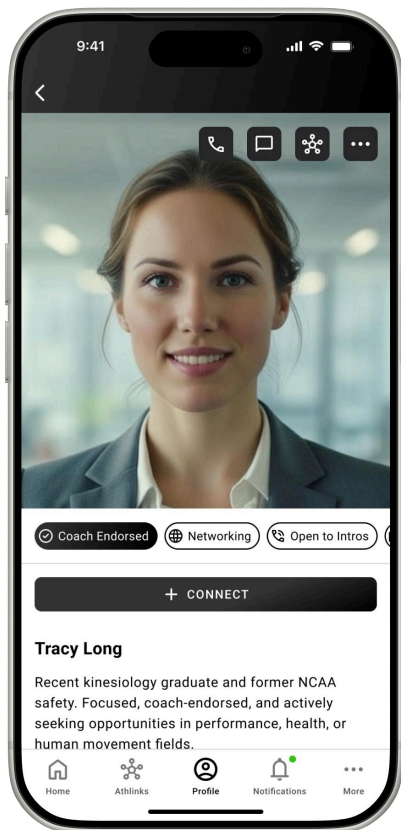


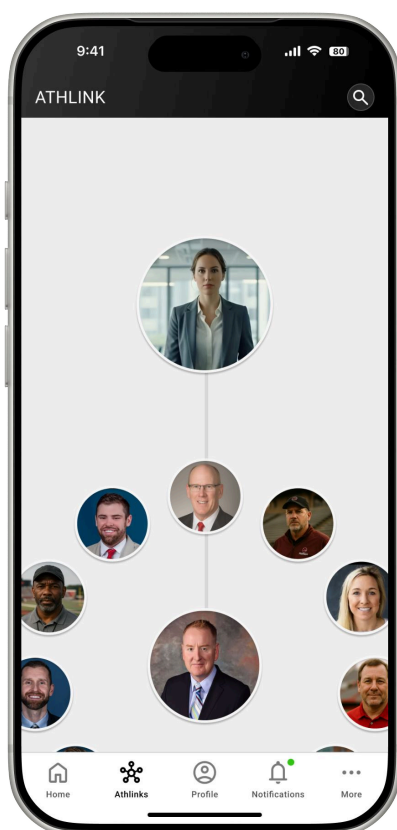
# ATHLINK

## 0-1 Product Architecture for a Curated Athlete Network

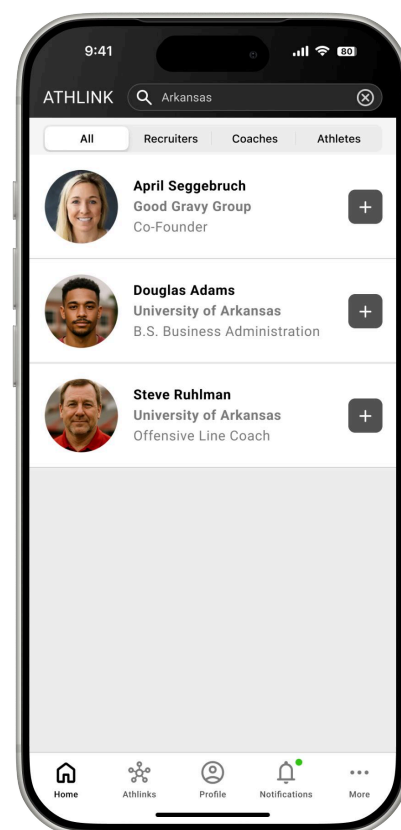
Prepared by Mark Young



Curated Profile



Legacy Tree



Advanced Filtering

### Overview

AthLink is a pre-seed platform connecting former collegiate athletes with coaches, mentors, recruiters, and career opportunities in a high-trust, invite-only environment. By leveraging shared athletic legacies, it enables endorsements that carry real weight and opportunities that feel earned—not algorithmic.


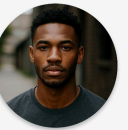
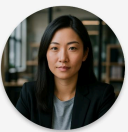
As independent consultant in the earliest phase, I collaborated with the founder to define the core architecture, ensuring scalability while preserving exclusivity. This positioned the product for efficient engineering handoff and long-term governance.

