

Luke Fedlam

President, Anomaly Sports Group

Age: 42

In position since: 2016

Previous: Porter Wright Morris & Arthur, partner and chair of sports law practice (2017 to present); Scotts Miracle-Gro Co., director of business development and manager, legal – M&A (2015-17); Kegler Brown Hill & Ritter, attorney, (2013-15); Army National Guard infantry officer (2002-11); Legacy Group, partner (2006-09), SEI Investments (2001-06).

Education: Wake Forest University, BA, 2001; Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, JD, 2013

Resides: Columbus

Family: Luke and wife Janelle have two children: Allen, 10, and Simone, 6.

Trusted counsel

In the world of athletics, players need help making sense of all the opportunities being thrown at them. That’s where Luke Fedlam comes in.

College athletes around the country will need a lot of expert guidance to navigate the new and complicated name, image and likeness rules that soon will allow them to spread their entrepreneurial wings and fly into the world of commerce.

They’ll need someone like Luke Fedlam, a man who knew from an early age what he wanted and how to get there. When he was eight or nine, the persuasive young Fedlam pleaded with and pestered his adop-

tive parents—a pair of pastors—for something very few boys of that age tend to yearn for: A briefcase. He got one, a gray Samsonite, that he proudly toted around with him for the next few years in a business-like manner. The Samsonite fit in with the lofty aspirations Fedlam had: businessperson, lawyer and, what the heck, why not become president of the United States? Soldier wasn’t on his list back then, but was added later.

“Where all this came from, I don’t know,” he says. “There were no lawyers in my family, or anyone in the corporate space.” Or in the White House. “While I waited for the future, I had my briefcase to try and make it a reality.”

While he has yet to achieve POTUS status, Fedlam is an attorney and he is president of the Anomaly Sports Group, a small, fast-growing organization affiliated with the Columbus office of the Porter Wright Morris & Arthur law firm, where Fedlam is a partner and chair of the Sports Law Practice. He may need two Samsonites for this two-in-one career.

Anomaly is poised to be a major player in the growing field of educating athletes about the new name, image and likeness (NIL) laws the National Collegiate Athletic Association is hurrying—and struggling—to finalize. Several states have already passed NIL laws that go into effect on July 1, and many other states, including Ohio, are in the process of enacting NIL laws.

The tide has turned: College athletes soon will be able to make money. “I think [the evolving NIL rules] really highlights and amplifies the need for the services Luke and his team provide,” says Clark Kellogg, a former Ohio State and NBA star who’s now a college basketball analyst for CBS Sports. These athletes and their parents, he says, “need to understand their rights and how to protect and leverage their brand.”

A noble king

The bright, determined kid with the magical briefcase, ready to take on and conquer the world, is

only one side of Fedlam’s complicated childhood.

Only a handful of people know his actual birth name, which is Rex Allen Noble, and the details of his difficult first few years. “I always felt like my life, my future, was all on me, that I have to do this for myself,” Fedlam says. “I’ve been driven like no other.”

Fedlam, 42, was born to a white mother and Black father whose relationship quickly ended. He never met his biological father, his mother married another man, and she and her new husband put the 3-year old Fedlam into foster care. Young Rex was adopted about six months later by Jim and Faye Fedlam, who gave him stability. His new name, Luke, and that of the second son the Fedlams adopted, Matthew, are taken

from the Bible and the Gospels.

The family initially lived in Iowa, then moved to upstate New York, where Fedlam ran track and cross-country and played basketball. Jim Fedlam passed away in 2018.

“I was always embarrassed by my [given] name,” Fedlam says. But in high school, during an AP English class, Fedlam learned Rex meant king, and he realized “my name was Noble King,” he says. “For someone who’s big on motivation, I have a tattoo on my shoulder that says Rex, and I’m getting one on the other that says Noble.”

During his senior year at Wake Forest University, Fedlam reconnected with his birth mother and her six sisters. “I’ve gotten to know these seven white women and have built a

relationship with some of them,” he says. “We still talk.”

Fedlam has turned a difficult past into a place of positivity. “His energy and passion about everything he does is really contagious,” says Robert Tanous, managing partner of the Columbus office of Porter Wright.

A terrible loss

After graduating from Wake Forest, Fedlam went to work in Philadelphia for SEI, an investment firm. And then came a few more life-changing events. “I had always wanted to join the military,” says Fedlam, who joined the Army National Guard soon after 9/11. “My department [at SEI] had a lot of former military officers, and the boss said he would support it.”

Much to his disappointment, he

was never sent overseas. But Fedlam was called into active duty a couple of times, including a three-month stint in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina.

