THE SPORTS CAREER PLAYBOOK

A Cheat Sheet for Landing Your Dream Job in the Sports Industry

Presented by

Work In SPORTS
An Introduction

Developing and actually using a playbook can mean the difference between winners and losers - in sports, business, and life.

And yet, we constantly see job seekers who just “wing it” or put little effort into figuring out what’s needed to take charge of their career.

The team at WorkInSports.com has been helping job seekers for over 12 years to break into the sports industry and we’ve observed the qualities and actions taken by the people that land jobs - as well as the ones that don’t.

And instead of sitting on the sidelines we decided to share with you those things that we see the winners do to land their dream job in the sports industry.

In The Sports Career Playbook you’ll learn how to:

✓ Develop a Winning Mentality

✓ Become a Better Communicator

✓ Network Like a Pro

✓ Set S.M.A.R.T. Goals

✓ Get Sports Industry Experience

✓ Learn Sports Career Lessons from Mark Cuban
Develop a Winning Mentality

Your playbook starts with developing a winning mentality.

You need to develop a winning mindset that will not allow you to take “no” for an answer. This is no easy process, but it is one you need to dedicate yourself to perfecting. You are bound to make mistakes along the way, which is all part of the learning curve.

The following pieces of advice will help you develop that winning mentality that will propel you to the sports career of your dreams:

1. **Surround yourself with positive people.** Latch on to peers and mentors who are ambitious, honest, trustworthy, and confident.

2. **Set goals for yourself, both personal and professional.** Develop a plan to accomplish them and make sure you execute. Write them down, and have your friends and family hold you accountable to them.

3. **Accept that everything happens for a reason.** If things do not go your way, do not complain or let failure deter you from pursuing the job of your dreams. Learn from your mistakes and get better.
4. Read books about successful people and get inspired. *The Greatest*, a biography of Muhammad Ali looks at a heavyweight champion who overcame adversity and became one of the best champions sports has ever seen. Jim Murphy’s *Inner Excellence*, is another example of a book that helps you get in the zone and develop that winning mentality that sets you up for success. There are many great books out there that can help you take your game to the next level. Ask some of your trusted advisors for a recommendation.

5. Believe in yourself. The only thing holding you back from attempting to do the impossible is yourself.
Become a Better Communicator

If there is one universally transferrable skill in business it is the ability to communicate effectively.

The obvious advice here is to become a better writer and speaker. And sure, that’s a big part of it and putting energy and time into those skills will send you miles ahead of other applicants – but don’t forget about one of the most undervalued communication skill of all – *listening*!

Here are a few tips to help you become a better communicator:

1. **Take a Public Speaking Course** – This is a great way to enhance your speaking ability in front of an audience and will help give you the tools to think on your feet. Most community colleges and universities will offer a class like this with flexible hours so that you can take one at a time that fits your schedule.

2. **Take English/Writing Courses** - As much as you might not like either of these, they are vital for you to become a successful communicator. You don’t need to be a grammarian master, just don’t let your spelling and grammar mistakes undermine your ability to land a job.

3. **Get Involved with Extracurricular Activities** - Strive for leadership positions that will force you to stand up in front of a large group and lead meetings. If you are religious, volunteer to be a lector at services. Other ideas include hosting a sports radio show and joining a Speech and Debate or Mock Trial club; basically anything that will help you hone your communication and leadership skills.

4. **Join Toastmasters International** - This is a global organization dedicated to making people better communicators and leaders. There are clubs pretty much everywhere (all over the World) and meetings every week.
Network Like a Pro

Attending sports networking events is a must for anyone looking to break into the industry. These gatherings are perfect opportunities for you to get some face time with sports business executives who have not only been in your shoes before but also have an expertise in an area of the industry that might intrigue you. The more of these events you are able to attend, the more contacts you will be able to make, which will increase your odds of knocking down that proverbial door.

Here is a look at some Do’s and Don’ts of networking:

Networking DO’S

1. Bring business cards – Sports business professionals in attendance are bound to bring a stack of cards. While you can certainly get someone else’s business card, it is definitely important to bring your own. This is a great way for you to differentiate yourself from other job seekers trying to make connections. It will increase your chances of being remembered when you follow-up with a contact via email after the event.

2. Be interested - When you talk to people in the business, take a genuine interest in what they are saying. They could potentially be the person to get your foot in the door someday. Make sure you look them in the eye and smile while they are talking to you. Listen actively, and try to relate their experiences to yours. Show them that you care.
3. **Be yourself** - There is nothing worse than acting like someone you are not at one of these events. Be honest when answering questions and informing others about your background. No one likes a liar. If you try talking to someone and it doesn’t go so well, it’s not the end of the world. Move on to the next person and learn from your mistakes. The more practice you get at networking, the better you will become at it.

4. **Make your personal brand known** - Before going in to one of these networking events, think of a few points about yourself that you would like to get across to each person you meet. You could talk about skills, interests, experience, etc. Be careful not to brag about your past, but make sure the person you speak to understands what makes you tick.

