

# THE ADIDAS ATHLETE

**A** DIDAS HAVE A LONG ASSOCIATION WITH SPORTS AROUND THE GLOBE AND CAREFULLY SELECT PLAYERS TO REPRESENT THEIR BRAND AS AMBASSADORS. THEY HAVE JUST EXTENDED THEIR LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS ASSOCIATION (NZRPA) REINFORCING HOW HIGHLY SUPPORTIVE THEY ARE OF PLAYER EDUCATION. THEY STATE THE REASON THEY SUPPORT THE NZRPA IS BECAUSE FOR ADIDAS, BEING PROFESSIONAL OFF THE FIELD IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS BEING PROFESSIONAL ON THE FIELD. They collaborate with some of the biggest names in sports, fashion, music and entertainment including Kanye West, Rita Ora, Stella McCartney, Pharrell Williams, Disney and Star Wars. They have some of the biggest names wearing their brand as ambassadors including David Beckham, Katy Perry,

Derrick Rose and Lionel Messi. From New Zealand they have Dan Carter and Sonny Bill Williams in their stable. Adidas sponsor over 56 different types of sport around the world including the All Blacks, Real Madrid, Manchester United and Chelsea football teams. It is a €17 Billion business which has recorded impressive global currency neutral profits the last financial year of €720 Million. What do they look for when they are choosing people and organisations to associate their brand with? Andrew Wilson, Senior Global Sports Marketing Manager: [HBS] Team Sport of adidas answers a few questions about what they look for in Global Ambassadors, potential sponsors and brand collaborators.

**PLAYERS OWN:** What do you look for when you bring an athlete into the adidas family to be an ambassador?

**AW:** A young athlete needs to first and foremost fit with our brand positioning, and at the same time share similar values. We look for honest, passionate and committed individuals who are authentic, innovative and inspirational. The "Creator" athlete is young and a superstar in their chosen sport! Best in class and a standout with a bright future, however not only do they possess the qualities of a world class athlete on the field, court or in the pool but they are also socially active and influential within their peer group and beyond.

**PLAYERS OWN:** What advice would you give to young athletes starting out?

**AW:** Education is key make sure you have options should you need them. The sporting world is a very unforgiving one and in this, the professional era we are seeing players' careers becoming much shorter, sure athletes are being paid more HOWEVER the seasons are becoming longer, the hits bigger and the injuries more severe. It's still a long life post career, so always keep this in mind

when developing through the stages. At the same time its important young athletes take control of their careers, find people you can trust to guide and support your decisions. But most of all it's about enjoyment. Be sure to enjoy what you do and the rest should fall into place.

**PLAYERS OWN:** How important is social media from a sponsorship perspective for athletes?

**AW:** Social media is today's norm, it's a powerful medium through which players and brands alike can reach a target audience. Our athletes are our biggest brand ambassadors and through their social channels we can tell specific stories, drive campaigns and grow our influence. It's key for players to understand that their social platforms are very powerful and at the same time they need to take responsibility for how they use or abuse such channels. As a sponsor you want the athlete to be telling a organic story daily in which your brand features constantly through their channels, a before - during - after scenario in which adidas is a part of the athlete's daily life be it during a gym session, in the game itself, or just

relaxing on a Sunday afternoon. When recruiting athletes we not only look at their performance on-field we are also looking at their social analytics, how many Instagram, Facebook and Twitter followers do they have? Lionel Messi has c. 35 million followers and David Beckham just fewer than 20 million followers on Instagram the value these numbers bring to sponsors are limitless!!

The athlete today can no longer ignore social media, they need to embrace it and we certainly see that the new generation of athletes are very in touch with and understand social platforms, not only do they communicate through these channels but they expect us, the sponsors, to communicate via said channels too.

**PLAYERS OWN:** Obviously on the field performance is important, but how much expectation do adidas place on your athletes around off-field performance?

**AW:** The days of an athlete being a product endorser are long gone. The expectations on athletes have changed. We are constantly looking for ROE [Return on Engagement] as well



LIONEL MESSI



DAVID BECKHAM

as ROI [Return on Investment]. Our athletes are in effect our ambassadors, they need to be 100% engaged with our brand at all times, they need to be sharing our messaging and stories daily. The adidas logo is worn by them at all times. Their social platforms are alive with organic, personal messaging about the brand. How they conduct themselves in front of camera and in an audience all play important roles in building that relationship with the player. Athletes need to be dynamic and willing to go beyond the 80 minutes on field.

**PLAYERS OWN:** How important has athlete involvement become with technology in designing sporting apparel?

**AW:** Athlete involvement has always been at the centre of product development for adidas, dating back to our founder Adolf Dassler who crafted the saying "Only the best for the athlete" and this still rings true today. Technology in the sporting goods industry has become cutting edge, in an environment where milliseconds can mean the difference between gold and silver it's vitally important to understand how an athlete moves and what they need to make them the best. Of course, new technologies and machinery can provide valuable feedback and insight but at times the very best feedback is direct from the athletes themselves. Point in case when it comes to the All Blacks product, the team, and management are heavily involved from the start of the process providing invaluable input to ensure we develop the world-leading technologies as seen during the RWC 2015.

**PLAYERS OWN:** When choosing athletes, artists, designers and

entertainers to collaborate with, what process do you go through?

**AW:** When dealing with athletes, we involve our wider business team, as well as the markets in which the athlete might be relevant. Key to start is that the athlete has that something special, an exceptional talent either with a bright future or already well established in their chosen sport. At the same time we need to understand how the athlete will support our wider business objectives. Are they relevant to our target audience? Do they have a large social following? Do they transcend the vertical sport and are they a globally recognisable face? All questions and criteria we review when contemplating a young athlete. In rugby for example we also look at key positions which influence games, try-scorers or goal kickers. The Playmakers and "Creator" athletes both on and off the field.

**PLAYERS OWN:** How far in advance do you work with collaborators until products arrive in the stores?

**AW:** In short, the product development process end to end can take anything from 12 to 24 months; depending on the range and style and if the adidas futures team are involved. This is the time it takes from first designs to the product actually hitting the store shelves. However, when working with third parties, [artists, sportsmen] it can in reality take longer, depending on the level of collaboration, as well as the materials needed to be sourced and availability of the athlete to input into the design process.

**PLAYERS OWN:** How do you stay at the forefront of such a competitive market?

**AW:** We have a very developed scouting and sports marketing

network globally, and as a business are constantly looking to redevelop our brand to ensure we stay relevant. In today's world the consumer expects more and instantly, they in effect are making the decisions for us. We adapt an open source approach, meaning we listen to what the market wants and allow them to influence trends and decisions, at the same time it's all about speed to market.

**DID YOU KNOW** American track and field athlete Jesse Owens was one of the first athletes to use adidas shoes. He won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics.

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