

Athlete Brand Mark Ownership: The Current Landscape of Trademark Usage in the National Basketball Association

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Abstract

The need for athletes to protect and take ownership of their brand mark(s) has become increasingly evident as more athletes enter their brands and brand marks into the marketplace. Recent instances where athletes have had to protect their personal logo, or related brand mark,(s) reinforce the growing necessity of the utilization of federally registered trademarks. This investigation examined what type of brand marks, and by what type of athlete (e.g., more experienced, more famous) are being strategically protected, in addition to the type of mark these athletes most frequently protect. Results indicated that while experience was not a representative variable for which athletes utilized trademarks, salary and number of followers were. Additionally, the athletes were most likely to protect their logo, followed by trademarks of other business-related entities (e.g., restaurants), in comparison to other brand marks. Further results are discussed, as well as implications, such as the need for professional athlete and/or brand managers to recognize the value in protecting the athlete brand.

Keywords: brand management, athlete logos, brand marks, trademark law, brand protection

Introduction

The opportunity for businesses and brands to become regional, national, or even international entities has never been greater than it currently is, given the proliferation of social media and advances in certain technologies (e.g., digital marketing, supply chain). With the growth in both the quality and quantity of nationally relevant brands, the need for federal protection regarding brand marks has also grown. In 2000, there were over one million active trademark registrations in the U.S. Comparatively, there were over 3.25 million active trademark registrations in 2024, more than 600 thousand than even four years prior (Gerben, 2024). It is evident that many business entities recognize the crowded marketplace in which

they operate within, and understand the benefits of utilizing federally registered trademarks to protect the most salient visual elements of their brand, their logos and brand marks (Park et al., 2013).

This trend of increased brand mark protection has become increasingly prevalent in the sporting landscape as well. Teams (e.g., the Philadelphia Phillies and 'Ring the Bell'), conferences (e.g., the National Collegiate Athletic Association and 'March Madness'), leagues (e.g., the Women's National Basketball Association and any one of their team's official name), professional athletes (e.g., Saquon Barkley and 2KSA), and even collegiate athletes (e.g., Brigham Young University quarterback Jake Retzlaff and 'BYJEW'; Liberman, 2024) have taken the appropriate steps to protect their brand marks from potential infringement and harm by utilizing federally registered trademarks. Although some brands invoking such marks may avoid infringement without obtaining a trademark registration, a number of recent instances have proven the positive opportunity cost of trademark registration, particularly for athletes. The current investigation examines athletes specifically, due to their unique role in the sports realm and the brand hierarchies for which they are a part of (Su et al., 2020), and due to the substantial differences of brand capitalization by various athletes.

A focal aim of this investigation is to understand brand ownership in the athlete branding context. Athletes have the autonomy to act in any way they desire, and to involve themselves in whatever businesses or decisions they see fit. These decisions in conjunction with the performance of the athletes will constantly influence their brand image and awareness (Keller, 1993). While they will always have ownership of those decisions and at least some control of how they are perceived based on their actions, ownership in the context of this investigation pertains specifically their public business practices of brand mark utilization. As discussed later in the paper, athletes sometimes outsource the creation and protection of their brand marks, leading to a plethora of different outcomes and strategies. Furthermore, while the utilization of brand marks is neither required nor standardized amongst athletes, enough brand mark ownership issues have arisen to warrant an investigation into how these brands (specifically brand marks) are being protected. Thus, ownership is conceptualized as the entity that is in legal protection of federally trademarked brand mark(s).

This study provides an empirical examination of registered trademark usage by athletes that currently employ brand marks in the marketplace, thereby providing insights into which athletes are taking strategic steps to protect various brand marks that they employ as business entities themselves. Through an examination of who is protecting their brand marks, and what is being protected, future athletes and brand managers may have a better understanding of both the breadth and depth that some athletes have taken to fend off external entities and provide greater value to their own personal brand. As more athletes enter their brand marks into the marketplace (Pedersen et al., 2024), a greater need to both carve out specific brand marks, in addition to protecting such marks for the most optimal brand longevity (Williams et al., 2022), will be paramount moving forward. Hereafter, a literature review of athlete branding, athlete brand mark litigation, and brand protections in the realm of sports will be conducted. Four research questions will be presented, followed by a description of the methodological process, the results, and a discussion on the implications of the findings.