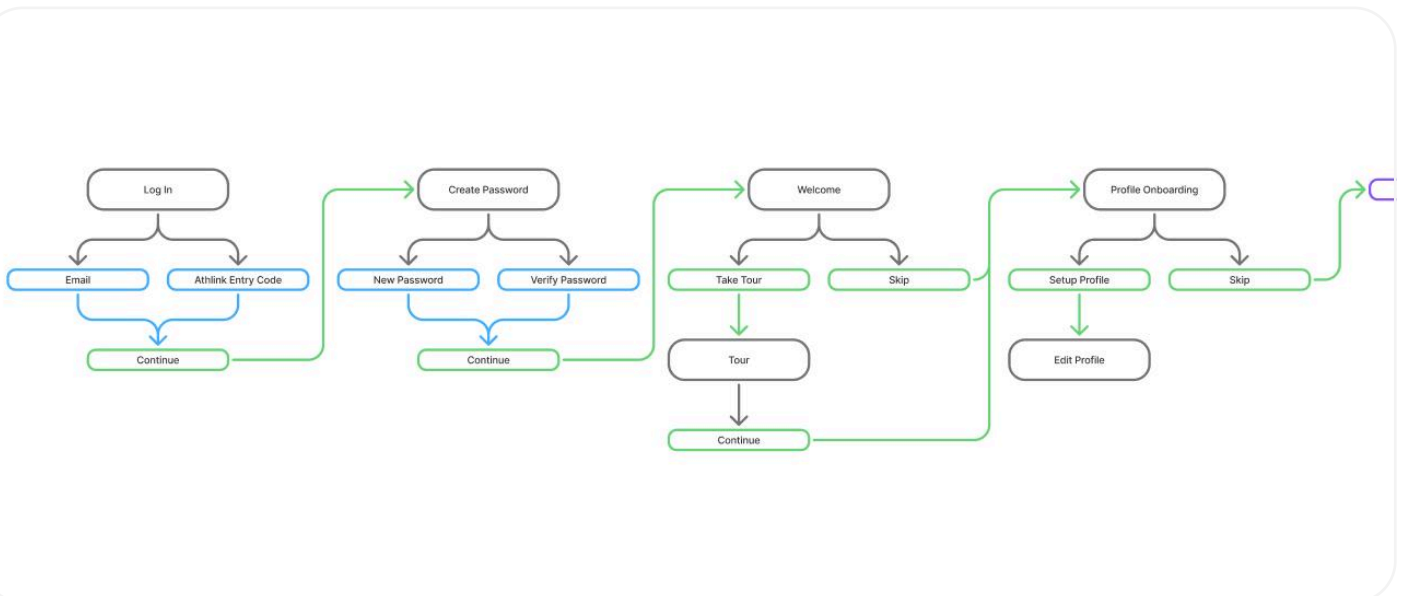
# Problem

Early strategy sessions revealed the core tension: Balancing network growth with trust. Unlike open platforms, AthLink's value hinges on verified, curated connections—preventing dilution while avoiding stagnation.

From founder sessions, I identified risks: Users like athletes (seeking fair shots without begging), coaches (extending legacies without friction), and recruiters (needing character signals over noise) demand intent-driven flows rooted in real credibility.