While in Philadelphia, he met the woman who would change his life: Janelle Toles, who was working on her MBA from the University of Michigan. “A friend called and said she was going to be in Philly for a conference with some friends, let’s meet and go out,” Fedlam says. Toles was one of the friends. “We started dating and have been married 13 years.”

By 2009, Fedlam had left SEI and was a partner with the Legacy Group, a Miami-based sports management firm. He was called back into active duty and was serving at an Army installation in the Washington, D.C., area. Janelle was pregnant and “we



Luke Fedlam



were living a care-free, wonderful life, we were so blessed,” Fedlam says. And then, Janelle went into pre-term labor several weeks before her due date. Luke Allen Fedlam Jr. was born on Oct. 15, 2009. He weighed a little less than 2 pounds, and he was immediately transported to a nearby neonatal intensive care unit.

“He lived for only seven days,” Fedlam says. “I’ll never forget leaving the hospital and driving back to our apartment without our baby. What do we do? What does this mean? This was the most crushing, devastating experience in our lives.”

The next steps

The death of their son was a turning point for Fedlam, who decided it was time to finally fulfill one of his childhood dreams and become a lawyer. “That experience made me think about how fragile life is, and what can I do to make it meaningful?” he says.

Janelle landed a job with Abercrombie & Fitch as a merchandise planner, and Luke was accepted into the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. Law school opened a lot of doors for Fedlam, who knows how to network. He first worked as an attorney for Kegler Brown Hill & Ritter, then for Scotts Miracle-Gro as director of busi-

ness development and manager, legal. Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith has known Fedlam for several years. “We had some breakfasts and lunches together and talked about his future,” Smith says. “I was kind of a professional mentor and then the Anomaly idea emerged, and I gave him some advice and he developed it.”

The Anomaly idea

Combining sports, law and business with education to help athletes make the best possible decisions was the goal, but it was one Fedlam wasn’t quite sure how to accomplish. While at a Crew game in 2015, Bruce Wimbish, senior communications manager of the Greater Columbus Sports Commission at the time, introduced Fedlam to someone who eventually asked him to speak to the Ohio State football team as part of Real Life Wednesdays. This program brings in outside experts and leaders to connect with and help the players learn about life beyond the football field.

“As a public speaker, you know when you’re engaging an audience,” Fedlam says of his presentation to the Buckeyes. “[Young athletes] have no shame in tuning you out, and I knew I had their attention.”

The interaction with the football team planted a seed in Fedlam. There was a need for more of this. “I had worked with athletes as a lawyer and saw the challenges they faced, how to protect themselves, to understand documents and contracts and how to do due diligence and make good business decisions. I [realized I could] take and turn this into workshops and conversations and share it with groups of athletes, entire athletic departments. And that was the impetus for starting Anomaly. There is a need for more of these types of conversations.”

Back to the Buckeyes

Fedlam honed his Anomaly craft by speaking to several Ohio State teams. All pro bono.

“He spoke, for example, to our professional athletes’ program,” says Smith of the junior and senior football, baseball, men’s and women’s basketball and ice hockey players in the program. “He spoke about preparing for the professional life, what to look for in an agent, financial

literacy around contracts.”

And Fedlam spoke about the importance of character.

“He talks about character all the time, your brand, your persona, is all about character,” Smith says. “This part of his presentation is off the chain, and I know it resonates with our athletes because I’ve heard them walk out of sessions and talk about it.”

Tannous was another of Fedlam’s professional mentors, and they met from time to time. “I sought his counsel when I was thinking about what’s next,” Fedlam says.

He brought up the idea for Anomaly, and “it was a no-brainer to bring Luke here [to Porter Wright],” says Tannous, adding he’d tried to recruit Fedlam unsuccessfully in the past. Fedlam went on to develop Anomaly as a separate entity, and he would also create and lead the firm’s sports law practice to represent professional athletes. But not as their agent.

“We don’t serve as their agents, we serve as general counsel for them as individuals,” Fedlam explains. “We help with agent selection and agreements, and review, from a legal perspective, any contracts, endorsement deals, and marketing deals their agents may find for them.” Other services include creating a business or nonprofit foundation, real estate and investment advice, estate planning, intellectual property rights and post-career planning.

Ethics rules prevent Fedlam from listing his roster of professional athlete clients, but he says the Porter Wright sports practice represents athletes in all the major leagues, including the National Football League, National Basketball Association, Women’s NBA, National Hockey League and Major League Soccer. Every year during the NFL and NBA drafts, he works with multiple first-round draft picks in each sport.

When Fedlam represents athletes as their general counsel, it means billable hours for the firm. When he educates groups of athletes, Anomaly receives the revenue. This arrangement is out of the ordinary in the world of law firms, Tannous says. “Luke has become a thought leader in this country on the NIL issue and a great platform to educate players and their families. I don’t know of anyone else who brings along the families to educate them.”

