

## **S6 E31: Shaping Stories Beyond The Game**

(AJ II & Kirby Porter)

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0:00 AJ: During women's history month, we're celebrating the vital role of women in society. Former Harvard women's basketball team captain, Kirby Porter, is a *Sports Business Journal New Voices Under 30* honoree and podcast host. This week on *Max Out Time*, Kirby brings the court to the corporate world.

0:20 Intro Song: 'For The City'

0:57 AJ: Kirby, how are you, what's going on?

0:59 Kirby: I'm good, I'm good, living up this lockdown life. How are you?

1:03 AJ: Lockdown life, I think all fifty states are getting there now. I'm isolated right now, but I am trying to stay healthy.

1:09 Kirby: Yeah, as as we all are.

1:12 AJ: You and I both have -- we have something in common, both former athletes, both have podcasts, both very invested in the well-being and the future of athletics. So, what I want to ask you, someone in your profession as a brand marketer; why is it so important for athletes to hone in, and utilize their brand at this point in time?

1:36 Kirby: First of all, thank you for having me on the show, super excited about this. I will say this, even aside from the time, this pandemic, the increased use of digital right now and athletes leaning in to it, is highlighting it. But, I think it's something that has been on the up even before that, and I think this is just putting that on the spotlight, it's always been important. Why it's so important it's because for anything or anyone, a product, a company, a team, an individual, an athlete, your brand is your differentiator. The reason why it's so important for athletes is because it helps you create a platform that can extend beyond your time of play. So I think right now what we are seeing is, we're not relying on athletes -- who they are on the court, what their performance is, you see a lot of them becoming content creators. But specifically for student athletes, I think it's really important as they think about longevity and how it applies to their careers, to really own their narrative and think about how they want to differentiate themselves. Think about their story pieces together, how being an athlete can influence who they are off the court as well, and find different outlets to attack that and voice that opinion. Because I think ultimately provides leeway and a runway for you to attack that after the chapters of one part of your career closing.

3:16 AJ: But even with student athletes though, talk about right now, it's such a scary time. They're influx, so senior spring athletes do not have a season. Senior winter athletes couldn't compete for championships. There's no March madness, there's no tournaments, they're going into this big bad world and we're in a global pandemic and recession.

3:41 Kirby: No it's scary, and early last week as soon as things were unfolding the way that they were, I had a few senior student athletes reach out to me and then just offered to set up a time to consult with others, that were going through the decision. I think first, before anything and thinking about how to build your brand, for a lot of them it was making a decision. For spring student-athletes, it's do I want to come back and consult my extra year

of eligibility that has been granted or do I want to close this chapter and begin something new?

4:16 AJ: What are they saying?

4:18 Kirby: I think for a lot of them, it's a tough decision, right? I think what I have learnt and what I want to share with other people, it's an emotional and practical decision. On the emotional front it's thinking about do I feel I've gained what I needed from my sport? From a personal achievement standpoint, from a relationship standpoint, being a part of a team and then also from a character development standpoint. Do I feel fulfilled from my student athlete experience? And then I think on a practical side, is there optionality? If you're not going to come back, what is the alternative? If there is optionality, how do you weigh the pros and cons of each? And on my podcast we talk about decision making a lot. A lot of athletes at different stages of their career, you've had athletes that did their four years and left. You've had athletes that have had potential but decided to close that chapter and go to Wall Street. You've had athletes that have worked on Wall Street while playing professional hockey, there's a wide range of the types of decisions. My advice and what it comes down to right now for those that have to make decisions, is kind of getting in touch with what your intention is, and what your goal is, to really guide and make confident decisions. I think it's really an emotional time, and in order to land something confidently, you have to think about a year from now, what do I envision my story being? [AJ: Right.] How do I see athletics fitting into that? Or, how do I see closing this chapter and beginning something new and fitting it into that and allowing me to grow. So, you can go either way but, of course it's really a personal decision. Also, you mentioned that this is a crazy time, it's unprecedented for so many people and industries. A lot of people are hurting. I think what I am saying to so many people, now's the time to seek mentorship. Don't try and to go through this alone, don't try to you know get through this battle just guessing what maybe is best for you, at the end of the day, you know what's best.

