

NEWSROOM

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [2025](#) / [February](#) / Pacers Sports and Entertainment Job Proves to be Slam Dunk for Alum



PACERS SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT JOB PROVES TO BE SLAM DUNK FOR ALUM

RICO FRANCIS TURNS PASSION FOR LEADERSHIP INTO CAREER.

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | February 13, 2025

Read time: about 2 min

Alumni Testimonial: Rico Francis



When Rico Francis sat down for his interview with Pacers Sports & Entertainment, he was more than just a candidate—his CNU education positioned him to be a game changer.

The new graduate was able to wow his potential bosses with a resume packed with leadership experience and real-world achievements.

“One of the things my employer truly enjoyed and was excited about was that I had experience in college before I even graduated,” he said. “It made me really very competitive with others in the pool.”

The [Communication Studies](#) major landed the job, becoming the first-ever social impact director for the Pacers Foundation, the philanthropic arm for Pacers Sports & Entertainment. The foundation is part of a sports franchise that includes the Indiana Pacers (NBA), Indiana Fever (WNBA), Mad Ants (G-League) and Gainbridge Fieldhouse.

Francis was encouraged during his four years at CNU to set the world on fire with his enthusiasm and drive. He embraced that way of thinking, and it came across loud and clear in his interview.

“My current supervisor said he was excited for me to breathe new life into the foundation,” said Francis ’18.

In the three years since he was hired, he has done just that.

Francis has elevated the foundation to new levels and expanded its reach to make a difference in the community he now calls home.

As social impact director, his mission is to forge the way for the Pacers Foundation to be an agent of good. Francis works to establish relationships with community groups and leaders, administer grants to nonprofit organizations, and execute programs that make a palpable difference off the court, doing everything from funding the refurbishment of community basketball courts to initiating a program called NBA Math Hoops that fosters a love of math in young students.

A proud [Captain for Life](#), Francis takes every opportunity to credit CNU with his success. The University, he said, was instrumental in shaping him into the person he is today. He is always cheering for Christopher Newport, sharing his story and love of the school with potential students.

“It’s really important to me to pay it forward, to pave the way for other students on the same path I was,” he said.

The Maryland native toured CNU during his senior year and was surprised to discover a place focused on what he loved most: leadership. He felt an undeniable connection the second he stepped onto campus.

“In high school, I had been involved in a lot of student leadership programs, so it was one of my biggest priorities to find a school where student leadership was baked into every student,” he said. “It was obvious that it wasn’t just a few students who stepped up as leaders at CNU. Rather, it was an expectation that everyone was, so that was what sold me.”

Francis wasted no time getting involved at Christopher Newport. He developed strong relationships with professors and sought out opportunities on campus and in the community.

The project that inspired his career goals was Friends of Phi Nu, a fraternity-led youth development program he started in 2016. The effort focused on a local elementary school, which Francis and his peers visited regularly to mentor at-risk students. He wanted to continue that momentum after he graduated.

“My hunger to share what I was learning really became my appetite,” he said. “In my CNU experience, the through line is this notion of me being able to service not only the people I worked with but also in the greater Newport News community. I was able to use the work I did in the classroom and the conversations I had with my professors and apply it to the real world and get a lot of hands-on experience.”

When he transitioned to the Pacers, he knew exactly what he wanted and needed to do.

Francis calls himself a “social engineer,” as he pushes himself and his skills to foster collaboration and progress. He often refers back to what he learned on campus to help him navigate and achieve success.

“The University is really good at preparing students for jobs of tomorrow,” he said. “It has definitely prepared me well.”