

I Went Pro, But Not In Sports

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Making it to the University of Tennessee in 2005 made me realize my professional football dreams were only four years away. I needed to make every year count. So, first I had to fall in love with the weight room so my body could change physically from a boy to a man. I also had to become a student of the game. My mind needed to develop mentally to understand the game on the collegiate level and beyond. Then, I had to mature mentally to take responsibility for my work load as a student first and an athlete second. It was a whole new world for me, and I had my work cut out. That's when I knew I had a choice to make. Not just in college, but for the rest of my life. That choice altered everything!

You know when you have to do that thing that is never really wanted, often needed, and is consistently happening around you. Some people pray for it, and some run from it, but we never escape it.

What is this consistent inevitable I refer too? It's change! I forced myself to embrace change rather than resist it. Embracing and resisting are both tough to do, but I figured I would pick the one with the most upside. I had to ask myself this question: "If not now, then when?"

I did not like change and most people do not like change because we are afraid of the unknown. What exactly was the unknown? For me, in sports, it was the coaching staff getting fired, new coaches coming in, and having to learn a new play book. In life, it was me making it to the NFL or getting a job after my collegiate career was over. In business, it was taking a leap of faith and starting my company: Impact, Inspire, & Empower LLC. In all of these areas existed unknowns about what the future would hold for me. Fortunately, this wouldn't affect me because of the one choice I made in college that altered everything. I decided to go PRO, not in sports, but at life! This simple choice helped me break the chains of the socially imposed stereotype that athletes are just good at sports. My athletic ability was not the only contribution to society I was here to make, although I previously thought it was. After that decision, I felt liberated. I was now free to be more, do more, achieve more.

That decision changed the way I thought. I became free to attack everything in life with same tenacity I attacked football. That thought process changed my attitude. It set my dreams of being an entrepreneur loose. That one critical change helped me realize this. The unknown of the future was only unknown because I had not created what I wanted my future to be. This thought process made the unknown a known, which kept me from being afraid of change – the change from conforming to the world's view of me as a "jock" to being a successful human being off the field. There will always be change but there are options besides running and fighting it. Make the decision I made. Start by changing your

mind! Once you change the way you think about yourself, it will change the way you view yourself, which will change the way you live your life.

Deciding to go PRO at life changed the way I lived. I went from living that amateur get by, scared to take risks lifestyle to living like a pro. I knew what I wanted, and I knew what I needed to do to attain it. Attack life became my mantra. This relentless, “nothing can stop me” mentality I had in football, which is the same one CEOs have in business, was the missing piece I needed in my life. From that day forward, I dressed for success. I no longer wore athletic clothing to class. I came fully dressed in a suit and tie. I began to notice when I changed the way I dressed, it changed the way I was addressed. My peers began to notice. I played football with them, but I did not dress like them. It gave them no more excuses. They could no longer get by with just being “jocks” anymore. I had set a new standard; the “jocks” bar had been raised. They were capable of being more and giving more than society expected of them because they realized they were athletes but not jocks.

We tend to put our energy towards things that are temporal and of less significance in the big picture of our lives, but we often realize this when it's too late. So for those who are reading this, I challenge you to break the norms for which society has set for you. You can be more, do more, experience more than society has reserved for you. The only way for this to happen for you is to get out of your box. Do not just get outside your box, destroy your box. That is society's box, you are capable of creating your own box, with your name on it just like I did eleven years ago. Nothing in my life would have been accomplished if I didn't decide to destroy the “jock” box the world had me in. “I am an athlete but I'm not a jock” because I went pro, but not in football. I went PRO at life.