6:34 AJ: To piggyback off of that, I think mentorship is one of the vital aspects of career development. Not just for athletes, but for anybody, because there are people out here that have gone through the peaks and valleys that you are going through currently. And you have to seek them for their wisdom.

6:52 Kirby: Exactly, exactly, there are people that have laid a blueprint, that have made a road map who are there to advise and guide you. Tap into that especially as an athlete, there are people who have been there and want to help you and have been through a similar process of transition. Ultimately, leveraging their athlete to find confidence and what they do now, so reach out.

7:17 AJ: You know, going through some of the episodes on your podcast, *Court to Corporate*, I started to realize, you hit on it earlier, there's a lot of sports out there, women's Hockey, women's Basketball, unfortunately a lot of these are women's sports. But, men's Lacrosse and things like that, where you can't survive without having two streams of income. Right now going through a recession, I know plenty of people who have told me over the last couple of days, they have been laid off. So people are getting laid off in the business world and there is no sports currently anywhere. So when we talk about a scary time for athletes and dynamic athletes and going from the court to a business world or to another job, and the way you put food on the table is through two streams of income and neither one of those incomes are coming. What do you say to those types of people?

8:13 Kirby: Yeah, I think that that is where - for those that are already into their careers, and have that optionality, that's where it comes into - going back to the discussion of having a personal brand that transcends different areas and different platforms, different careers and different avenues that gives yourself optionality and does not place yourself into one box, that's when personal brand matters because it doesn't constrain you or confine you into one specialist skill or one specific industry, to just sports. For example, in in in my career, when I first started, my role wasn't technically in sports, but I started *Court to Corporate* interviewing about careers and about business but inherently sports. That created this halo affect for my personal brand and obviously full circle, aside from *Court to Corporate*, began working in sports at PepsiCo. I think I think what that says is that you have the opportunity to create what you want your narrative to be and apply that in different ways. So I think for people in their careers right now, it's taking a step back and thinking what strengths you have, what skill sets you have, where does your voice resonate, and where-- what are you can apply that. This past week everybody has been bombarded with content, for better or for worse, you know it's great -

10:02 AJ: We've all had time on our hands.

10:04 Kirby: We all have time, like all of these Instagram lives are crazy.

10:09 AJ: [laughs] the IG live -- the IG live movement! See 10 Do 10.

10:14 Kirby: I'm like turn this notification off! This is the age of content, content is King. How can you leverage that to your advantage right now? If you're in your career, you have downtime and how do you create a halo affect for yourself? If you're a student athlete, it depends, are you a senior that is graduating and has a job lined up, maybe it's time to embody what I just advised for people currently in their careers to think about, and how you can set that foundation for you now. I think if you're a freshman, sophomore junior, then that discussion for you kind of becomes - you're still early on in your career, you've had internships, maybe you haven't. Either way, maybe it's a good time to think about what you want your story to be beyond the game. Ultimately, you going to get to a point where you don't want to be confined in a box. So how do you begin to think about that now? Maybe that will carry out on campus, but kind of just getting into that routine of not limiting yourself to one area to one function or one specific realm, is going to set you up for success.

11:28 AJ: Well I think you can really teach a master class in not limiting yourself in one area. So, you went from being the captain of the Harvard women's basketball team, doing internships all throughout, starting your own podcast and also now working a professional corporate life. You are a true business woman, entrepreneur and multifaceted. How's that been being someone, not only a female athlete but now a woman in the business field, like take me through some of the challenges and barriers that are faced and presented before you?

12:04 Kirby: That's a great question, I would say - you know as you said it was I like oh, I guess that is what it has become so early in my career, there's so much room to create and iterate on that. But you know I feel for me, as I was in the moment, it was more so, building blocks. When I was a freshman, I wasn't like, I'm 23, I want to work in corporate America, I want to have my own podcast, I didn't know what a podcast was -

12:37 AJ: [laughs] I don't think most of us did. Before 2015/2016 nobody really did. I wasn't listening to "this is life" when I was a junior in high school.

12:47 Kirby: Exactly, I was listening to Drake somewhere.

12:53 AJ: [laughs] Drake podcast, the whole album.

