



EXECUTIVES & ENTREPRENEURS

## How Kim Miale Became One of the NFL's Biggest Agents

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By Shlomo Sprung

Sep 14, 2021

The Roc Nation pro hustled her way to the top to represent stars like Saquon Barkley, Ronnie Stanley, & Dez Bryant . Now, she's blazing a trail for rising women in the industry.

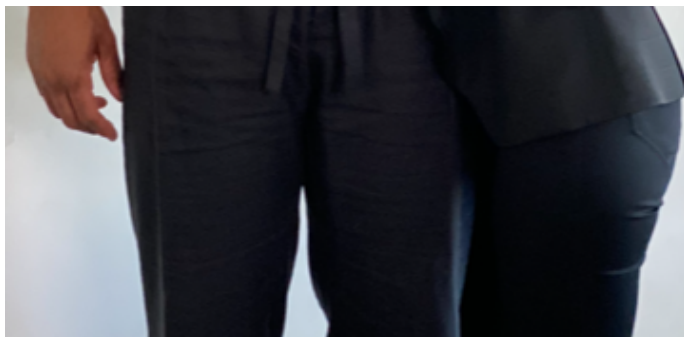
When Roc Nation Sports announced in 2013 that it had signed New York Jets rookie quarterback Geno Smith as its first client, other agents took notice that Jay-Z's new venture was going after the stars of the NFL.

Even more noteworthy than Roc's football foray was that its first client was represented by Kim Miale, a relatively unknown and unproven agent at the time. Even today, female NFL agents make up less than 5% of the NFPLA certified total. If you only include agents with clients actively playing in the league, that number goes down to below 3%.

"All of the agents started to just freak out," Miale said. "The PA [players association] said they got more calls about me signing Geno than they got about the lockout."

Over the last eight years, Miale has proven herself more than worthy of leading Roc Nation Sports' football division, with a star-studded client list that includes Saquon Barkley, Ronnie Stanley, Leonard Fournette, Dez Bryant, and more, ascending as a trusted and valued representative with gravitas and staying power.





With Lions LB Romeo Okwara



With Ravens OL Ronnie Stanley

# New England Roots

A love of football and sports was ingrained in Miale from the earliest of ages growing up in the Providence suburb of Johnston, R.I., where her dad was a diehard fan of the perennially terrible New England Patriots. She attended Providence College for undergrad, though she does admit some regret about not attending school with a big-time football team.

While in law school at Suffolk University in Boston, Miale took a sports law class with a professor named Kristen Kuliga, who also happened to be an NFL agent. Conveniently, Kuliga was looking for an intern. After applying for and landing the gig, Miale interned with Kuliga every semester and summer she could over her three years at Suffolk, solidifying the area she really wanted to focus on.

“That’s where the seed was really planted for the career that I wanted to pursue,” Miale said. “My goal was always to not practice [law] in the traditional sense.”

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# Miale's Side Hustles

But that's exactly what Miale did after law school, joining a Boston boutique litigation firm called Tucker, Heifetz & Saltzman. She picked up important and transferrable skills there, most notably negotiating and being an advocate for clients, writing and speaking well.

While being a working lawyer came with billable hours and 50-60 hour weeks, it is a financially stable and comfortable existence. Being a sports agent is almost the opposite. The hours are long, but starting out means a constant feeling of instability and volatility.

The image is a screenshot of a tweet from the account UNINTERRUPTED (@uninterrupted). The tweet text reads: ".@kimmiale shares her expertise on the crucial differences among NFL contracts that she negotiates on behalf of her @RocNationSports clients". The tweet is dated 2:21 PM · Apr 13, 2021. At the bottom of the tweet, there are icons for 43 likes, 1 reply, and a share icon with the text "Share this Tweet". The UNINTERRUPTED account name is accompanied by a blue checkmark, indicating it is a verified account. The Twitter bird logo is also visible in the top right corner of the tweet card.

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Yet Miale still decided to become certified as an independent NFL agent while still working at the firm, “because it’s difficult to break in and actually be successful and earn a living as an agent,” as she put it.

