

“Nothing Is Obvious the First Time”: How This Serial Entrepreneur Is Redefining Sports Media with On3

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Gone are the days when college athletes were mere amateurs, playing for pride and scholarships, their talents confined to the field and their bank accounts empty. Today, they stride across campus with the swagger of professionals, their status transformed by NIL deals that rival pro contracts and redefine what it means to be a student-athlete.

This seismic shift didn't stop at college – it trickled down to high school athletes, many of whom no longer choose schools based on name recognition alone but on who's offering the biggest bag. With this transformation sweeping across youth sports, the need for a more centralized voice in media became undeniable.

That's where serial entrepreneur Shannon Terry came in. Recognizing the chaos and opportunity in the evolving landscape, Terry founded On3 – a cutting-edge media and technology company delivering news, analysis and data about college, high school and youth sports, shaping the narrative for this new era of athlete empowerment.

Image credit: On3

Terry is no stranger to entrepreneurship. In 2000, he founded his first business, Rivals, a college and high school sports media company.

“Rivals was all about niche audiences,” Terry explains. “It was a platform built around fan sites, message board communities, and recruiting.”

But as the internet evolved, so did its audiences. “Consumers became brand-agnostic, and the focus shifted to search, social media, and attribution,” Terry says. “Origination mattered less – it became all about how content reached users.”

This shift inspired his next venture, 247Sports, a network of

websites focused on college football and basketball recruiting, which was acquired by CBS Sports in 2016. Building on that success, Terry launched On3 to redefine sports media in a rapidly changing landscape.

He thought of the idea during a conversation with popular sports commentator Kirk Herbstreit about how the college and high school sports space was lacking a trusted media brand.

Image credit: On3

“We were coming out of a clickbait-driven, social-search era where pure reporting had largely faded,” Terry says. “After years of experience, I saw this as my last hurrah. I’d learned a lot and wanted to build a trusted brand in college sports –

but on a bigger scale than my previous ventures.”

On3 was born from a perfect storm of transformative events: the rise of the transfer portal, the introduction of NIL and the skyrocketing salaries of coaches. At the same time, interest in college and high school sports was reaching unprecedented heights.

Terry acknowledges that there is a lot of confusion in college sports right now, but he sees that as an opportunity for On3 to become a trusted voice of reason.

“We want to be the hub for high school and college sports—a community for fans of teams, high schools, and colleges, as well as those who follow athletes and the subculture of these sports,” Terry says. “Our platform is where they can engage, not just with the talent we hire and the employees reporting on the subject, but with the community itself, which is key to everything we do.”

Related: NBA All-Star Baron Davis’s Plan to Connect Entrepreneurs

When building this community, Terry identified two key target segments. The first is obvious: fans. “We’ve invested heavily in setting up fan sites and bringing in people like Pete Nakos to build a media hub around college and high school sports,” Terry explains.

The second, more intriguing target segment is athletes themselves.

“There are 24 million athletes ages 13 to 17 in the U.S., not even counting college athletes,” Terry says. “The vision for On3 is to create both a media company and a community that ties the entire ecosystem together. With Rivals and 247Sports, we focused on niche spaces. As we build a platform for athletes, coaches, and brands, the addressable market is much larger—and that’s what we’re going after.”

While Terry is proud of his past ventures, he sees On3 differently.

“Rivals and 24/7 were born with a ceiling,” the CEO said. “With On3, we’re building it from the start to expand.”

According to Terry, On3 has expanded the “niche market piece” by nearly 40% in the three years since On3’s foundation. They already have predictions on their site for every high school football game in the U.S., from the scores to the schedules, and Terry believes this is only the beginning.

“Our mission is to profile and build a database of every high school and college athlete in the United States,” Terry says. “It’s a massive undertaking, and we’re only in the second inning.”

On3 is building a comprehensive community for athletes, spanning from 13-year-olds all the way through their first job after college. Each group has distinct needs that On3 addresses through tailored services. For younger athletes, particularly those in middle school, the focus is on learning the recruiting process and connecting with others who share similar goals.

For high school athletes starting the recruiting journey, they provide coaching, directories, guidance and personalized reports. College athletes, meanwhile, are primarily navigating NIL opportunities, so On3 helps them assess their value, connects them with agents, and links them to coaches and schools.

Terry’s long-term vision includes helping former athletes transition into the workforce. “Companies struggle to hire former athletes, and it’s a challenge,” he says. On3 intends to bridge this gap by connecting athletes with job opportunities and offering a unique value for hiring managers. While focusing on athletes’ careers from youth through college, Terry envisions a platform that supports them

throughout their entire lives.

“We have the media to cover their careers and are building a subscription-based platform to serve them,” he explains. On3 is collaborating with corporations to create a staffing service and recommendation engine to streamline athlete hiring.

Related: The Entrepreneurs Who Are Changing the Way Fans Watch Sports

Like most successful people, Terry had to learn some lessons the hard way. “Entrepreneurs try to think too big, too quickly, and they don’t keep the main thing, the main thing,” he says. “In my 30 years as an entrepreneur, I’ve often tried to scale the business before it was ready—before I had the right leadership.”

Unfortunately, there’s no substitute for experience, and as Terry puts it, “nothing is obvious the first time.” But given Terry’s track record, one thing is clear: On3 is in capable hands.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/how-this-serial-entrepreneur-is-redefining-sports-media/486530>