12:56 Kirby: Yeah, exactly. I was thinking about this is where I want to be at 23, not at all. I think what did help me was thinking of it more so as building blocks. Moving throughout my career with intention, I had two sports internships, one at the Patriots and one at Under Armour, both in marketing. Then I went on to do a marketing internship, now I -- I began in marketing, now I'm working in sports marketing and bringing those two together. Then on the flip of that, carried my athlete experience with me and you know leverage that to land great internships and then to build something on my own. In addition to who I am at PepsiCo, I think there are not necessarily barriers, but I do think what has been great is cultivating a network of women and women of color that are in the space. Not even just those that are above me in age, even just networking across, people underestimate that and overlook mentorship from peers as well. That has been the biggest thing that has helped me elevate and motivated me, and just find the joy in this industry. Working in sports, I feel like I can be myself. If you can find that inner section of your skill set and your passion point and what the world needs, got that advice from Alan Stein Jr who is on my podcast, who is world renowned speaker, coach, you name it. He said that's your strength and I feel like I have found that and I feel like that has definitely helped.

14:52 AJ: You mentioned building a network and everyone knows how vital and important that is to building a brand and working in a professional life and professional development. I saw you posted a picture with Cari Champion and I almost fell off my feet. You you definitely have built some strong connections, but can you name some of the notable ones. Some of the people we might not have heard of, people you want to give a shout out to and who we should you know take note of.

15:23 Kirby: So, Cari and just to speak to that, so another part of building a network has been intentional and speaking mentorship as well. As a lot of people know she is the founder of *Brown Girls Dream*, which is a non-profit mentorship program for women of color interested in sports, media and entertainment. It's a mentorship network, there's a class above me, I was in the second class, we all joined together and were assigned a mentor. That for me, I joined that last year, and when I talk about communities that have been refreshing and energising and helped me elevate, like just having people around you that are all attracting towards the same thing. It's not always just button up business with them. Cari, thank her so much to her for starting that.

16:23 AJ: Yeah she's extremely down to earth. I I actually have met her one time, I do hear what you are saying about that social aspect too.

16:30 Kirby: Yeah, yeah it's great. You know I would say, going back to the point of building a network intentionally, there's a lot of people, maybe just in New York, because there's a lot of sports networking events. I always happen to run into the same people at them, women of color. We joke every single time, because we're like we don't need to plan this, I'm not going to ask you if you're going, I know you're going to be there. But I think the point is that it's great to have that in places where there are not a lot of people that look like you. Some people that come to mine are Ariel Chambers, she's at Bleacher Report, Alycia Powell, she's the founder of *Champion Sport Philanthropy*. I feel like I see them at so many things. It's

always refreshing to see – you walk in and it's like there's people here that look like me and are on the same mission, and we're doing this together.

17:34 AJ: Before we wrap up, what is something that some of these women or something you've learnt along the way that you would tell young Kirby, the DC Heat Kirby, the Bullis Kirby, the back in the day Kirby, as you are growing up and young girls moving forward.

17:50 Kirby: I think my biggest learning has been that, you are your biggest advocate. You don't have to fight the fight alone. So on the biggest advocate piece, it's more so learning to get comfortable creating your voice and sharing your voice. There's a funny saying, don't be a bobblehead, don't just be the one in meetings nodding your head. I feel like even now I have to push myself a little bit in the workplace, but creating outlets like *Court to Corporate* as well, has kind of helped me find my voice, and you know find people that support me on that mission. Find your voice but you're not fighting the fight alone. Seek mentorship and don't feel like you have to figure it out all by yourself. Going back to that first part of the conversation and what this means for athletes right now, it's all about mentorship and identifying and finding and seeking advice from people that have worked a similar path as you. But even in your career, seek that early one and it's only going to help you out further.

19:12 AJ: Seek that mentorship early on.

19:16 Kirby: Yep.

19:17 AJ: As always my special guest, Ms. *Court to Corporate*, Kirby Porter. She's not letting athletes fight the fight alone everybody. Thank you so much for being on.

19:27 Kirby: Thank you, thank you!

19:28 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time With AJ II* on iTunes. Add @kirbobangss on social media. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter, and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

19:47 Outro Song: 'For The City'

20:15 –End–

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