Miale made sure not to do agency business while she was on the clock at her regular gig; that meant working what effectively amounted to two full-time jobs. She had to learn to strike the balance between devoting herself to her work during the day while pouring a whole lot into her passion project when she got home.

She would take vacation days to go to the annual NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis. When she was lucky enough to get a snow day, that meant another chance to go all-in on her side hustle.

She made the decision to disclose her agency gig to her firm, which gained the approval of one partner who became an important mentor and supporter, and the adamant disapproval of another, who vigilantly ensured she wasn’t using company time on her vanity project. One year when taking a vacation day to go to the combine, she was with her husband at the Boston airport as her plane got set to commence boarding.

“Coming from the plane that was de-boarding was that partner who did not approve of my agency work,” Miale said. “And my husband was like ‘quick, he’s getting off the plane!’ So I ran to the bathroom to hide from him. So I really had to balance things out.”

Kim Miale with Giants RB Saquon Barkley

Working independently, Miale reached out to any remotely successful NFL prospect in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Her first ever client was Lindsey Gamble, a running back from Bryant University. She got Gamble into Boston College's pro day, as no scouts were really going to Bryant.

At the BC pro day, there was a Massachusetts native named Zack Asack who played quarterback at Duke but was transitioning to safety for the next level. After shining at the pro day, she convinced his parents to have him join her agency. Miale got Asack a tryout with the Cincinnati Bengals. And while he didn't make the team, it was her first real experience to help

Cincinnati Bengals. And while he didn't make the team, it was her first real experience to help her dip her toes in the water of some tangible agency success.

After a year on her own, Miale, still working at the law firm, was contacted by a man named Brian Kauffman, who was working at an agency called Madison Ave. Sports & Entertainment based in New York. They were looking to expand into football and wanted to bring her in for an interview. Madison Ave. brought Miale on as a consultant, a gig she worked from 2011 to 2013.

"Having that agency backing made it easier to break into bigger programs like Notre Dame and Florida," she said.

Right on cue, their first big football client was Gators linebacker Brandon Hicks, who subsequently went to training camp with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"Some of the front office folks from the Steelers still remember he was my first client with them," Miale said. "They still bring him up to me."

## Miale Makes It Big

In 2013, the principal partner at Madison Ave., Joe Tacopina, told Miale that the firm was considering divesting from the sports side of the agency. They were getting bigger names, but weren't making enough money. At the same time, Roc Nation had just announced its agency beginnings by signing then-New York Yankees superstar slugger Robinson Cano.

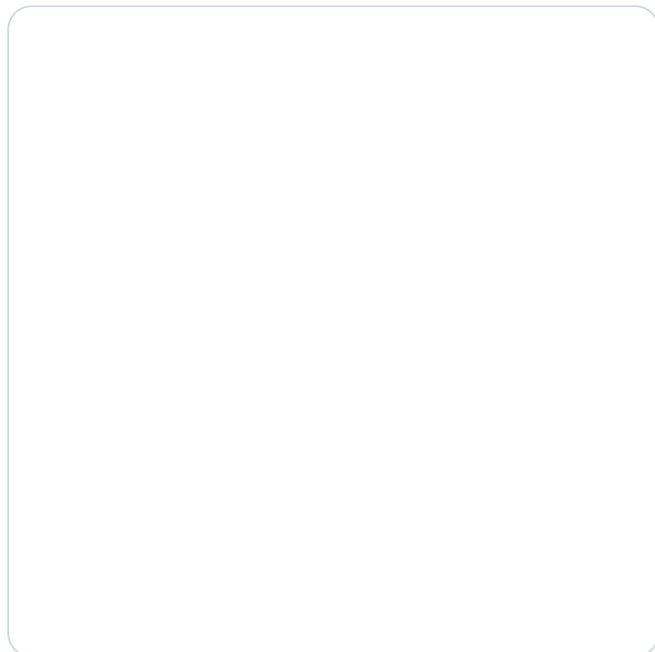
Roc Nation was looking to bring a football agent in-house, and it reached out to Tacopina, who had lots of contact with them over the years with artists and entertainers. Tacopina referred Miale for a job at Roc, calling her up and asking if she wanted to come down to New York City to interview the next day.



Saquon Barkley, who just went No. 2.