5. **Follow-Up** - This is the X Factor! Getting a sports business professional’s business card is great. However, having that person’s contact information is essentially meaningless if you do not take advantage of it rather quickly. If you feel like you had even a slight connection with someone you met, be sure to send them a polite follow-up email the next day. If your interaction went really well, a personalized handwritten note might blow that person away. In your message, it is a good idea to mention a few of the things you conversed about with that person, particularly something that you learned. Ask them if it is okay if you check in with them every now and then. If they are okay with that and you plan to follow through on your request, give yourself a pat on the back. You have now added someone to your network!

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[Click here to join over 15,000 people in the Sports Career Linkedin group.](https://www.linkedin.com)
Networking DON’TS

1. Don’t stand in the corner - The main reason you go to networking events is to meet people. Don’t be that guy or girl who spends the majority of the event off to the side eating or drinking alone. It is understandable that you might feel shy or awkward striking up conversations with strangers. It can be intimidating. Make an effort to put yourself out there and be interested in other people. You never know when you are going to connect with someone who will open doors for you.

2. Don’t talk too much about yourself – Treat every encounter you have with someone as an opportunity to learn. While it is important to make sure others know who you are, you never want to be too over the top. Nobody wants their ear talked off. Make sure you are having a balanced conversation filled with insightful questions. As much as you might like tooting your own horn, people like to talk about themselves even more. Let them.

3. Don’t come unprepared – Depending on the event, you can often find out who else will be attending. This includes keynote speakers, panelists, event organizers, and other like-minded individuals. Do your best to obtain a list of confirmed attendees in advance. Google or do a LinkedIn search on the people you think you would be interested in meeting. Learn about their background, and try to identify any shared interests, whether it is high school affiliation, college affiliation, or hobbies. This way you will not walk into conversations blind. If anything, your aspirational contacts will be impressed that you took the time to learn about them. Do your homework.
4. Don’t bring your resume - For one thing, you will have to carry it around in some sort of folder. Keep in mind that it will be a nuisance to deal with when you are holding a drink and get the opportunity to shake someone’s hand. People at these events want to converse about their personal lives and the sports business. The last thing they want is to have a piece of paper shoved in their face for evaluation. It is much more important to develop chemistry with a person that results in you getting his or her business card. Then, you can send your resume over and see if your new connection has the time to give you some tips.

5. Don’t forget to maintain eye contact and smile – There is nothing more annoying than talking to someone and watching his or her eyes dart around the room in search of someone else. Give your undivided attention to the person you are talking to out of sheer respect. Show your potential contact that you care about what he or she has to say. Complement your eye contact with a smile. This will increase your chances of being liked and make you feel more self-confident. After all, you are trying to advance your career. That is surely something to be happy about.
Set S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Sure, you might have a goal to “find a job in the sports industry” but your chances of achieving that goal will increase significantly if you can make it a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

**Specific**

The “S” stresses the need for a **Specific** goal over a more general one. To make goals specific, answer the “W” questions:

- What: What do you want to accomplish? Is there specific kinds of jobs or employers or locations you’d prefer? Full-time, part-time or an internship?
- Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits that you want to focus on to keep you motivated?
- Who: Can anyone help you achieve your goal?

**Measurable**

The “M” stresses the need for concrete criteria for **Measuring** progress (success) toward the attainment of the goal. How else do you know if you’re “winning”?

For your larger goal of finding a job in the sports industry you may want to create some smaller, measurable goals such as “talk to 5 people at the next career show”.

**Attainable**

The “A” stresses the importance of goals that are realistic and **Attainable**. Look for goals that are neither out of reach nor below a certain standard.

An attainable goal will usually answer the question:

How can the goal be accomplished?
If you can’t answer that question, you might have an unattainable goal that needs to be revisited.

**Relevant**

The “R” stresses the importance of choosing goals that are Relevant and that really matter. The more meaningful your goals, the more you’re likely to make the sacrifices (time and effort) to make them happen.

If you are having problems with motivation consider doing a mental exercise to picture what your life will be like when you achieve your goal.

For example, how will you feel when you are rewarded for your hard work and you land your dream sports job? What will it mean to your family?

**Time-bound**

The “T” stresses the importance of grounding goals within a Time frame, giving them a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps you focus your efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. This part of the S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria is intended to prevent goals from being overtaken by the day-today crisis that invariably arise.

A time-bound will establish a sense of urgency and will significantly increase the likelihood of your goal being reached.

- What can I do today?
- What needs to be done this week?
- What can I do in the next 3 months
Get Sports Industry Experience

Employers want to see that you already have practical experience that is directly applicable to the job you apply for. Here are 4 ways to get some sports experience:

1. Volunteer for your school’s athletic department (For Students)

This is a great way to get a better appreciation for all the work that goes on behind-the-scenes in sports. Areas within the athletic department that you can gain experience might include:

- Ticket Sales & Operations
- Athletic Development
- Business & Finance
- Corporate Sponsorship
- Marketing & Promotions
- Sports Information

Go after the areas of the department that interest you the most, but in the end, you want to take what you can get.

