

143. Kevin Richardson: 1% Better

Gavin Kelly

Hey, everybody, you're listening to beyond 1894 this is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications, and our guest for this episode is Kevin Richardson. He is a Louisiana Tech class of 2017 graduate, and he's currently the vice president of content at Clemson ventures in good old Clemson, South Carolina. Kevin, I know you're in the middle of a busy day, a busy year, a busy life. I appreciate you making time to be on the podcast

Kevin Richardson

I am pumped one to connect back with you on our history, but to just be on this podcast, have a conversation, talk about Louisiana, tech, like, oh, like everything too. So just just grateful for having me on for a little bit, yeah, a little bit

Gavin Kelly

of context for everybody listening. Kevin was my supervisor, my boss. My senior year, I got an internship here at Louisiana Tech in the athletics department, working in marketing, and Kevin, at the time, was the assistant director of marketing. And right around the time I graduated, greener pastures, right? I think Rice was that we'll get into it, but I think Rice was the move after that, and then I slid right into Kevin's spot as the assistant director over there. So that's kind of our connection. And we were talking before we hit record here, about how we go way back, even though it seems, you know, it's like 989, years now, so time does fly, but Kevin, you've been through a lot, but let's, let's go back to the start. Let's talk about kind of early days and figuring out where you wanted to go to college and what you wanted to study, and why sports was like was really the meat and potatoes of it for you. Yeah.

Kevin Richardson

Honestly, I'm from a small town, Franklinton, Louisiana, toe the boot Louisiana, like maybe 1800 people. Honestly, what drew me to Louisiana Tech? I didn't visit, I didn't look it up, I didn't like none of that. It was the furthest away public institution in state from where I live. Took the AC T, had a decent GPA, applied for Louisiana Tech and got in so, like there was no preemptive, oh, I'm going to go there. I will say everybody from my high score area was going to southeastern or LSU. I knew I didn't want to do that. I just want to kind of get out of that small town and end up in another town, and Louisiana Tech was part of that. And so crazy. How it works out my time there was, was phenomenal. Met a lot of great friends, so I'm still in contact with the day. It's the reason I'm in the career I'm in. It's really, really cool how it all works out when you look back. But was never intended to go. It just happened furthest away and applied and got in, and here we are.

Gavin Kelly

Was it was settling in. Quick thing for you, like, did you make friends? Fast? Did you kind of find your place here? Fast? We talk to people all the time. To talk about, you know, the second I stepped foot on campus, I knew I was where I was supposed to be, that sort of thing. But what was

Kevin Richardson

it like for you? It was brand new for me. I didn't know anybody. I didn't know what majors Louisiana Tech I got to offer any of that. But I got my footing pretty quickly. I still, I still vividly remember an orientation some summer orientation, or I think it was oriented. Yeah, it was definitely orientation. And they're on stage and Wiley auditorium, and they're saying, all right, if you are an engineering major, come up with me and leave. And All right, if you are an English major, you're gonna come up here with with me and leave. And in my head, I'm like, Huh? Like people already have their majors. And I was like, okay, so they said, if you're a business major, come up here with me. And I just walked, and I walked with that group, and I said, I'm a business major, and it's crazy. I had no idea. It just felt like a gut reaction, let's go and and get connected. So that could be a whole different pot, a whole different story about kind of my major and how that happened. But then I got my footing pretty quickly, like I lived in Mitchell dorms. I don't even know if they they're still there, but the Mitchell dorms, when I was there and I met now my best friend Sam, right down that hall, those it was the first week, and we got connected. And then I think it was like week two or three. He said, Hey, I'm gonna go apply for this thing called union board. I said, All right, that sounds cool. And union board is people still know, like, holds events on Tuesday nights, and it's kind of this whole, you know, give something for the students, kind of activities, and so we have concerts and all that. But that happened, and I got my footing pretty quickly. It's almost like I gained a group of friends because I was lucky enough to get in after going through the interview process. In that same vein, I was a broke college kid. I needed a ton of money. I had negative \$100 in my bank account, and so I'm applying. Lying all over the place. And there's this store, hibbets sports, in Ruston, where I literally, I walked in, you know, three days a week, and talked to the manager Ben fields as I came in. I love sports. I know what you're doing here. I worked at a grocery store in high school. I understand, like, what this can look like. I understand the value I could bring, I'd love a job here. And it took about two weeks of that for him to convince him to give me an interview. So within that first month, you know, I got met a guy who's now my best friend. I was involved. I got an interview and accepted into union board, which to this day I still think, is like a really, really cool blessing. And then I had a good paying job, right to be around just like athletic sportswear, and meet a ton of people and work on that, just talk to people. I was in retail, and so that first, like, man, that first three, four weeks really shaped what was going to be the rest of my collegiate career. So very grateful for all those opportunities. And none of that again, none of that happens if I don't go to Louisiana Tech, which I think is just super impactful and just

