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## Agents court Xavier star Posey

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By Michael Perry  
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Four men in suits sit relaxed but attentive in a row of chairs. Across the office is Xavier University senior James Posey, dressed in sweats, sitting on a blue couch.

One of the men is sports agent Bill Duffy, who will spend the next two hours trying to convince Posey that he is the right man to represent him as a potential star in the National Basketball Association. He's the third of four agents making the same pitch to Posey in a week.

The agents want Posey because the athletic 6-foot-8 small forward is projected as a first-round pick in the June NBA draft. He has the potential to improve as a player and have a long and productive professional basketball career.

Agents can earn up to 4 percent of the negotiated portion of a player's contract and typically charge 15 to 20 percent for off-court deals. A long-term relationship with Posey could mean hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars, for his agent.

The agents like Posey's profile. Hard-working, cooperative, a stay-out-of-trouble kid. In today's sports world, those qualities are as appealing as a reliable jump shot.

Duffy has flown in from California. His marketing director, legal affairs coordinator and director of European basketball have come from different cities.

Each has a briefcase on the floor by their chair. Posey has a clipboard to take notes. "It's a big decision that's going to impact the rest of my life," Posey said. "Everybody's going to come in with their little spiel about why I should go with them."

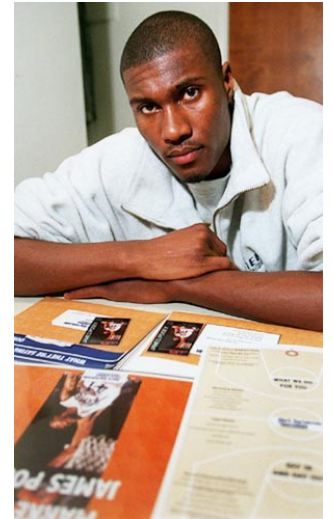
The four agents who come to Xavier to court Posey all mention his character.

"He has morals and ethics, he's bright, and I think he's tough," New York-based agent Andy Miller said. "I don't just look for top-10 picks. I'd rather pass on a lottery pick for someone I feel I can relate to."

James Posey is a 22-year-old native of Cleveland. On May 15, the criminal justice major will be among almost 900 Xavier undergraduates receiving a degree at Firststar Center. He drives a 1987 sky blue Delta 88 with 180,000 miles on the odometer and has about \$500 in his checking account.

That is about to change.

The agents are talking budgets, tax liabilities, real estate and investment opportunities, car purchases, estate planning, Hollywood film industry connections, trusts and charity foundations. They offer to co-sign loans and take care of travel arrangements for his family down the road.



There are 312 agents certified by the NBA Players Association. Posey has narrowed the field to four.

The drill is the same for each. They travel to Cincinnati, meet with Posey, Xavier coach Skip Prosser and assistant Jeff Battle. They make their pitch, answer questions and try to bond with Posey. They call his parents in Cleveland, send notes and leave messages on his answering machine. Then they wait for Posey's decision.

The competition among agents can be fierce. Ten agents called Posey last fall before preseason practices even started; he changed his phone number. All season long, agents dropped notes in the mail — to him, to his family, to the coaches. *“Good luck with the season.” “We’re looking forward to meeting with you.”*

The battle for James Posey won't end until an agent is chosen. Each of the four this week know they have roughly two hours in Prosser's medium-sized office to gain Posey's trust.

### **So much information**

Mark Bartelstein, 38, comes heavily recommended. The Chicago-based agent represents former Xavier Musketeers Torraye Braggs, Brian Grant and Tyrone Hill. All three have spoken to Posey, vouching for their man. That was enough to get Bartelstein on the couch opposite Posey's chair.

Dressed in shirt and tie and speaking with the confidence of a veteran agent, his presentation is the second in 24 hours.

Bartelstein is following Miller, 30, who flew in from Irvington, N.Y. Miller was the only agent Posey talked to during the season.