Literature Review

Athlete Branding and Brand Marks

The inherent interest in athletes by sport fans delivers an opportunity for all athletes to capitalize upon the fandom that they generate (Williams et al., 2015). Certain athletes, though, leverage this fandom and their brand much better than other athletes, many of whom fail to capitalize on their name, image, and

likeness (NIL) at all. For example, less than half of the most rich and famous athletes around the world have created a personal logo to represent themselves on gear, merchandise, and brand extensions (Pedersen & Williams, 2022). Similarly, over 70% of the top 25 male and female athletes in the niche sport of disc golf utilize a personal logo (Pedersen, 2024), even though these athletes make substantially less money than those that compete in more mainstream sports.

While theoretically athletes have always had a brand, or several unique associations that differentiate an athlete in the marketplace (Williams et al., 2015), a greater number of athletes have been more heavily engaging in brand management practices like logo creation over the past two decades. Athletes choose to engage in brand management strategies in order to elevate their personal brand equity (Arai et al., 2014), subsequently allowing for the potential creation of additional revenue streams (Walsh & Williams, 2017), the establishment of post career opportunities and success (Williams et al., 2022), or increased fandom in general (Doyle et al., 2022). Additionally, although a logo is not the only brand mark an athlete can have, it does predominantly serve as an indicator of which athletes have recognized the influence that they have in the marketplace.

A brand mark is, “any symbolic mark that seeks to represent a brand in marketing or communication materials in the form of a brand name, a logo, or a slogan” (Pedersen & Williams, 2024). These brand marks are used, in the realm of athlete branding, to further differentiate one athlete from the next or to capitalize on specific marketing campaigns for the athlete. The importance of protecting these brand marks is demonstrated in the industry time and again. After winning the Super Bowl, and in conjunction with his endorser (i.e., Jordan Brand), Jalen Hurts had a marketing campaign dispersed regarding his success with the tagline “Love, Hurts.” Hurts was seen during the Super Bowl parade wearing a sweatshirt with the same tagline, and promoting videos on social media with it as well. However, in that short amount of time, there was already an individual that filed that same specific tagline with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (Gerben, 2025). The lack of protection around the tagline now calls into question how big the campaign can be in the future, given that neither Hurts nor his brand managers have official rights to the brand mark. While Hurts and his team have some rights given that they were the first to introduce the tagline on a product, they now have to deal with a potential legal situation that could slow the campaigns momentum down.

The existence of disputes between athletes and apparel manufactures (e.g., endorsers) over the use of athlete logos is evidence of how far athlete branding has come, and how important athlete branding now is. Athlete branding is a form of brand management that is crucial for athletes who look to capitalize on the immense fandom they have the opportunity to create. When athletes choose to create a logo, they are choosing to create a multifaceted and symbolic mark. The athlete logo is the most important visual element of the athlete brand, as it is representative of all of the branding efforts that the athlete partakes in (Pedersen et al., 2024). It serves as both a mark that is representative of components of the athlete's brand image (Arai et al., 2014), and a symbol that can be used to elevate brand awareness through its usage at times and on inventory when the athlete is unable to be present or utilized (Pedersen et al., 2024). Each of the elements of brand equity (i.e., brand associations and brand awareness; Keller, 1993), are significant components of greater brand knowledge and equity. With how important logos can be for athletes, an examination of how athletes are protecting their most representative symbol (and related brand marks) is needed. As athletes continue to present themselves as unique business entities, and as they utilize many business practices seen in the corporate realm, investigating how athletes embrace trademarks will provide novel insights.

Trademarks and Brand Protection

Trademarks are one of the most valuable assets for athletes and athlete brands (Brown et al., 2019). In

marketing, trademarks are defined as a name, design, slogan, or other identifier used to distinguish goods and services from those owned by competitors (Levy & Rook, 1999). Heightened awareness of brand value by the athletes has led to an immense increase in trademark applications over the past decade (Glaus, 2021). While most trademarks may not be highly profitable, they still serve their primary purpose of protecting the athletes' brand. Today's athletes can safeguard a broad range of their brand through trademark law and have greater enforcement power over their trademarks compared to the average individual (Glaus, 2021).

By registering their trademarks, athletes can protect their personal brand and endeavors federally by preventing unauthorized use and capitalizing on commercial opportunities (Demcak, 2023). Although individuals accrue rights in their marks once they begin using them in interstate commerce, it's immensely easier to protect intellectual property with federal registration. Failure to do so could result in someone else claiming rights to a name or phrase that is associated with an athlete, as such was the case with Jeremy Lin during his meteoric rise with the Knicks (Chase, n.d.). Two individuals were the first to file for trademark applications for "Linsanity" prior to Lin filing his own application, but fortunately Lin was able to gain trademark ownership of the phrase.