Gavin Kelly

powerful, yeah, so it's kind of, it's interesting to hear you talk about, like, almost accidentally ending up in your major, ending up in the College of Business. I will get into this. But I, I'm hard pressed to talk about somebody I know personally who like, eat, sleep, breathe, live sports the way that you do. I've talked to people all the time about, you know, I spent a year in athletics, and it just, it ended up not being for me in the long run, because I'm not a guy like Kevin Richardson who like lives, lives, it all it like it means something to you. We'll get into that. But knowing sports is important to you in that way, and choosing sports marketing was that just, oh, it's got sports in the title, I want to work in sports.

Mark, the marketing part doesn't matter. Or, like, what was the logic there and what made you stick with it?

Kevin Richardson

Yeah, so in high school, I played every, every sport I could. So I always had this innate just like, I loved sports. I was never good enough to play in college, right? Never, never had that dream. So in when I get to Louisiana Tech, I actually and I'll get, I'll get how this makes sense into my major. My sophomore year at Louisiana Tech, I start as a like assistant coach at a private school called Cedar Creek, where I'm coaching their JV team. I'm coaching their eighth grade team. Shout out to Kyle Cavanaugh for giving me a chance. I had no credentials other than I loved basketball, I understood what was going on, and I can help on a volunteer basis, and that became like a really a lot of what I did my sophomore junior year is like being around that team and that school that led me to a manager spot on the Louisiana Tech basketball team under Eric Konkle Andy Fox and that crew. Right after MIKE WHITE left, I said, Hey, I'd love to be involved in some capacity. I do this at this high school. I'll do whatever. And luckily, they gave me, I couldn't do it for the full year. But over that there was, I think it was my junior summer, they let me be their manager for the summer, and so I'm just rebounding balls for guys you know, Alex Hamilton, Eric McCree, like the guys that we all know and love. And like, I truly thought, Man, I truly thought, I Okay, this is my path to be the coach of the New York mix. I'm going to be coaching high school ball. I'm on this college team, you know, I got, you know, I'm going to start doing this. And then, long story short, like my my senior year. I mean, I didn't know you could work in sports, but somehow I fumbled upon, oh, there's a sports marketing internship. I don't even think it was called street scene at the time. It was just sports marketing internship with the department, and I reached out to who became my boss, David pillin. And I said, Hey, like, I'd love to do this and get some credit hours for it, but it can be a minor for me, and I can get a sports minor concentration, or whatever they call it these days. And honestly, it wasn't on purpose up until my senior year, my last quarter at Louisiana Tech, and I reached out to Dave, and I said, Hey, man, I love to, you know, be a part anything I can do. Like, I'm eager to do anything. And my first role, like, my first actual job in sports, was playing music at baseball games. I think J UC love field like, and I'm playing love shack while the team's coming out onto the field, and I'm playing the jaws theme song at a zero to count. But because of that, I start talking more to the at at the time Tommy McClellan, I start talking to David pillin, who becomes my future boss. I started talking to all these people, because it's a small town, small community. I do a good job. I play good music. And like you said, with street team, how we got connected, that is what led me to the Hey, we have an assistant director of marketing job open. We'd love for you to stick around and be part of it. And so it's nuts, dude, how it all works out, but That's literally how my journey went. And again, I'm not where I'm at today, if not for those moments and those chances people took and the accessibility and opportunity that was provided to me by the Louisiana. Back in the surrounding community.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, so let me, let me kind of feed off that a little bit and give you your flowers. Because, much like you, I didn't, I started in sports marketing, and I stayed it was kind of something I knew I wanted to do from the get go at the time, but I didn't kind of get serious about it until senior year, when you start you have to think about internships, and you have to start thinking about a job. And I realized I've and I realize I've done three and a half years of school and I don't really have any solid foundations for what I'm going to do after I graduate, and then sports marketing class, street team, athletics, internship.