“This is a passion of mine,” the energetic Miller said. “I'm not competing against anybody else. If I am what James is looking for, there's no one else like me. I'm straight-forward, I'm honest, I'm consistent. I work my (butt) off for my clients. That's who I am and I'm not going to change.”

All the agents tell Posey that nobody will work harder, care more or devote a greater amount of time to his cause.

“Ultimately, you're going to put your life in someone's hands,” Bartelstein said. “... And that's an awesome responsibility. I go to bed every night thinking about those things.”

Bartelstein owns Bartelstein Sports Entertainment. He will try to sign four or five players this spring. If Posey signs with him, Bartelstein said, he will not sign another small forward.

As the meeting progresses, Bartelstein stresses that he and Posey are a good fit because of Posey's similarity to his other clients.

“We get the blue-collar guy,” Bartelstein said. “Everybody in life has to find their niche. We take guys who are not finished products and try to get them to that finish line. We do it better than anybody in the business.”

That's because of his relationships, respect and credibility with NBA officials, he said, adding, “Nobody will fight harder for you than I will, but I'll do it in a way where people will enjoy working with us.”

Bartelstein tells Posey what NBA scouts are saying: Some love him, others think he needs to get stronger. He offers to call every team with a top-20 pick in the draft, find out what they think of Posey and report back. The next day he faxes that information to Prosser.

Before he became an agent, Bartelstein worked for an investment bank firm. He hands the young man a file with "Marketing James Posey" printed on the cover.

Like some of the other agents, Bartelstein tells Posey that during the first few years, he may lose money representing Posey because of overhead expenses. So the pitch is, "We're making an investment in you."

Throughout each of the four presentations, Posey is consistently serious, listening intently, trying to absorb all the information. He asks only a few questions. "Coach Prosser always says you learn more when you listen," Posey said.

It is usually more than an hour into the meetings before each of the agents ask Posey what he's looking for.

Trust and honesty, Posey tells them. He wants to be taught *how* to make big decisions, not just have them made for him. He wants someone accessible.

"I can't promise how much money you'll make, I can't promise where you'll get drafted," Bartelstein said. "I *can* promise you'll never get more attention from anyone else.

"I will not be a yes-man. Caring about someone means you can say 'no' or 'it's not the right thing to do.' Where you are when you're 40 years old will say a lot about me."

Xavier assistant coach Battle asks what Bartelstein does with guys who don't make big bucks?

"Once you make a commitment, I never look at how much money you're making," Bartelstein said. "I think you have a chance to be an All-Star in this league, but if things don't go well, you'll get even more attention from me.

"I don't do it for the money. You can really made a difference in people's lives. I want to represent you. We will work harder for you than you can ever imagine. I really want to do this."

### **Long day continues**

Less than an hour after Bartelstein is gone, Duffy arrives with three "teammates" from BDA Sports Management in Walnut Creek, Calif.

When Xavier played at St. Mary's College in December, the team stayed in Walnut Creek. Duffy had Battle to his home. Later, Battle spoke well enough of Duffy that Posey put him in the mix of agent interviews this week.

Duffy lets Posey know right away that he did not speak with him all season because that's the way Posey wanted it, and he respected the players' wishes.

Duffy, 39, has a soft, calming, controlled voice. The Los Angeles native has been in the business for 15 years. He represents Michael Olowokandi, the No. 1 pick overall in the 1998 NBA draft who now plays for the Los Angeles Clippers.

"We're very selective with who we work with," Duffy tells Posey. "Your name keeps popping up when we hear about quality people. We believe in you 100 percent. You'd be an A-1 priority."

Each of the BDA teammates speaks. They talk of a long-standing relationship with Magic Johnson and with one of Oprah Winfrey's producers, of connections with the recording industry, of how to dress for interviews with teams and how to prepare for individual workouts, and of deals with trading card companies and shoe

companies. They've got a tailor in North Carolina who can help with Posey's new wardrobe; Tiger Woods uses the same guy.

