to recognize and understand that each social media platform is different. The basic understanding is that if they are trying to reach younger audiences, then Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are the platforms that they should be focusing on. The age ranges on those three sites are not 100% the same, but younger people are on there. Twitter is also very important, and there is a bigger range of users on it. Facebook has young users, but it is used consistently by older people. I would not suggest that this athlete tries to build and maintain an audience on Facebook. Yes, it does have somewhat of a range of users, but I do not think that it is the most effective way for a college athlete to become a social media influencer.

It is important that they be as consistent as possible on their social media sites. They have to engage with their audiences and post often; their audience will want to come back for more. That being said, it is important to know what to post on what platforms because it is not all the same.

The primary focus on Instagram is photos. Consistently posting pictures on Instagram will leave an audience wanting to come back to see what else is going to be posted. A very engaging way to keep an audience on Instagram is the use of Instagram Stories. It allows people to upload pictures they have already taken, as well as in the moment pictures. If their school and athletic department allows it, their followers would love to see stories and posts from behind the scenes in their locker rooms, but they would have to make sure they are allowed to post that stuff. Making the story look nice or cool with the pen tool, stickers, and gifs is also appealing to followers. Posting polls, questions, and mini quizzes on their story are smart ways to have an audience physically engage with a story post. There are many fun and cool features that Instagram Stories allow people to use. Another fun way to interact with an audience is by going on Instagram Live because fans can post comments, and the athlete can talk to them and show them what they are doing in the moment.

Instagram is mostly visual, whereas Twitter is mostly text. That does not mean graphics could never be used because posting pictures, videos, and gifs on Twitter are very effective, however, that is not the main focus; there should be text with a graphic. Twitter is a great way to interact with an audience. The first thing that must be done is to figure out what they want to do with their Twitter account, and how they want to “sell” themselves. There are many different types of Twitter accounts, so they will need to narrow down how they want to brand themselves and what their intentions are. Once they do that, they can start tweeting. To grow a following, it is smart to use hashtags, but only a few per tweet. This will allow other people who are not following them to see their tweet. Twitter has great analytic features that allow users to learn more about their audiences, and how they are doing. It is also very important to be consistently liking, retweeting, and responding to tweets because this shows they are interacting back.

Snapchat and TikTok are really to get a following from the much younger audiences. Snapchat is a great way to post what they are doing in the moment because Snapchat Stories are usually not uploaded later (as opposed to Instagram Stories). TikTok has many different things a user can do on it; they can be funny, do dances, be educational, be relatable, etc. For TikTok, it is just important to figure out what you enjoy, and gain a following from there.

Something to also keep in mind is that by building a following, people will start looking up to them. Being a social media influencer is powerful. They will start to have a responsibility, so they must be careful what they post, and if they promote something, they must know it is legit. It is best to keep a good name for themselves and not post things or do things that will get them in “trouble,” now or later on. He/she is still a college athlete hoping to go professional, and it is important to stay on the good side of the media.

The most important strategies when trying to build a name for yourself online, for anyone, are knowing what is appropriate to post on what platforms, constantly engaging with audiences, being consistent in posting, being creative, and constantly keeping up with the trends. The goal is to get a strong and regular audience, not just people interacting with posts here and there.

Based upon what you have learned throughout the duration of this course, what are three major differences in social media usage within sports that you think will exist five years from now? Explain your rationale for each and support your answers.

The first thing I automatically thought of to be different in five years is Esports and gaming. Esports has slowly started to become a big deal, but I can only imagine what it will be like in the future. I do not think that Esports should be considered a sport, but I think I have the unpopular opinion there, so I do think that it will blow up even more than it has. There are people like Ninja who are paving the way for future gamers. This applies to social media usage because they are not physical games, but they are video games (obviously). The usage of streaming services will only grow the more Esports grow. Having more and more well known professional gamers will increase the appeal of Esports, and this will ultimately increase the usage of streaming services, like Twitch. I know that some schools are already recognizing Esports, and there are already plenty of Esport tournaments; this is only going to grow. This will also lead to individuals becoming famous and even considered influencers like Ninja.

College athletes becoming influencers and making money from social media will hopefully be different in five years. College athletes contribute so much to their schools and get nothing; they should be allowed to make money from their social media. A college student who is an artist can sell their work, but a college athlete cannot make money in the area they are best at. It is great that companies are already eager to help out college athletes with this, and because there are companies out there that want to, I believe that there will be a major change in the next five years. Other people are allowed to make money from social media, and I think that college athletes deserve to as well. If they are putting in the effort to grow a following, why not? Schools profit off of big name athletes, and it is time that these athletes are allowed to profit off of their brand too. Of course there are some risky things that can come out of this like an athlete focusing more on their social media than their sport, but that is on them. If they really want to get to the next level then they will not stop grinding. There are pros and cons, however, I believe that the pros outweigh the cons.

Many athletes already do brand deal posts on their Instagrams, but it is not every athlete. I believe that in five years even more sponsorships will take place on Instagram. Firstly, not every athlete is on social media, especially not some older athletes. Most young people are on Instagram, so in five years, as more younger people are in the professional realm, more athletes will be on Instagram. There are definitely brands that athletes make sponsored posts about that have nothing to do with sports, and I think that will only grow. More brands will start to realize that there is a market on social media AND with athletes. For years, there have obviously been commercials for brands

that are not related to sports with athletes in them, however, I think that more brands will start moving their way to Instagram with this too. I also think that more athletes will take these opportunities. There is a market on Instagram and with athletes, and in five years I believe that more brands will have noticed this.