Athletes are not required to seek federal trademark registration, or even simple brand-building endeavors. Many athletes do very little to capitalize on the commercial power of their NIL, with just around half of the most famous and wealthy athletes in the world even entering a brand mark into the marketplace, trademarking it aside (Pedersen and Williams, 2022). However, as more athletes have found more successful and efficient ways to capture the equity they are producing, the next logical sequential or supplemental step after brand equity generation is brand protection, which is a process that sport teams and general business entities follow as well. If athletes are just seen as just endorsers like they have been in the past (Thomson, 2006), while they have a brand, there is nothing to federally protect from a trademark perspective. However, once athletes see themselves as business entities with commercial power that can benefit from the sale and promotion of their own products or intellectual property, brand protection via trademarks becomes an import tool for athletes and their brand managers.

Instances where trademarks (or the lack thereof) have proven to be consequential for athletes and their brands have consistently shown up in the media and sport industry. In 2020 Nike settled two disputes with two of the brands' biggest endorsees, basketball star Kawhi Leonard and tennis legend Roger Federer (Cambers & Graf, 2023). Both athletes had recently left Nike for newer endorsement deals, and although it is common for athletes to change endorsers throughout the course of their career, these moves were obviously not appreciated by Nike given the legal battle that ensued in both cases. In both situations Nike decided to retain the trademark to each of the athletes' logos, barring future use of the logo by the athlete. Kawhi Leonard and Roger Federer throughout most of their professional careers have utilized two iconic logos, with Leonard's representing of one of his most well-known brand associations (i.e., his large hands; Chorpenning, 2020), and Federer's displaying his symbolic 'RF' initials. Even though these brand marks were specifically used and created for these athletes, they could not use them in commerce, as they did not own the trademark.

Leonard lost the battle with Nike and was no longer able to utilize his 'Klaw' logo (Chorpenning, 2020), while Nike worked with Federer to eventually transfer ownership back to the tennis star (Cambers & Graf, 2023). Many athletes now have brand marks that they utilize in the marketplace due to the fact that many athletes now operate as business entities themselves (Pedersen & Williams, 2022). Recent incidents such as the aforementioned disputes, in addition to situations where athletes do not fight previous endorsers over logo ownership (e.g., Kyrie Irving, Neymar Jr.), point to a novel phenomenon where athletes are barred from the utilization of a mark representative of themselves as an athlete. The protection does not have to be from an endorser, though, and the mark does not have to be a logo.

Football quarterbacks Lamar Jackson and Troy Aikman have even clashed over the trademark of their jersey number (i.e., eight), given how both of the athletes use this mark and association in commerce (McCann, 2024). Legendary golfer Tiger Woods left a 27-year endorsement with Nike in 2024, and although Woods owned the rights to his iconic TW logo, he decided to embrace a new identity and brand called Sun Day Red. While Nike or his new endorser had no legal issue with the use of this mark, rival sport apparel manufacturer Puma and Tigeraire (a personal cooling device company) have filed trademark disputes with Woods over the use of his new logo (Schiffer, 2025).

These situations prompted the current investigation, as the landscape of brand management from the athlete's perspective provides crucial information for the growing number of athletes deciding to enter their brand marks into the marketplace. The purpose of the current investigation was to examine how athletes were deciding to protect their brand marks, from endorsers or individuals with malicious intent, through the usage of federally registered trademarks. Although protecting a trademark entails monitoring potential improper uses by outside parties, registering a trademark is the first step in protecting a brand.

Furthermore, while registering a trademark is the first step in protecting a brand, it should be noted that it is not the first step in creating a brand. There are myriad ways in which athletes go about generating and bolstering their brand image and brand awareness amongst sport fans and consumers, with no specific timetable or uniform path that an athlete must follow. Athletes can choose to protect their brand marks at any point in their career, with a potential specific metric for recognizing the need for protection unavailable, thus the aim of this investigation. Several high-profile athletes who work with large endorsers (e.g., Nike) will register their trademarks before any public announcement of a logo or phrase is used, but their personal brand image and brand awareness are typically well into their athlete brand lifecycle (Hasaan et al., 209) in these instances.