These terms get floated around to me, and I think I just ended up like cold emailing you with interest, and we did a quick interview, and then, you know, the rest is history. But thinking back that, you know, within my first few months working basketball games early and and just seeing like, Okay, this guy, you is, you know, putting trust in me gradually and gradually to the point where, when we got to baseball season, I was on the computer doing music so and this, and just knowing that there was no plan, you know at the time, you weren't planning to leave tech at the end of that athletic year and a graduate, which was coming up for me, I didn't know I would be in your role just five or six months later. So it is funny to think about how that sort of thing happens. But let's talk about street team too. Because, yeah, I've had athletics guys on the podcast a lot, and we talk about the phrase it takes a village all the time, because a casual fan, or even a hardcore fan, you know, they see the product on the field or the court, and they see ads and they see merch and whatever. But even when you see five or six guys behind the scenes working on stuff you don't see usually, all of the moving pieces and student work, student internships to this day over there, play a large part in the way things work. And I know that's not just here. It's everywhere. So talk to me about like in your assistant director stint here, building up street team and like, kind of how you went about that, and how you went about, like I said, learning to delegate and trust and use students to further what you were doing there.

Kevin Richardson

Yeah, man, I think fondly of that team. What a great group of people who are all doing really cool things now, what a squad. But when we were putting that together, when we were putting street team together, I had this this mantra of, like, if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. And I wanted to go far. And I think we all have this innate ability, like, there's something inside of us that wants to be great, whether you know whatever it is, but I you can't do it alone. It does take a village, right? So I remember showing up one of the first months there was, there was a semblance of a street team. I think there were two or three people that were like, hey, you know, you know, we, we help with the social or we do shirts. I'm like, Yeah, but, like, we need, like, foundational, like, what are we about? And I remember going to David and I went to him with, like, a constitution. Here's what street team stands for. Here's our members. Here's how many members will have, like, here's how we can go from a tier system of like, here's, hey, I can oversee it, but here's a leadership role, like, here's some people that can kind of build up to that. Because I've done, I've done that previously with, with the Blue Crew, which is that student section at Louisiana Tech. So I just wanted to bring wanted to bring that same mindset into this and and the idea was like, how do we generate a better experience for fans experiencing Louisiana Tech games, whether for the first time or the 10th time? And so this street team, I think we got it to like 20 people, and everyone was assigned sports, and I would charge some people with, Hey, you come up with ideas. You execute these. I remember Merrick, who was on your podcast, was a part of that street team, and he came to me one day. I was like, Hey, Kev, I think one thing we're missing is is content. You're absolutely right. Max America swing got a camera and just started taking photos. And look at him now, by the way, and looking, oh, he's in the NBA. Kyrie Irving, like, what a shout out to him, and I've been able to talk to him a little bit the last couple years. Man, what a cool story. But no, like I wasn't. I was put in a position to lead, sure, but it was really about the people in that room that took it upon themselves to almost like own lanes, like lead, collectively. How can we make this better? Everybody was so bought in and loved each other and wanted to see us to be successful. And honestly, I can't take any credit other than just like, hey, street team, that's our name, and we're gonna rah rah. I'll go recruit great. But like we we would have Christmas parties, like we

would have, like, moments of celebration for each other and for the group, and I think fondly on that of like, because those were dude. I was the boss, but I was one year removed from college, like I just graduated, and we were all like, 1920 2122 just wanting to do something. Have some community. Community. We cared about Louisiana, tech. We cared about spring. Sports, and I think that just kind of seeped into our success, honestly, for that year. And everybody was running a gun and everywhere, like you were doing basketball, we've got pa guys like, we're run up shows for soccer. Some of our interns were running the show at soccer, which is so impressive to just look back and go, Wow, what are the opportunities you don't see that at some of these other schools, like, even bigger schools, like, the fact, like, hey, it's in your hands, you get this opportunity is huge. And so I'm just, honestly, I'm just grateful for the people that were on that committee or committee, but group, I just wanted to see us all be successful,

Gavin Kelly

and it was necessary, too. I think even you look at those of us that went on to work in sports, or not working sports, or whatever, I think everybody took something away from their time on street team. And I, you know, I'm one month, I'm on street team, and then the next month, I'm in your position, in charge of street team. And so having to find a way to, you know, look at the the guys and girls that were just, you know, shoulder to shoulder with me just a few weeks before, and having to be like, well, you know, I'm supposed to be in charge now. But I want you to understand that nothing's really changed. You know, we're all, we're all still just pushing the same boat out into the water. But, yeah, I think finally, on street team and of that, that crew, and it's, you know, it isn't, doesn't still exist in the way that it did then. But like I said before, student work and student involvement is such an integral part of how things operate. I will note too that street team interns were unpaid, and it leads me to kind of a question that I've thrown out to some other guys here in athletics about kind of the culture and the expected sort of grind set of college athletics, and how a lot of times you see somebody with a few years of experience and an advanced degree lining up down the block for a entry level job or something not much higher, you know, and how athletics is oftentimes long hours and little pay, and you're kind of often expected to just kind of do it, because that's how you prove that you're committed to Working in sports. But obviously, for you that that's like, you've paid plenty of dues. And not to say that you've, like, made it to the top of the mountain or anything, but you've, you've had a career in athletics, and your your positions have evolved as you've gone from university to university. But talk about kind of, how do you balance? Like, I said, Eat, sleep, breathe, sports with working in a hectic, chaotic and often thankless industry like college sports.