## Athlink-Specific Connections

 <p>THE COACH - MARKUS WILLIAMS</p>	<p><b>COACH WILLIAMS</b></p>	<p><b>DARIUS KING</b></p> <p>Marcus coached Darius for 4 seasons and always saw him as dependable and quietly driven. When Darius appears in AthLink's "Seeking Opportunities" feed, Marcus endorses him immediately and creates a direct intro to Natalie.</p>	<p><b>NATALIE CHEN</b></p> <p>Marcus met Natalie years ago at a collegiate leadership summit. Though they rarely kept in touch, AthLink's recruiter tools prompt her to reach out after seeing Marcus's name attached to Darius's profile. Their connection is reignited through the platform.</p>	<p><b>FORMER ATHLETES</b></p> <p>AthLink's coach dashboard reveals that 6 of Marcus's former players are active on the platform—3 are marked as "Open to Opportunities." He endorses 2 of them and messages one directly to check in.</p>	<p><b>REPUTATION LOOP</b></p> <p>After Natalie hires Darius, Marcus is notified through AthLink's "Legacy Impact" module. He receives an in-app badge for "Successful Introduction," reinforcing his value to both the platform and his athletes.</p>
 <p>THE ATHLETE - DARIUS KING</p>	<p><b>COACH WILLIAMS</b></p> <p>Darius was invited by Coach Williams. Their former bond remains strong, and the platform gives Coach an easy path to endorse and re-engage his former athletes.</p>	<p><b>DARIUS KING</b></p>	<p><b>NATALIE CHEN</b></p> <p>Darius didn't know Natalie before joining. She found him through filters set to "Coach-Endorsed," "Kinesiology," and "Seeking." Their interaction happened only because of AthLink's curated trust network.</p>	<p><b>FORMER TEAMMATES</b></p> <p>Through the Locker Room feed, Darius reconnects with 2 former teammates (one now working in sports media, another starting a nonprofit). These reconections lead to meaningful backchannel intros and future opportunities.</p>	<p><b>HIDDEN PATHWAYS</b></p> <p>AthLink's visual "Coach Tree" shows Darius he's 2 degrees away from a high profile recruiter he admires—via another coach he trained with at a summer camp. This triggers him to message that coach for an intro.</p>
 <p>THE RECRUITER - NATALIE CHEN</p>	<p><b>COACH WILLIAMS</b></p> <p>Natalie recognizes Marcus from past athlete leadership summits. When browsing for new hires, she filters AthLink candidates by "Coach-Endorsed" and sees his name on Darius's profile. That single signal gives her confidence to reach out.</p>	<p><b>DARIUS KING</b></p> <p>Natalie never would have found Darius through LinkedIn or a resume submission. AthLink surfaces him via smart matching tied to his Kinesiology degree, seeking status, and Marcus's endorsement. After a quick convo, she hires him for a hybrid operations role at KineticOps.</p>	<p><b>NATALIE CHEN</b></p>	<p><b>VERIFIED ATHLETES</b></p> <p>Following Darius's success, Natalie bookmarks 5 more coach-endorsed athletes from the platform. She flags 2 for future roles and messages one about an internship opportunity at KineticOps.</p>	<p><b>FEEDBACK LOOP</b></p> <p>After hiring Darius, Natalie logs the hire in AthLink. This updates both Darius's and Marcus's dashboards. It also boosts Natalie's visibility as a trusted recruiter and triggers a system nudge to other coaches with eligible talent.</p>



# Approach

I synthesized founder insights into a multi-role permission system, defining interactions across athletes, coaches, mentors, and recruiters. This emphasized invite-driven, relationship-based connections over open requests—e.g., endorsements as trust signals and "Legacy Trees" for coach impact tracking.

To inform this, I modeled key scenarios: A coach endorses an athlete, triggering recruiter visibility and hires. This guided UX decisions like one-click intros and smart filters, all prototyped mobile-first. Early design system foundations (components like badges and profile cards) ensured scalable iteration without rework.

### Multi-Persona Journey Map

STAGE	COACH MARKUS WILLIAMS	DARIUS KING (ATHLETE)	NATALIE CHEN (RECRUITER)
1. INVITE / ONBOARDING	Receives invite → onboards quickly due to .edu verification and coach-tailored UX.	Receives invite from Coach → joins because it feels legit and exclusive.	Logs into Athlink to explore athlete-backed hires. Uses saved filters.
2. NETWORK DISCOVERY	Browses past rosters → sees Darius is active and seeking.	Browses Locker Room → sees Coach and teammates engaged. Feels reconnected.	Filters candidates by endorsement, degree, and career intent.
3. ENDORSEMENT TRIGGER	Clicks Darius's profile → writes a quick, meaningful endorsement.	Gets notified of Coach's public support. Updates profile to "Seeking Opportunities."	Sees Darius at top of filtered search. Spots "Coach Endorsed" and reads Marcus's quote.
4. OPPORTUNITY MATCHING	Notices Natalie is active and remembers her from leadership circles. Sends intro: "Darius is your kind of talent."	Surprised and motivated that he's now in front of someone like Natalie.	Reads profile + coach endorsement → sends personal message to Darius.
5. INTRODUCTION & RESPONSE	Gets notified that intro was accepted. Feels like he's still coaching.	Responds to Natalie. Schedules intro call. Thanks Coach privately.	Schedules intro. Notes alignment between Darius's background and open role.
6. OUTCOME	Receives private update: "Darius hired." Feels validated, motivated to refer others.	Starts job at KineticOps. Shares a shoutout in Locker Room: "Never left the team."	Hires Darius. Logs hire under Coach's name in platform. Feels good about the loop.

**SCENARIO**  
A trusted coach joins the platform → reconnects with a former athlete → endorses him → recruiter notices → athlete lands a job.