As athlete brands and personal logos have increased in value, it is important to understand the current landscape of those who have registered marks and what elements of their brands are registered. Thus, this could help inform the current trends and encourage athletes looking to build their personal brand to register and protect their brand in order to fully realize the commercial value. With this in mind, the following research questions have been developed, specifically in the context where athlete logos are most heavily utilized, the National Basketball Association (NBA; Pedersen & Williams, 2022), amongst the athletes that already use a personal brand mark. The variables of salary, career length, and following were utilized as potential metrics that could be both easily tracked and potential indicators of enhanced reasoning behind pursuing a trademark.

RQ1: Is NBA athlete salary positively associated with likelihood of federal trademark registration among athletes who have a personal logo?

RQ2: Is NBA athlete career length positively associated with likelihood of federal trademark registration among athletes who have a personal logo?

RQ3: Is NBA athlete following positively associated with likelihood of federal trademark registration among athletes who have a personal logo?

RQ4: What brand elements do NBA athletes protect with their federal trademark registrations among athletes who have a personal logo?

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The sample population for the current investigation consisted of NBA athletes, given their high use of personal logos (Pedersen & Williams, 2022) and their prevalence of collaborations with apparel manufacturers (DePaula, 2023). Furthermore, the current investigation sought to understand the differences amongst athletes who currently employ a personal logo, given that this is the symbol that previous disputes have centered around (e.g., Kawhi Leonard). The athlete logo also represents a common, symbolic, and objectively representative attempt to self-brand by the athlete, as athletes are not required to create and/or use a personal logo.

Additionally, the actions of logo introduction and trademark registration are not linear or sequential for many athletes. Athletes may have logos for many years before federally trademarking them, if at all, while some athletes trademark their logo and seemingly never utilize it in the marketplace. While the current sample is restricted to the number of athletes discussed hereafter, this sample is believed to sufficiently represent the athletes that are engaged in trademarking activities, as searches into other NBA athletes' trademark activity was minimal outside of the current list. To construct the appropriate list of NBA athletes to be utilized in the analysis, the roster of each of the 30 NBA teams before the start of the 2023-2024 season was utilized (via [espn.com](https://www.espn.com)). Athlete logo website [logoroster.com](https://www.logoroster.com) was then consulted, which houses a list of basketball athlete logos, indicating a total of 115 NBA athletes on a roster and utilized a personal logo at the start of the 2023-2024 season.

Significant to this investigation was also the knowledge of what official registered trademark activities that athletes and apparel manufacturers engaged in. Understanding official trademark activities can be challenging given the ability athletes have to register trademarks under external entities (e.g., LLC) with either nicknames or unrelated names. However, the approach taken hereafter is believed to have reasonably exhausted the searching capabilities to identify any trademark activity taken by the NBA athletes. The first step was to consult [gerbenlaw.com](https://www.gerbenlaw.com), which hosted a list of professional athletes who have engaged in some form of trademark registration. Evaluating this database produced a list of 36 NBA athletes with logos who utilized a federally registered trademark. The remaining 79 athletes' names and logos were utilized to uncover any further trademark registration on this list. Utilizing the United States Patent and Trademark Office ([uspto.com](https://www.uspto.com)), each athlete's name was searched for using their full name, their first and last names individually, any known nickname of the athlete, their jersey number, their initials, and descriptions of their logos.

After using the aforementioned search logic, five additional athletes were found to have registered their personal logo. Therefore, the final list of 115 NBA athletes who utilize a personal logo was comprised of 74 athletes who have a logo but have not engaged in any trademark registrations, juxtaposed to the 41 that have. In relation to the entirety of the NBA, these numbers represent 13.7% and 7.6% of the league respectively. Although the usage of athlete logos is growing, the number of athlete's employing a personal brand mark is still low in comparison to the number of athletes in the league.

Finally, the metrics of player salary, social media following, and experience were required. Regarding player salary and experience, [espn.com](https://www.espn.com) was again consulted to gather this information for the 115 NBA athletes by the start of the 2023-2024 basketball season. Salary, rather than wealth or contract, was utilized to give a more accurate representation of how money factors into these trademark decisions. Through the use of the experience variable, which represented the number of years athletes have played in the NBA, wealth and/or current contract could present a metric that is less useful given the larger contracts that more recent athletes enjoy. Athlete following in the current investigation is conceptualized as the number of followers that the athlete had on the X platform. Although several different platforms

exist that athletes can utilize to connect with fans (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok), and while different athletes use different social media platforms to varying degrees, X was chosen as the common metric for this variable as only six athletes did not have a public account.