Kevin Richardson

Yeah, man, as a great question, first, I want to go back to you guys were all unpaid, which I do not believe should be something that continues to happen in college athletics. So like, I'm at Clemson now we have 30 interns all paid a decent salary, or not salary, but like, decent pay as well. Like, and that's just such a different, not even a different world. But like, there is this expectation, and we should always push for paid work now. So like, if I was to go back to go back to Louisiana Tech and do some street team stuff, in no world would we do another group that's, like, completely unpaid, right? Like, but to your point, the grind of it, yeah, man. Like, I look at it very differently now than I think when I did at Louisiana Tech rice and even Texas people that aren't in college athletics, like, when I tell them about the hours their their minds are blown like it is. It's not just, you know, 40 plus hour weeks or 50 plus

hours. It's 7080, plus hour weeks. And not just, you know, every other week. It's like, back to back to back for 50 weeks. And then guess what? Here comes crossover season in February and in November. And like, basketball is kicking up, and then baseball, softball is a 30 game grind. And it's like, it's nuts. And definitely there is a part of it where the more you put in, especially in college athletics, the more you put in and the more visibility you have. Typically, what happens is, like, more opportunities you receive, right? Like, that's kind of the underlining thing in college athletics. And I say that to say it doesn't even matter if it's just your role, like I would, I was the, you know, assistant director marketing at Louisiana Tech, but I'd squeegee the tennis courts if it rained. Like, we made sure, like, hey, that the end of the day the kids are what matters, the student athletes, and they had a great experience. So a lot of that was like, Hey, you had to wear multiple hats at small schools. And now, you know, I get to Rice, it's kind of the same thing, doing a ton of different stuff, probably putting in 6060, 65 hours, and a lot of it's thankless. You know, Texas is kind of the same thing. I think now, you know, at Clemson, as you get. Get older in the industry. Like, one thing that I want to do in my role and impact college athletics is that's not how it has to be. It does not have to be a 6070, hour grind. And who can withstand the grind the longest? And it's not a badge of honor anymore. Of just, like, great, you worked long hours, great. But like, how's your home life? You know? What hobbies do you have? Like, I find so much more value in like, you know, groups outside of where I work, like friends, groups like my wife, like these things matter to me way more now than I think they did. But I was also, you know, 23 to 27 going through the grind at Louisiana Tech rice in Texas. And, you know, I think just as I've gotten older, my perception has changed, and so especially in a creative sense, like as a creative leader, what can we do to make sure the input from departments in demand? You know, we have a high output, but let's make sure there's some guardrails. I'm like, Hey, this is how long it takes us. This is our production timeline. We actually can do this. What's on our priority list here? Does it move the needle? Like there's so many different questions you can ask that help facilitate for that younger generation in creative and marketing or whatever. That kind of saves them from some of that burnout that we can do now as leaders of people that went through that, and that's part of my job now, like, I make sure, like our team is never burnt out, like they're home when they need to be, they're in the office when they need to be. We got some projects. We got but there's clear communication, clear pipeline, clear, like expectations from our unit, but as well as communicative to other units. Hey, here's how we work, which has been good, but, man, it's what's happened in the last, like five, six years, I would say a lot, you know, post covid to like people getting back into the workforce. Like, what matters more is a lot of home life, and just

Gavin Kelly

it's, it's fun to watch, but it's crazy how just much has changed. Yeah, to your point, too. Like, when you're 22 years old and you're graduating college, and you just know you want to work in sports, and you don't necessarily know what that entails. You know it's even if no one tells you directly that you're kind of just expected to work these 80 hour weeks and just show up and be there and do it. You You feel it whenever you start to work in it. And it is important to have leadership that tells you you know, that checks in on you and says, you know, there's, there's more to life than this job, and you know you also have to take care of yourself, because then you're a better you're a better employee, and you're, you're able to row the boat a little better.

