

The Anti-Rosenhaus: Priority Sports Challenges Everything You Think About Agents

By

[Michael Schottey](#)

September 7, 2011



Priority Sports is the biggest and most successful sports agency that you know nothing about.

That should change.

Priority represents some of the biggest names in many US team sports and a few of their football agents sat down with Bleacher Report to explain why Priority operates in a much different way than how typical sports fans expect an agency to operate.

Mike McCartney is a licensed football agent for Priority out of their Chicago office. McCartney grew up around football because his dad, Bill, was an assistant at Michigan under Bo Schembechler and then a head coach at Colorado. Mike also spent a long time coaching in the college ranks (at Colorado and North Carolina) and working with [NFL](#) teams.

When McCartney decided to move to the other side of the negotiating table, he says it was easy to pick which agency to work for.

"My last job in the NFL [Director of Pro Personnel for the Philadelphia Eagles] was to deal with the agents. I got to know and understand who actually worked for their clients. Priority Sports did it the right way, with integrity and character."

Integrity and character aren't names often associated with agents. However integrity and character definitely describes the client list at Priority. Kevin Mawae, the President of the NFLPA, trusts Priority, so does Madiou Williams—the reigning Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year. Another NFL Man of the Year, [Kurt Warner](#), signed with Priority when he came home from NFL Europe and stuck with them when he was a Superbowl MVP.



Christian Petersen/Getty Images

Looking at the rest of Priority's client list, it is hard to decide which is more impressive—the number of Pro Bowls or the number of charities. Tony Pashos works with HEAL to find a cure for autism. Alan Faneca leads the fight against epilepsy. Nate Kaeding has hosted a celebrity golf tournament for years benefiting local San Diego charities like cancer research. Haloti Ngata has chose juvenile diabetes as his nemesis. Drew Stanton wants to cure Cystic Fibrosis.

When Drew Stanton left Michigan State for the NFL Draft, Priority was among his top choices for representation but he initially chose Rosenhaus Sports instead. While Stanton had nothing but complimentary things to say about Rosenhaus, it was clear that his switch to Priority was predicated by one thing: growing up.

Kenny Zuckerman of Priority Sports loves when players grow up and choose his agency. In fact, Zuckerman is confident that: "If players were making the decision at 26 instead of 21, we'd get all of them."

Zuckerman also passed on any opportunity I gave him to say anything mean-spirited about Drew Rosenhaus, but made it clear that the two of them have differing views about what constitutes the best interests of their clients.

"I've heard Drew say that 'any publicity is good publicity,' but I don't believe that. I believe that only good publicity is good publicity. That's why a lot of young kids choose Rosenhaus. They see him with his clients on TV and it doesn't resonate that it's negative publicity. Older players realize that sort of thing."



Drew Rosenhaus with client, Terrelle Pryor

Jared Wickerham/Getty Images

McCartney painted a wider picture of the sports agency landscape. When he was working for the Eagles, he said that he "learned quickly about an agency when players were struggling." It impressed him when agents like Zuckerman and Rick Smith of Priority would fight for a client just as stridently when he was struggling as when he was at the top of his game.

That care for their clients is largely driven by the type of clients Priority accepts. Read that again—the type of clients Priority accepts. At some point, every agent needs to decide what kinds of kids he wants to represent.

For some agents, the criteria is simple—any kid who will say yes. Priority is in the enviable position to turn away clients that don't fit their specific criteria. Priority talks to scouts, coaches, parents and teachers to decide if a player is high character enough to fit into the Priority family.

McCartney describes his criteria in this way: "We're not going after guys who've been living on the edge. We're looking to help young players navigate throughout their entire football career."

The message to prospective rookie clients is simple: "We're not going to do anything illegal or unethical. We're not going to jeopardize your eligibility. It's not worth it to us."

The career-long strategy for those clients is simple as well.

"If we can keep a player and his family on the straight and narrow; comfortable and happy, it gives him a chance to be successful. So many players are bled by bad investments and poor lifestyle choices. We want the player's environment to be solid, so he has a chance to maximize his opportunities."

How does that happen?

Priority boasts the best agent to client ratio among any team sports agency in the country. That kind of personal attention is important to clients and allows those players to have assistance in scheduling charity events and setting up foundations.

Also, Priority says it treats its company in a fundamentally different way than other agencies. While other agents spend their days golfing with clients and their nights partying with their clients, Priority's agents spend their days and their nights with the families. One of the interesting things about Priority is that—in a business dominated by bachelors—most of Priority's employees are married with children.

Priority also has a company policy of giving clients an honest look, not telling players what they "want to hear." Priority believes their clients would like to hear the truth.

These facts don't escape clients who appreciate representation that mirrors their own priorities in life.

Sadly, a lot of these facts escapes the general public who are more drawn to the controversy of other big agencies. Unlike many of the well known "super agents," Priority has never once been in trouble with the NCAA or the NFLPA.

Zuckerman says that: "We do it the right way and it's a shame that the right way doesn't get you noticed."

Maybe, finally, it should.