Many of Fedlam’s clients in the Porter Wright law practice are young Black men and women who find themselves suddenly thrust into the spotlight. “I can play a role in protecting and changing the status of these athletes, who often get taken advantage of, and often go broke after their playing days are over,” he says, adding this can have a positive ripple effect for their families and communities. “They can make a real impact and create lasting change.”

What is NIL

The NIL laws are changing daily, and federal legislation remains possible.

The NCAA had hoped to pass a national rule that would govern all college athletes by July 1, but has yet to finalize its plan. In the interim, as the organization hesitated, hemmed and hawed, individual states have proposed and passed laws. The Ohio legislature is in the process of doing this. According to the *Columbus Dispatch*, NCAA president Mark Emmert “has lost control of what may be the biggest issue ever faced by the organization” and college sports “faces a situation where 50 states can, and probably will, enact 50 different NIL laws, thus sowing chaos across the landscape of big-time college sports.”

According to the NCAA, if and when its membership does approve NIL rules, they would allow compensation for third-party endorsements related to athletics, without school or conference involvement; and compensation for other opportunities such as “social media, new business and personal appearances, without institutional involvement or the use of trademarks/logos.” Schools would be forbidden from paying student-athletes for NIL activities. The state laws are similar, but in many cases give more rights to the players and less oversight to the schools and conferences.

“There are a lot of unknowns as we go down this road,” Kellogg says. “One of the pillars will be education about what [the NIL rules] entail. The decision-making component is critical, and Anomaly does this really well. Luke’s passion is real and that’s what excited me when we first met.”

Kellogg is a member of Anomaly’s advisory board.

AD Smith also believes education is the key for Buckeye athletes. “We

have to educate our athletes on how to run their own businesses, how to create your brand and represent yourself, your persona and how to run your social media accounts,” he says. “How to hire business agents and service providers, marketing agencies, what to look for and where you need to be careful. Luke will be great in this space.”

Growth spurt

Anomaly has developed what Fedlam calls “a comprehensive curriculum” to educate athletes on understanding and maximizing their opportunities and avoiding the pitfalls young, inexperienced entrepreneurs often encounter. “It’s all about the ability of college athletes to get paid by third parties for the licensing of their name, image and likeness,” he says. “I think the sky’s the limit, and Anomaly can be the go-to educational resource for real-world, practical education for athletes at every level.”

As business began to grow, Fedlam reached out to Wimbish and recruited him as vice president. They share a vision to protect the rights of athletes at every level and help them make good decisions. “We’ve all heard and seen the horror stories of athletes being taken advantage of, sometimes by their own advisers,” Wimbish says. “To protect them, to prevent them from making life-changing mistakes, is what drives Luke.”

Anomaly has held workshops for several Ohio State sports teams as well as for other colleges, including Florida State University, Indiana University and Boise State University.

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He’s also presented to NCAA’s Elite Symposiums for football and men’s basketball players, the New York Giants, Las Vegas Raiders, Los Angeles Chargers and Jacksonville Jaguars, as well as the G League, the NBA’s developmental league.

“If someone offers you \$500 to do a talk, it’s not worth us getting involved,” he says of the new offers college athletes soon will have. “But if an athlete is doing a deal that’s worth thousands and thousands of dollars, then they will need that legal understanding and protection.” These types of deals could happen on a regular basis for stars of the Ohio State football team. Opendorse, a marketing and endorsement company for athletes, estimated that former Buckeyes quarterback Justin Fields could have earned \$1 million a year if the NIL rules had been in place.

Anomaly recently partnered with Philadelphia-based Team Ultimate in anticipation of their growing role in providing NIL education. “Their expertise is the financial literacy aspect, and we’ll teach student-athletes the process of decision making, understanding due diligence and contracts,” Fedlam says.

Fedlam, Wimbish and Anomaly also organized and help lead a College Basketball Parents Association to educate, empower and create a network for the parents of college basketball players.

Giving back

Fedlam was reluctant, at first, to discuss his early years and the impact they had on his life and career choices. “My life has been shaped by some unique circumstances,” he says. These are circumstances and topics he’s not talked about much in public. However, slowly, and then more comfortably, Fedlam opened up about his life and how the negative and the positive events, and people he’s met along the way, have led him to where he is today.

“I’m sure I could sit on a psychiatrist’s couch and figure it out, but I do think being adopted was like, ‘what can I do to help others with opportunity,’” he says. “I’ve always wanted to give back to others and take the spotlight off of me, and maybe that’s my form of therapy, helping others.”

Steve Wartenberg is a freelance writer.