Kevin Richardson

But it's you, your family, your job, like, in that order, as a macro view, like, take care of yourself, then take care of your family, and your job will take care of itself. Like, if those two things are aligned, the job is going to be fine. The last thing you want is somebody coming into the job because, like, they weren't able to spend time with their family, or they didn't work out that morning because they didn't have time, because they had a meeting. Like you, your family, your job, in that order, is such good, just like symmetry for what we're trying to do in this these next 234, or five years, as we keep going through this college athletics deal,

Gavin Kelly

yeah, and it's worth mentioning too, that it the kind of change that you seem to be advocating for. I do see kind of a ripple and talking to guys here, Kyle Cavanaugh and his team, and, yeah, the way he talks about, you know, taking care of his team and making sure students are in good shape. But also, too, I looked back at kind of how I fell out of athletics, and that was part of it, but also not putting that on any of my leadership at the time, in terms of, like, you know, working for Ken Yarbro, Paul Kabbas, those guys, I that, you know, you're at the mercy of budget and manpower and expectations, and it's tough to get figured out. And I think it's important now people in the role that that are willing to address it and acknowledge it, because it's not going to get better if nobody does right.

Kevin Richardson

No, it's absolutely right. So like, how can we be advocates for the next generation of people that want to work in sports while still doing a really great, high output level job, but understanding like some other things that kind of matter, that'll help, whether it's mental health or physical health or just emotional being like to where you can be your best self when you show up to the job. For sure,

Gavin Kelly

very good, very good. I'll ask you one last question before I let you go. I know we've you've kind of charted your your journey a little bit in passing here about, you know, Louisiana Tech, Rice, Texas Clemson, now you've sort of made it clear in the way you've talked about how you've changed, and your thoughts on the industry and your job and the nature of your work has changed, but talk a little bit more directly about the Kevin that was the Assistant Director of Marketing here at Louisiana Tech, versus VP Kevin now at Clemson and and how you think specifically that that you've changed over those last several years?

Kevin Richardson

Yeah, man, assistant director Kev was running around with his head cut off and living day to day and making it happen and figuring out every moment how can. Happen. How can I make it and VP have now more lives in the in the six to 12 month range of macro views and macro trends and thinking right now, it's all about like, how can we generate above the cap dollars? Post house, there's a whole nil rev shirt at 20 and a half million dollars. My role now, through content and our team's challenge is, how do we generate more dollars above the cap through content? And that's the original IP so podcast features Docu series that's custom content with brands when they come to the table, and that's one to one nil content through studio shoots like that's the main ways, and we do that through over the air deals. We have an Ott, which is over the top, and Clemson plus. Shout out. Everybody. Go look at Clemson plus, and also getting into the streaming space and digital space, like there's so much happening in the

college space that that has to change because of post house and rev share and above the cap dollars. But Kev, eight years ago, assistant director, was just trying to get by day to day, to day, put on a good show for fans with the run a show you'll try to learn get better. That part of me has not changed. Of like, every day I'm looking to get better at something I believe in the saying in one man is many men, and I'm one to challenge myself in every which way possible to get better, whatever that looks like. But from a macro sense and what I'm thinking now went from day to day to more like, I have to think like years in advance, and maybe not years, but six months to a year in advance. Of how will this almost like an entrepreneur like, how will this affect the bottom line for what we're trying to do, and how can we get there, which is crazy different. And so now I appreciate all my bosses at Louisiana Tech that had to think like that, where I had no thought of I'm just trying to put on a good soccer game or, you know, good, good basketball game, but crazy different now I'm thinking

Gavin Kelly

beautifully put, man, I appreciate getting a chance to talk to you and catch up and pick your brain. We could be here for a few hours, I'm sure, if we had the time. But I know you've got a meeting on the schedule and probably several more, because that's just how it is. But again, thanks for making time. It was great catching up. Let's not wait years to do it again. But shout out louisianatech athletics. Shout out street team, shout out, it's good. It's good thinking back and and seeing that and seeing what everybody's doing these days. It is. It was good times. Was good times. Give you before

Kevin Richardson

you help me out, I want to give a shout out to you. You doing this podcast for a place that I love, at Louisiana Tech, and bringing people on to really share their stories, Dude, that's awesome. That's not easy. Like, you look at a ton of people who want to start podcast, they do two or three and they quit. Like, what you're doing is super special, and it's, I'm so honored again to just like be asked to be on this and talk and talk with you. Keep going, keep being great, dude. I love everything you're doing.

Gavin Kelly

All right. Man, appreciate it. Kevin, it was good seeing you. We'll talk soon. Hey, Go Dogs. Go Dogs. Are you allowed to, are you allowed to say that? Haha thanks, man.

Gavin Kelly

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