The Duffy team's pitch is heavy on marketing.

They have Posey's attention. The four men talk of starting work on post-career goals now, of becoming a high-profile person in the community.

“If there's something you want to pursue in basketball or outside of basketball, it's just a phone call away,” Duffy said.

Duffy cautions about fiscal responsibility. Like Bartelstein, Duffy advises Posey to wait until he's drafted to buy a new car. What they don't know is that Posey already has designs on a Cadillac Escalade sport utility vehicle, sticker price \$46,525.

Marketing director Bill Sanders talks about a marketing plan that begins as soon as Posey is drafted and presents a document titled, “James Posey Marketing Opportunities.” The strategy is to market Posey in his hometown (Cleveland), his college town (Cincinnati) and his pro town.

Sanders talk about video games, public appearances, golf outings, motivational speaking and walk-on parts in movies. He mentions Letterman, ESPN, Craig Kilborn's new “Late, Late Show.”

A James Posey Web site?

“That's the future, James,” Duffy said.

What if Posey does not become an elite player, Battle wants to know. He or Prosser ask this of every agent who interviews.

“He is so talented, you'd have to play unbelievably bad for us to not be able to do the things the way we think,” Duffy said. “But it doesn't matter. If you were out of basketball in two years and needed a job, we'd be pounding the pavement to help find a job for you.”

Posey tells Duffy he wants trust and honesty in an agent.

“You said you wanted honesty,” Duffy responds, “I'll tell you what it is I see. ... You're going to have women all over you. You have no idea what you're about to see. I'll be the first one to tell you to chill on that. And that's just one thing. There are also a lot of scam artists and bad people you're going to see.

“... When all the money comes and goes and the fame comes and goes, all that's left is the relationship. That's what I'm all about. We're just consumed with doing a great job — but with the right people.”

### **One more time**

“Are you ready for this to be over with?” Indiana-based agent Craig McKenzie asks.

Posey laughs.

It is the day after his meetings with Bartelstein and Duffy.

McKenzie, 28, shows a brief news clip that includes him and one of his clients, former Ball State player Bonzi Wells, now with the Detroit Pistons. Young, athletic looking and donning a lime green sport coat, McKenzie has an over-head projector that presents this message on Prosser's whiteboard:

*“The Truth*

*“No matter what you are told, remember a client makes the AGENT, the agent does not make the CLIENT”*

McKenzie is here because he has talked with Posey's parents throughout the season. They liked what they heard.

McKenzie never sits down during his presentation. He is aware that Posey has already sat through almost seven hours of agent meetings.

“It's a privilege to be an agent,” he said. “It's not about power.”

Maximum Sports in Roanoke, Ind., is the top minority agency in the country, McKenzie said, and has been rated one of the top eight overall by some publications.

Its most notable client is Deion Sanders. The group has about 60 to 70 National Football League players, including Dallas running back Emmitt Smith. McKenzie would like to build a larger base of NBA players, and Posey is a main target for this draft.

McKenzie: “If James commits Monday (four days later), we're not signing anybody else.”

Prosser: “That's different.”

McKenzie: “We'll end that process right here in that regard.

“ ... You're going to get the red-carpet treatment. You're going to be our guy. I think you're the one who's going to break out like gang-busters in this draft.”

McKenzie lays out his credentials with an emphasis on his age.

At 25, he said, he completed the Deion Sanders/Pepsi deal, the largest endorsement deal for any athlete at that time. At 27, he landed Wells a deal with Nike right out of college. At 28, he got Charlie Ward a \$31 million contract from the New York Knicks.

McKenzie talks of car deals, show contracts, active wear, formal wear and trading cards. It is a full-service company. Financial management is optional, personal management is available.

Rather than attach a standard percentage as a fee, once a contract with the agent is signed, Maximum Sports has a handshake agreement with clients. At the end of the year, “you pay us what you think we're worth,” McKenzie tells Posey.

