Balancing Business and Basketball with Grace and Grit

September 10, 2024



Sion James (BSM '24) was a star on the Green Wave Men's Basketball team and an award-winning student-athlete at the Freeman School.

During his time at the Freeman School of Business, Sion James (BSM ’24) successfully balanced academics with NCAA Division 1 athletics as star guard for the Tulane Green Wave basketball team.

James’ decision to attend the Freeman School was driven by his interest in business and the flexibility Freeman offers.

“I knew that I wanted to study business coming out of high school, so when I chose to play basketball at Tulane, joining the Freeman School was an easy choice,” James says. “It gave me the freedom to explore different avenues within business and find where my true passion and expertise was.”

He adds that Freeman's wide-ranging curriculum played a big role in shaping his academic path.

"Because the curriculum forced us to take classes among different focuses, I got introduced to many different topics," James says. "I came in expecting to major in finance, but I learned that I had an interest in legal studies and marketing as well. I would not have known I had these interests unless the curriculum guided me that way."

During his four seasons at Tulane, James played in 114 career games, including 107 as a starter, averaging more than 34 minutes per contest. Balancing the demands of being a student and an athlete required all-star time management skills and lots of support from his academic team.

"I learned early on how to balance the demands by sectioning off the time in my day," he explains. "I'd spend the morning in class or getting work done, the afternoon with basketball requirements, and the evening working or in class again. I utilized my academic team to help me stay on top of my classes. Plus, I created a detailed calendar early in the semester so that I always knew what was expected of me."

As a legal studies in business major, James learned the lessons of business both in the classroom and on the court.

"Playing basketball taught me exactly how to balance teamwork and leadership," he says. "On the court, I need my teammates to be successful, but they also need me to be an effective leader to maximize their skills. The same thing applies in business. I've had to learn how to build out a high-performing team and lead them to fulfill their true potential. Plus, I've grown accustomed to managing egos and personalities, which is an essential piece of leading a team."

As a shooting guard for the Green Wave, James became the first player to win the AAC Sportsmanship Award twice, earning the distinction in both 2023 and 2024. He also served as the two-time chair of the AAC Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

But James' success extended far beyond the court. In 2024, he received the Tulane 34 Award, which is presented annually to 34 graduates from across the university in recognition of exceptional academic achievements, student leadership and community service. He also received the Freeman School of Business Dean's Service

Award in recognition of completing nearly 350 hours of community service and the Newcomb-Tulane College Student-Athlete Award.

For current students juggling academics and extracurriculars, James emphasizes the importance of passion. “The most important thing is that you must truly love your extracurricular activity to fully maximize the opportunity,” he says. “I loved playing basketball for Tulane, so it wasn’t difficult to find the time and energy to play and handle my academics.”

Reflecting on his experience at Freeman, James says his biggest piece of advice is to appreciate everything everyone has to offer.

“My biggest takeaway is that there are many different ways to find success in life,” he says. “I met classmates that studied differently, worked differently and had a different background than I had. Even with that, we all made our way through Freeman. I would encourage Freeman students to embrace the differences. I learned so much from my classmates, and I know they can too.”

In 2024-25, James will complete his final year of college eligibility as a transfer student at Duke University, where he is currently enrolled in graduate school.