

“You Have to Grow Up Fast”: How This College Athlete Became a CEO Before Turning 18

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In the '80s, Michael Jordan met his agent, Sonny Vaccaro, through a series of coincidental meetings, shared connections and corporate machinations. Today, Arkansas point guard and NBA first-round draft prospect Boogie Fland met his manager, Julian Aiken, through an exchange of DMs facilitated by Fland's father after Aiken spoke to his EYBL team, the PSA Cardinals.

“That's how you meet people nowadays,” says the 18-year-old Fland. “It's through social media.”

This is just one of countless examples of how the life of a rising star athlete has changed over the years. As recently as 2019, Fland would've been living off whatever pocket change he'd saved in high school. Today, he's a bonafide CEO of his own brand, dealing with everything from corporate sponsorships to philanthropy efforts before he can legally drink.

“Boogie has been financially literate for two and a half years,” Aiken says. “We set up an LLC from the start, and he learned about business expenses and deductions. These conversations prepared him, so there's less pressure when he turns pro.”

“You have to grow up fast in this life, especially with money,” Fland adds. “People need to be taught how to handle themselves at a young age.”

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Fland isn't exaggerating when he says “young.” The New York native landed his first NIL deal with Spreadshop at just 15 years old, during his sophomore year at Stepinac High School, making him the first high school player in NY with an NIL deal.

“They approached me as one of the key NIL targets, especially since not many people were doing it or even aware of it at the time,” Fland says. “Their goal was to bring more awareness to it, and I'd be the first to participate.”

Accepting what is essentially free money doesn't typically require business savvy. But for a 15-year-old to recognize the value of being an early adopter and leverage his growing platform to build financial security before signing his first contract? That's a rare level of foresight.

“It allows you to get ahead early,” Fland says. “So when it comes time to do commercials and major sponsorships, you already have the experience and relationships needed.”

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Fland's profile reached new heights when he committed to Arkansas to play under the legendary coach John Calipari, and with that increased attention came more opportunities. One of the more unique was an invitation to feature on an episode of CarWashConvos, presented by Zips Car Wash.

“There's this app called Opendorse that connects college athletes with brands,” Fland says. “They contacted me and suggested setting something up.”

Aiken jumped on the opportunity, recognizing Fland's potential

as a brand ambassador.

“The reason everyone’s attracted to Boogie is because he’s truly an authentic person, he’s got a million dollar smile, and he’s able to keep a calm demeanor through difficult challenges,” Aiken says. “He’s experienced what it’s like to be a pro far more than 18-year-olds did 10 or 12 years ago.”

Aiken would know, having worked with 12-year NBA vet Andre Drummond.

Image Credit: Dallas Hobbs

“It’s not like in Dre’s era, where you had to wait until the NBA to understand these things, Fland says. “I can get a head start now rather than later. It’s also about building

relationships with brands – having those discussions and meeting people early, so when it's time to make deals, those connections are already in place.”

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Fland will be just 18 when he enters the NBA, but he and Aiken have already given him experience well beyond his years.

“In basketball, I’ve always played with people older than me,” Fland says. “It forces you to be prepared.”

This maturity also translates off the court, evident in his appearance on a panel at Ad Week alongside notable figures like journalist Jemele Hill and Lineage founder Anthony Rodriguez.

“Confidence impacts everything,” Fland adds. “It allows you to speak with conviction, be heard, and truly believe in yourself. You can have all the skill in the world, but without self-belief from a young age, you won’t succeed.”

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