Analysis

To examine the research questions, several statistical measures and methods were used. To better understand RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, descriptive statistics were assessed, and both independent t-tests and non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-tests were utilized when appropriate. To better understand RQ4, a content analysis was performed on the type of trademark activity athletes with logos engaged in (only 12 athletes without a logo were found to engage in any trademark activity). Not all athletes trademark their primary logo, as some athletes choose to trademark their name or charity, for example. The content analysis consisted of two independent coders with extensive knowledge of athlete branding tactics and trademark usage. An initial coder meeting was held where the coders discussed the codebook for the investigation. The codebook delineated the process the coders were to adhere to, which consisted of observing an athlete's trademark activity and categorizing each of the potential marks as either an athletes' trademarked logo, name, nickname, philanthropic venture, or other (e.g., restaurant, company), slightly altering Pedersen and Williams' (2022) codebook to the trademark context. The trademark activity of 21 of the 41 athletes (51%) were assessed by both coders, with any disagreements being discussed until agreement of the appropriate trademark category (Pedersen et al., 2024). There is a chance that some brand marks can be confusing or misunderstood, such that a philanthropic logo may be perceived as a personal logo, or that a nickname be mistakenly understood as an actual name. Therefore, the inclusion of an additional coder was purely utilized to ensure that the instances in which confusion about a brand mark arose, scholars were able to identify and correctly categorize a vague brand mark.

Results

A total of 115 NBA athletes possessed a personal logo at the start of the 2023-2024 season. Out of these 115 athletes, 41 engaged in some level of trademark activity (e.g., registering a trademark of their name, logo, foundation). Each of the following analyses compared athletes that do have a logo and utilize registered trademarks to athletes that have a logo but do not have any registered trademarks (see Table 1). A t-test was performed to understand RQ1 and RQ2, which asked about athlete salary and experience and their potential association with registered trademark usage respectively.

Each of the variables met the required assumptions considering the constructs were properly setup (i.e., continuous dependent variable, nominal independent variable, independence of observations), there were no significant outliers, and homogeneity of variance was met for both the variable of salary ($F(1,113) = 3.47, p = .065$) and experience ($F(1,113) = 1.37, p = .244$). Welch's t-test was utilized as it is robust against violations of homogeneity of variance, even though this assumption was met. The result of the first t-test indicated that salary was associated with trademark usage, given that this variable was significantly positively different ($t(113)=3.81, p<.001$) for the athletes that did use a trademark compared to those that didn't, providing insight into RQ1. Conversely, experience had no association trademark usage, given that this variable was not significantly different ($t(113)=1.14, p=.25$) regardless of trademark activity, providing insights into RQ2. This result may be the outcome of more NBA athletes being able to capitalize on their brands at a younger age. With more access to social media, and heightened levels of media attention as well, there are not just one or two superstar athletes that enter into the league each year. The NBA has a steady stream of popular athletes entering into the league each year, potentially offsetting the need for athletes to wait until they are established within the league to capitalize on their brand.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics*

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Salary	No Trademark	74	16,184,675.38	13,464,399.48
	Trademark	41	27,312,419.93	15,804,297.03
Experience	No Trademark	74	7.89	4.31
	Trademark	41	8.92	4.84
Following	No Trademark	68	512,728.19	1,150,669.37
	Trademark	41	3,364,231.65	9,004,418.13

An examination of the descriptive statistics for the variable related to athlete following on X indicated that a number of significant outliers existed, and upon further analysis was observed as not being normally distributed like the previous two variables. The skew of this variable was expected, though, as the NBA has a salary cap that limits the players earning potential earnings regarding their salary, and athletes within the league produce a reasonable spread of years from rookie to veteran. However, regarding following, there is no limit or threshold to the popularity that athletes can have on a global platform like X, which leads to outliers and a highly skewed variable. However, these instances of immense fame (e.g., LeBron James has more than 52 million followers) are crucial to the dataset, making the usage of a non-parametric test, such as the Mann Whitney U-test, appropriate. Although the data for this variable is not normal, for both groups the data is heavily positively skewed and represents the same shape. The results of this non-parametric test also indicated that following was a significant associated with trademark usage ($U = 845.5$, $p < .001$), providing insight into RQ3.

