

# Enhanced Performance



APU helps former NFL player find his niche in entrepreneurship.

*Tanya Wiley*

During the mid-1980s, **Marsharne Graves** spent years blocking defenders as an offensive tackle for the Indianapolis Colts and Denver Broncos. But, once his career on the gridiron ended and he was away from the cheering crowds, Graves sought a new challenge—entrepreneurship.

In May 1999, Graves completed his undergraduate degree at Arizona State University and received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. After a short stint working in the juvenile court system, as well as in the public school system, he decided it was time to pursue a graduate degree.

Graves enrolled at **American Public University (APU)** and in June 2014, he graduated with a Master of Science in Sports Management. Graves was then inspired to fulfill his vision of creating his own line of performance wear t-shirts. On October 1, he launched his line called **Playaholic**.

Graves acknowledges that his educational experience as a graduate student of APU had a tremendous impact on the development and launch of his brand.

“It was a game changer to fast forward me to this point. Through my education and what I learned, it was a great experience for me,” he says. “In terms of the curriculum, I chose Sports Management. And, whether it’s from the administration, learning about the sports industry or related to understanding the financial side of the sports industry, it was an eye opener.”

APU has been changing the lives

of thousands of students since its founding. As part of the American Public University System (APUS), the institution’s origins reach back to 1991, when **James P. Etter**, a Marine Corps officer who taught at Marine Corps Base Quantico, retired from active service and launched one of the first 100 percent online universities, American Military University (AMU). AMU was designed to meet the unique educational needs of the military—transient, working adults needing a range of program offerings from traditional courses such as criminal justice to unique courses such as counterterrorism and military intelligence, which are not readily available at most institutions.

In 2002, after 10 years of growth and service to thousands of students and hundreds of graduates, AMU expanded into the American Public University System, adding APU to extend the system’s outreach to better meet the needs of those interested in public service related programs, such as criminal justice, public safety, national security and other adult learners seeking to advance their education through a robust, online curriculum.

Today, APUS has evolved as one of the world’s leading private institutions of distance education and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, which accredits more than 1,000 colleges and universities including University of Chicago, Ohio State University, U.S. Air Force

Academy, Northwestern University, and University of Michigan.

When asked what prompted him to launch his own business, Graves reflected on a class he took called, “Sports Entrepreneurship.” One of the primary assignments was to write a business plan. “Writing the business plan made me realize that I could stay connected with the sports industry by launching my own brand of performance wear t-shirts as an e-commerce business,” Graves explained. “Most importantly, I felt I had a unique brand, Playaholic, where I could be affiliated with all types of sports rather just be focused on one.”

Recently, Graves, the first retired or active professional football player from the NFL to ever graduate with a Master of Science in Sports Management from APU, was recognized by APU and the **National Football League Player Association** as an Ambassador.

When asked about the value that APU has added to his professional life, Graves is clear that he couldn’t have realized his dreams of entrepreneurship without APU.

“This education validates what Playaholic is all about in terms of education. There’s not a doubt in my mind that without me coming through this Master’s program, I wouldn’t be where I’m at today in terms of being an entrepreneur.” ♦

You can check out the performance t-shirt line at [www.playaholicsportswear.com](http://www.playaholicsportswear.com).

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