That's the highest a player represented by a female agent has ever been drafted.

Her previous high was Leonard Fournette at No. 4.



8:41 PM · Apr 26, 2018



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“I said, ‘yeah, I can call in sick at the law firm,’” she recalled.

So Miale made her way down to NYC on a luxury liner van, hoping that none of the firm’s partners would see what she was up to.

“I remember getting in the elevator and Kylie Minogue was going up to the same floor as me,” she said. “I was thinking, ‘this is a different place.’”

Miale got the job at Roc Nation Sports and quit her job at the law firm, and even though it was a fulfillment of everything she’d worked toward for so long, the imposter syndrome set in



immediately. Fortunately, Roc's husband and wife duo of Juan and Desiree Perez has been instrumental in mentoring her and helping her succeed in a competitive, cutthroat industry.

"Desiree wasn't bothered by the lack of high-profile client base," Miale said. "She wasn't concerned about bringing in a woman to start the football department. She had all the faith in me, and I'm forever grateful for that. She's empowered me since day one."

## The Trailblazer

It's no secret that an overwhelming majority of NFL agents are men, and Miale believes many underestimate her as a result.

She uses it to her advantage.

"Most of the players have some strong female figure in their lives, usually their moms," she said. "With this generation, it's more natural to gravitate towards a woman to get advice from. I'm sure there were guys that I reached out to that never respond, and it could be because I'm a woman. I guess we'll never know that. But for the most part, I've seen it as using the uniqueness as your strength."

While wearing her signature blazer, Miale has always looked to recruit the best high-character players at their respective positions, but also notes varied interests outside of football, because Roc Nation can help those players pursue their interests and passions off the field. And being a small, boutique agency ensures that Miale's clients will be catered to, rather than ignored or overlooked, helping build lasting and meaningful relationships.

It's a recipe that helped bring in Bryant in 2014, leading to a five-year, \$70 million contract extension with the Dallas Cowboys in 2015, and the signing of Barkley in 2018 before being drafted second overall by the New York Giants.

"To focus on one big client at a time to recruit makes a huge difference," Miale said. "Our business model has made it easier to focus on those big, high profile guys."

That certainly includes Barkley, who returned for Sunday's season opener after tearing his

That certainly includes Darney, who returned for Sunday's season opener after tearing his ACL last season, and Stanley, who inked a \$98 million contract extension with the Baltimore Ravens, making him the highest-paid player on a talented roster (and owner of the largest NFL contract ever negotiated by a woman).

But her proudest moment she had with a client is with Fournette.

Kim Miale with Buccaneers RB Leonard Fournette after winning Super Bowl LV

The fourth overall pick of the 2017 draft by the Jacksonville Jaguars out of LSU, the powerful running back was shockingly cut prior to last season — something Miale didn't see coming.

“Trading him, perhaps, but just waiving him?” she asked. “We were all blindsided by that.”

Fournette then signed with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers before the season started and was a key player in the team's playoff run, rushing for 89 yards and a touchdown in their Super Bowl win in February over Kansas City. To see him succeed after such a difficult year proved gratifying for Miale.

“So to go from that moment, from the worst team in the league last year in 2020, to go to the best team in the league, score a touchdown in the Super Bowl, it was a complete 180,” she said. “It was great to be a part of that.”

It's no secret that NFL players' careers are generally short. Miale's job is to get the league's best players that fit what Roc Nation is looking for, and help them navigate their careers on and off the field, and maintain the relationship when the stars' playing days are over.

Miale has been resilient throughout her life as an agent, a trait she said is important for any aspiring woman looking to go into this industry. If you focus too much on the disadvantages you may have against your male counterparts, she said, you may lose focus on trying to be the best agent you can be.

“It doesn't matter if you're male, female. It's a tough business to crack into and stay in, so you've just gotta stay the course, work hard, and not get deflated by the failures, because they will come,” Miale said. “It's coming back from it, when you face the failures and pick yourself up from it and be successful, that really determines how your career turns out.”

Miale has proven that she's someone who you should listen look out for, a woman intent on growing an already-impressive client base, blazing a trail for Roc Nation and a rising tide of women in the agency space for many years to come.

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