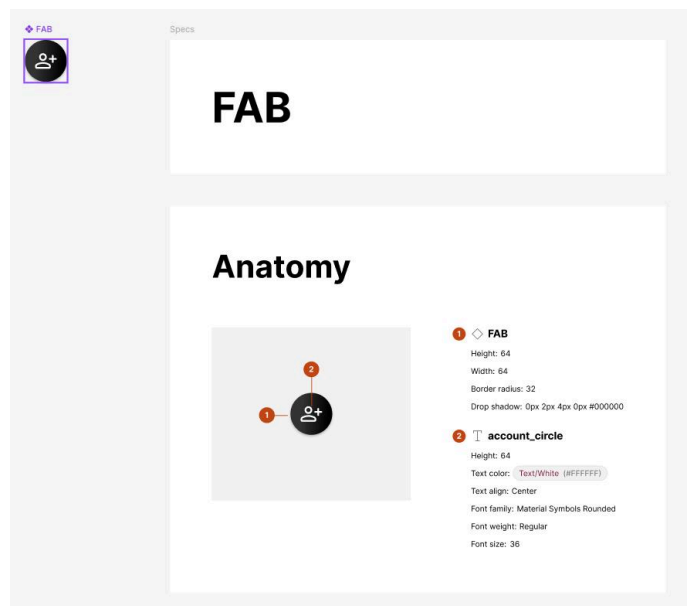
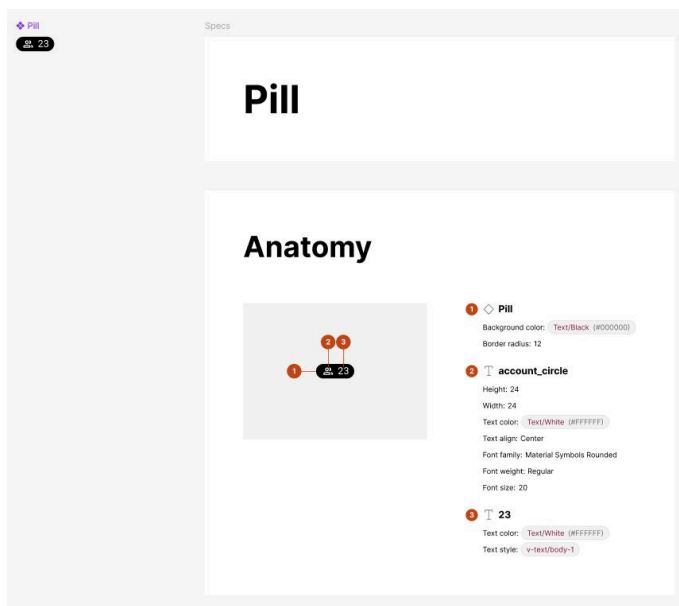
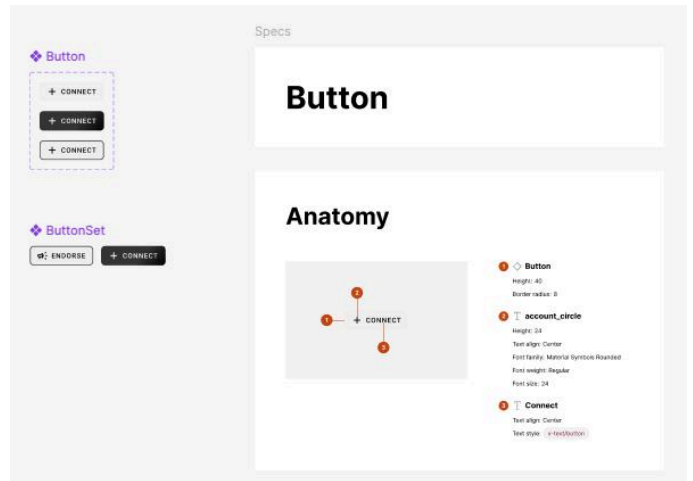
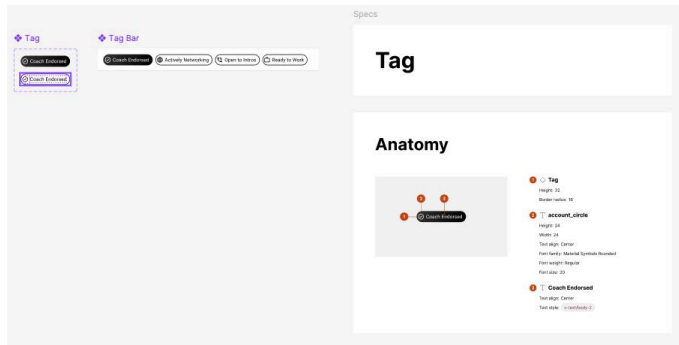
# Custom Components

I built the app with custom components to ensure scalable, consistent UX from day one. A couple key examples include:

- Endorsement Badges: Coach-verified icons that surface trust signals on profiles, reducing open-network risks.
- Profile Cards: Modular cards with role-specific fields (e.g., athlete's major/endorsements, recruiter's hiring tags), enabling fast iteration.