Regarding the content analysis, coding by the two coders produced an initial agreement of 72%. This was acceptable, though, as cases where disagreements took place were discussed until each trademark observation was housed in the appropriate category, following the process of Pedersen et al. (2024). Although 72% agreement may be low for more in-depth content analyses, the true benefit of this result was the ability to discuss the vague brand marks in the dataset to ensure they were categorized correctly. Disagreements fully revolved around a lack of knowledge by either one of the coders regarding the specific brand elements of a certain athlete, such as a nickname, component of their image, or marketing campaign being utilized. After educating the other coder on these practices/rationales, agreements on categorization were easily met. The results of the analysis provided insights into RQ4. The categories that were observed to house the most frequent trademark activity regarding the 41 NBA athletes with a logo, were the categories of athlete logo ($n = 25$; 61%), catchphrase ($n = 17$; 41%), other (e.g., business, restaurant; $n = 16$; 39%), nickname, ($n = 15$; 37%), name ($n = 12$; 29%), and foundation ($n = 3$; 7%). Additionally, 11 of the 41 (27%) athletes had their personal logo trademarked by their endorser.

Discussion

The current investigation provides insights into athlete brand protection, specifically in the NBA. Situations where athletes clash with former endorsers and subsequently dispute various aspects of the athlete brand, while few, are important. The results indicate that experience, or number of years professionally competing, was not associated with trademark utilization. This may mean that younger athletes are being instructed to work on, are beginning to understand, or just have more access to, trademark registration. Utilizing the tool of trademark registration early on in their career, even before more advanced stages of their brand lifecycle (Hasaan et al., 2019), warrants further investigation into this phenomenon. There have already been instances where athletes in different sports, and even athletes in the same sport, have produced very similar looking brand marks (McCann, 2024; Pedersen et al., 2024). Trademarks will play a crucial role in the future brand landscape as athletes fight to protect the marks, names, and catchphrases that best represent and are tied to their brand.

A significant positive relationship was also discovered between athletes with higher salaries and number of followers (specifically on X) and protection their brand marks. Paired with the previous finding, this may indicate that rich and famous athletes, regardless of age, are the most likely to protect their brand. While it is important for all athletes to protect their brands, it may be even more consequential for athletes with a smaller following and/or less money to do so. For athletes with smaller fanbases, protecting a brand through the act of registered trademarks can ensure that a valuable avenue for additional revenue (e.g., if the logo/name/catchphrase is used on merchandise or another profitable piece of inventory) is protected.

The findings of the content analysis also reveal the predominant usage of trademarking personal athlete logos. However, when examining this finding in the context of the 90 other athletes with a logo that do not have a trademark, within this dataset there looks to be a lacking emphasis on preparing brand marks to be protected in the marketplace. When stripping away the 11 athletes that have their trademark owned by their endorser (for which each endorser uses the logo on either shoes or apparel), only 14 athletes out of the roughly 540 in the NBA have chosen to federally protect the value of this form of branded intellectual property. Although it is difficult to ascertain the level of effort many athletes (or athlete brand managers) devote to the athlete brand, this may be an indicator that points to the significant opportunity and growth that can be had by athletes that devote more time, effort, and money to specific brand building and brand protecting strategies.

Further examination into this phenomenon through the testing of various hypotheses is needed before any truly practical advice can be given concerning this data. However, the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) permits the filing of "intent to use" trademark applications, enabling athletes to secure trademarks for their names, slogans, and related elements even if these have not yet been utilized in commerce. To proceed with such applications, applicants need only demonstrate a "good faith intent" to use the marks in commerce and subsequently commence their use. This practice facilitates the comprehensive protection of personal brands. Moreover, athletes should strategically leverage their trademarks to maximize revenue potential. For instance, Michael Jordan, one of the greatest NBA players of all time, has achieved substantial financial success post-career, amassing significant wealth through his brand. Consequently, it may be advisable for both current and future athletes to initiate trademark registrations for their names and associated marks at the earliest opportunity.

Limitations and Future Research

While the NBA provides the best opportunity to examine athlete brand marks as a collective group (Pedersen & Williams, 2022), the sample was small. Conducting the study when even more athletes and brands utilize officially registered trademarks would be valuable. Additionally, the language in the

contracts between the endorser and the athlete are private commodities and therefore may entail certain uses or ownership agreements not known to the public. Finally, future research should look to further evaluate related questions regarding athlete brand mark ownership and protection. Qualitative examinations may prove most beneficial in this regard, as more in-depth information and rationales may not be revealed through quantitative examinations. Utilizing similar studies in other sports may provide useful evidence as well, given that Roger Federer had a similar dispute with Nike to Kawhi Leonard, though he plays tennis not basketball.

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