2. Join any sports-related clubs on campus. If possible, obtain a leadership position (For Students)

Join the Sports Business Association or Sports Marketing Association chapter at your campus. If neither of these are available at your school then take the initiative and start one! That will look very impressive to a prospective employer.
3. Get an internship with a local sports team.

Depending on where you are located, there might be sports companies or teams who have offices nearby. If they have a formal internship program, apply. If they do not, offer free work.

*You will stand a much better chance of interning during the fall, winter, or spring than the summer due to the sheer number of applicants.

*Interning is often a function of your work and/or academic schedule. Perhaps you can take one less course for a semester or intern part-time if possible. If your job provides time constraints, see if you can come in early certain days to accommodate a game day internship.

Use your school’s Career Center, Alumni Network and your personal connections (see LinkedIn) to your advantage when applying for these internships.

4. Start a sports blog.

Write about a sports topic you are passionate about. It does not necessarily have to be about the business side of sports. Be creative.

Promote with social media.

Become an expert on the topic you choose to write about. Make yourself known in the online community by commenting on other blogs.
Learn Sports Career Lessons from Mark Cuban

When you get a chance, read Mark Cuban’s e-book *How to Win at the Sport of Business: If I Can Do It, You Can Do It*. This entrepreneur and cutting-edge Dallas Mavericks owner released the book in mid-November 2011 as a compilation of some of his more popular blog posts from blog maverick. There are some great words of wisdom and other life lessons throughout this book that are applicable to breaking into the sports industry. Here are six takeaways:

1. **Work experiences are first and foremost about learning** - If you land an internship or job that means someone has taken a chance on you to be an asset to his or her organization. You are there for one fundamental reason, to learn. It does not matter what your level of compensation is (if any) or whether your new experience is a sports one or not. Let every opportunity you are given shape your skill set in a way that makes it all worthwhile when you get where you want to be in your career.

2. **“It’s all about the edge”** – When you apply for an internship or job, you are going up against a lot of candidates who look just as qualified as you on paper. What is going to separate you from the pack? Maybe you started a sports business club on campus. Maybe you know someone who works at the organization who can vouch for you. Maybe you thought deeply about how to solve a current problem the organization is facing. Whatever it may be, you have to do something different in order to get a leg up on your peers. If you want to work in sports, you really have to hustle.
3. Learn to sell - According to Mr. Cuban, this is the best way to launch a sports career. Sports organizations like to hire people who can generate revenue. Selling yourself in an interview is one thing, but consistently being able to bring in new clients or sell products/services takes you to a whole new level. Your ability to add value to an organization becomes clear if you have a good track record of sales experience. One of the coolest things about sales is the amount of preparation that goes into getting that edge. The more information you seek out about your product/service and industry, the better equipped you will be to close the sale and shine as an employee. This means putting in the extra time and effort after work to stay ahead of the curve.

4. “You only have to be right once” – Mark Cuban repeated this phrase over and over in the book. In a nutshell, he is saying that it does not matter how long it takes you to figure out your vocation in life. This is basically what the internship process is all about. Finding out what you do not want to do for a living takes you one step closer to discovering your true passion. Once you figure out what it is, you have to be ready to take advantage of opportunities and run with them. If you get it right, success will follow.

5. Take the path less traveled – Everyone these days wants to be a sports agent or general manager. It is no surprise then that some of the most sought after internships and jobs are in Athlete Representation and Baseball Operations. However, it is important to think outside the box and look beyond these typical, highly competitive areas of the business. Nobody said you had to break into sports via the hardest route possible. Overlooked businesses that you can consider looking into include non-profits, consulting firms, or corporations, all of whom might be involved with sports in one way or another.
6. Be a doer, not a dreamer – My favorite quote from the book reads, "It’s not whether the glass is half empty or half full, it’s who is pouring the water." Mark took the classic optimist-pessimist scenario and looks at it in a new, innovative light. The quote’s main message is about the importance of controlling your own destiny. Anyone can dream about owning a sports franchise or running a league, but it is those who commit themselves to actionable goals that are taking matters into their own hands. Instead of flying by the seat of your pants and reacting to the situations life throws at you, try to create your own luck and catch the breaks that will propel you to success.

In Conclusion

The not so hidden message in this playbook is that success comes to those who put in the time and effort.

But don’t think you have to do or work on all of the things listed in this guide. Use the information to figure out your strengths and weaknesses – maybe there’s just one or two things you need to do differently to push you over the edge.

Lastly – have patience and perseverance. Going back to the first section of this book, keep the right mindset of learning from your mistakes, move forward, and eventually you’ll find success.

Do you have any questions or comments?

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