



Trademark Physiques Head Coach Braeden Miller and IFBB Pro Patrick Plowman

## HOW TO BECOME A SPONSORED ATHLETE: THE REALITY, EXPECTATIONS & STANDARDS BRANDS ACTUALLY LOOK FOR

” SPONSORSHIP ISN'T JUST A TITLE-IT'S A PARTNERSHIP

### Here's the truth

Sponsorship is often viewed as the finish line — the moment you've “made it.” In reality, sponsorship marks the beginning of a new phase of responsibility. Being sponsored isn't about being chosen; it's about being trusted.

This resource was created to remove the guesswork around sponsorship, clear up common misconceptions, and help athletes understand what brands actually look for. The goal is simple: to help you position yourself as a professional, long-term asset — not a liability.

### SPONSORSHIP IS A PARTNERSHIP — NOT A PRIZE

Sponsorship is not awarded based on entitlement, follower count, or a single strong performance. It is a working relationship built on trust, consistency, and mutual value.

When a brand chooses to support an athlete, they are attaching their name, reputation, and public image to that individual. This means your behavior — online, backstage, in public spaces, and in private communication — directly reflects on the brand.

Brands invest in athletes who enhance their image, communicate professionally, and create meaningful exposure without creating unnecessary risk. If a brand attaches its name to you, your conduct becomes part of their brand identity.

### WHAT SPONSORSHIP ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

One of the biggest misunderstandings athletes have is assuming all sponsorships look the same. They don't. Most sponsorships exist on a spectrum, and many athletes move through multiple levels over time.



# NEWSFLASH: COMPANIES AREN'T HANDING OUT CONTRACTS FOR STEPMILL SELFIES AND MID-LIFT POSES. SPONSORSHIP IS ABOUT CREATING VALUE, BUILDING A BRAND, AND MAKING AN IMPACT THAT ALIGNS WITH THE COMPANY'S GOALS.

## Common Sponsorship Levels

### Affiliate / Discount Athlete

This is often the starting point. Athletes may receive a personal discount code or referral link to share with their audience. Compensation is typically commission-based, and complimentary services are not guaranteed. Brands use this level to evaluate consistency, communication, professionalism, and overall brand alignment.

### Product or Service Sponsor

At this level, athletes may receive limited complimentary or discounted products or services. In return, brands expect consistent visibility, proper tagging, and professional representation. While this level involves deeper brand integration, cash compensation is still uncommon.

### Featured / Priority Athlete

Featured athletes have demonstrated long-term reliability, strong communication skills, and consistent alignment with the brand's values. These athletes may receive higher visibility, priority booking, or deeper collaboration. Even at this level, cash sponsorships are not guaranteed.

*Important Reality Check: Cash sponsorships are rare and typically reserved for athletes who consistently deliver measurable value, strong representation, and long-term reliability.*

## WHAT BRANDS ARE ACTUALLY LOOKING FOR

While every brand has unique goals, most evaluate athletes through a similar professional lens.

### **Professional Communication**

Communication is often the first filter. Clear, respectful emails, timely responses, and the ability to follow instructions signal maturity and reliability. How you communicate privately is often seen as a preview of how you'll represent the brand publicly.

### **Content That Creates Value**

Brands are not looking for constant advertisements. They value athletes who can educate, inspire, and tell a story authentically. Content that feels natural builds audience trust — and trust is what creates influence.

Follower count matters far less than engagement quality, audience connection, and credibility.

### **ROI Mindset**

Sponsorship decisions are business decisions. Brands want to know how you contribute to growth, awareness, or trust. Athletes who focus on what they offer — rather than what they receive — stand out immediately.



LSR Sponsored Athlete Sergio Oliva Jr. with LSR Athlete Director Jenna Koller



# SPONSORSHIP IS EARNED THROUGH CONSISTENCY, PROTECTED BY PROFESSIONALISM, AND LOST THROUGH ENTITLEMENT

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## **CONTENT EXPECTATIONS — THE REALITY**

Sponsored content should feel professional, intentional, and authentic. Brands expect to be represented clearly, but not forcefully.

Athletes should be prepared to tag brands appropriately, ensure services or products are visible when relevant, and maintain professional language in captions and stories. Visual quality matters — clean, well-lit, and thoughtfully composed content reflects positively on both the athlete and the brand.

Educational posts, behind-the-scenes moments, and honest experiences tend to perform far better than repeated promotional posts. Audiences trust authenticity, and brands notice when that trust exists.

Excessive brand-hopping, low-effort reposts, public complaints, or unprofessional backstage behavior can quickly damage sponsorship relationships.

## **INSTANT NOs — WHAT GETS ATHLETES REJECTED**

From an athlete director's perspective, certain behaviors immediately remove an athlete from sponsorship consideration — regardless of results or potential.

Publicly complaining about sponsors, placings, or the industry signals emotional volatility and reputational risk. Poor sportsmanship, disrespect toward staff, or backstage outbursts reflect directly on the brands an athlete represents.

Ignoring application instructions, attempting to bypass processes through direct messages, displaying entitlement around compensation, or frequently switching brands are all major red flags. Missed obligations, inconsistent communication, and failure to deliver agreed-upon content demonstrate unreliability.

Talent may earn attention. Professionalism earns trust — and trust is what leads to long-term sponsorship.

## **RESULTS DON'T GUARANTEE SPONSORSHIP UPGHTS**

Placings matter, but they are rarely the deciding factor. Many sponsored athletes are chosen not for winning, but for how they represent a brand.

Reliability, communication, audience connection, and professionalism often outweigh podium finishes. Consistency over time is far more valuable than short-term peaks.

## **HOW ATHLETES CAN POSITION THEMSELVES BETTER**

Athletes who earn sponsorship rarely apply once and wait. They position themselves intentionally over time.

Before applying, engage with the brand organically. Learn their values, observe how they communicate, and understand their audience. Genuine interaction builds familiarity and credibility.

When applying, identify the correct point of contact and follow instructions precisely. A clear introduction, defined value proposition, and professional photo go a long way.

After applying, patience is critical. Sponsorship decisions take time, and silence does not automatically mean rejection. Continued consistency and professionalism keep athletes on a brand's radar.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

The athletes who earn sponsorship don't chase brands — they build themselves into assets.

When you approach sponsorship with humility, professionalism, and a value-first mindset, you don't just improve your chances. You build a reputation that follows you throughout the industry.

Sponsorship isn't a title. It's a responsibility. And when done right, it opens doors long before contracts ever do.