McKenzie also offers up a new twist.

“The Lord's blessed me,” he said. “I was lucky enough to have the Lord in my life. Our company is based on sound Christian principles.”

He flat-out guarantees Posey will be a top-15 pick in the June draft — “if you're with us.”

Posey smiles, kind of shakes his head.

The day before Duffy told Posey: “Don’t let an agent tell you they can get you drafted in a spot.”

Posey has been at this for three days but is still focused. He takes fewer notes because much of the information is the same.

McKenzie vows a hands-on approach. He will work out with Posey personally.

“What I plan to do is camp here in Cincinnati,” McKenzie said. “We’ve got the most at stake. If we’ve got the most at stake, we’re going to work the hardest. If not, our basketball division is down the drain. ... I can’t afford to see you fail.”

It is close to 2 p.m., and the meetings are coming to an end.

When he is finished, McKenzie said to Posey: “It’s done. You can relax.”

“It’s not over yet, really,” Posey answered quietly.

His decision-making is just starting.

### **Now what?**

Once out of the room, Posey blows a heavy sigh.

“Everything sounds somewhat the same,” he said. “A couple times during each interview, I would think, ‘I like this idea. I can work with that.’ I can see myself in those commercials. I would love for my face to be on TV for something like Sprite or McDonald’s or movies.

“I think I got four guys from different levels of the profession — younger guys, guys on their way, guys who have been there. That’s good.

“Right now it’s too much. I’m going back to my room.”

After meeting with Posey, Andy Miller — like the other agents — has no idea where he stands because Posey shows little emotion.

“James has a poker face,” Miller said. “I gave them a pretty good indication of who I am. If James is comfortable with that, then I’ll represent him. I hope it went well.”

The last interview is April 8.

Posey hoped to choose an agent before leaving for the Nike Desert Classic pre-draft camp in Phoenix on April 13, but changes his mind because he wants to take his time.

On April 25, Posey informs Mark Bartelstein that he wants to sign with him.

Bartelstein has also signed college seniors Evan Eschmeyer (Northwestern) and A.J. Bramlett (Arizona) and has close to 25 NBA clients.

“This was not about coming in and just making a sales pitch trying to get a guy,” Bartelstein said after the Posey deal is done. “We really wanted to represent him and we're tickled to death about it now. I think he's going to have a huge career, and I think we can have a huge impact on it.”

Before making his decision, Posey visits informally with two other agents, attends the Phoenix camp — where he is named to the all-tournament team — and focuses on catching up with schoolwork.

Miller is the hardest for Posey to turn down. The two talked all season. When they spoke eight days ago, Miller enthusiastically told Posey of some of his plans.

“I didn't know how to break it to him,” Posey said. “He was all excited. I said I made my decision and I chose to go with Mark Bartelstein. Then there was like a pause.

“It felt good because I knew I had to do it, but then I felt bad.”

Said Miller: “For me the void is, why? There has to be a reason. ... It's a very empty feeling.”

Prosser calls McKenzie and Duffy. Bartelstein comes to Cincinnati to sign Posey.

McKenzie isn't surprised: “Not a bad decision. Mark's kicking a lot of people's butts this year. I'm just 28 years old. I've got a long way in this business.”

Duffy leaves messages for Posey and his father, thanking them for the opportunity to be involved.

“I believe it's important to leave a good taste in someone's mouth,” Duffy said. “I know this is tough call for these guys.”

In the end, Posey said he feels most comfortable with Bartelstein. While he talked to clients of the other agents, it is easiest for Posey to trust Xavier graduates Hill, Grant and Braggs because he knows them personally.

“He was upfront about everything, but he was relaxed, and after he gave his thing he sat back and heard what little I had to say,” Posey said of Bartelstein. “That was like myself a little bit.

“I'm positive right now that things are going to work, but you never really know until the end.”