These foundations allow branding overlays later while maintaining minimalism—the founder praised the approach for its focus on core functionality over aesthetics.

# Component Examples



## Outcome

The resulting architecture supports curated growth: Athletes gain validated pathways (e.g., "Never left the team" hires); coaches track legacy impacts via notifications; recruiters close loops efficiently with endorsed matches.

Primed for scaling, it de-risks the platform—permissions prevent open risks while enabling features like gamified badges. Designed for 80% faster intros per modeled flows and higher retention through trust signals. The founder gained a clear roadmap for engineering and pivots; full prototypes available upon request.

# My Role

- Defined 0–1 product architecture as Independent Consultant.
- Modeled multi-role permissions for trust, exclusivity, and governance.
- Designed scenario-informed prototypes, including endorsement flows and visual trust cues.
- Established foundational design system for scalable development.
- Advised founder on strategy, translating insights into executable, business-aligned features.
- Full Figma prototypes upon request.



**The Athlete**

## Darius King

**ABOUT**

Darius was a starting safety at a Power 5 school, known for his discipline, quiet leadership, and film-room IQ. He graduated this past spring and, like many, didn't get a pro call. His degree was solid, but his connections are fading fast. He misses the structure and brotherhood of the locker room—and he's realizing that networking after sports is an entirely different game.

**ARCHETYPE**

**"The Proving Ground"**  
He's done with the applause. Now he's building the next win—off the field.

**GOALS & NEEDS**

- Get connected to job opportunities that value his athlete mindset (discipline, leadership, grit).
- Stay connected to teammates, coaches, and other athletes who "get it."
- Build a personal brand post-sports.
- Get real, actionable referrals—not just empty recruiter emails.

**BEHAVIORS & ATTITUDES**

- Uses LinkedIn but feels disconnected from it ("not built for us").
- Posts occasionally on Instagram about training or motivation.
- Loyal to people who've helped him—values mentorship and team-first mentalities.
- Doesn't want handouts—just a fair shot.

**PAIN POINTS**

- No career center understands athletes.
- Feels isolated post-graduation.
- Frustrated by platforms that emphasize follower count over actual merit.
- Tired of people assuming he has no professional skills beyond sports.

**PREFERRED TOOLS & CHANNELS**

- Mobile-first user.
- Comfortable with DMs, group chats, short-form content.
- Email for formality, but rarely initiates contact that way.
- Has used fitness or sports apps like Hudl, Nike Training Club, and GroupMe.

**PERSONALITY**

Introsert ————— Extrovert  
Analytical ————— Creative  
Bay ————— Time rich  
Mehy ————— Organized  
Independent ————— Team player

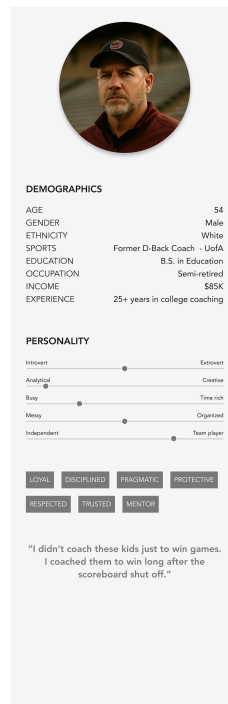
**DEMOGRAPHICS**

AGE 23  
GENDER Male  
ETHNICITY Black  
SPORTS Former Safety - UofA  
EDUCATION B.S. in Kinesiology  
OCCUPATION Part-Time Trainer + DoorDash  
INCOME <\$40K  
EXPERIENCE Internships

**PERSONALITY**

HUMBLE DISCIPLINED QUIET DRIVEN  
RESILIENT LOYAL

"I don't need a handout—I need a pass. Get me in the room and I'll show them who I am."



**The Coach**

## Marcus Williams

**ABOUT**

Coach Williams earned his stripes the hard way—he wasn't a star athlete, but a grinder who worked his way into coaching and spent decades shaping players like Darius King. He's coached dozens who went pro and hundreds who didn't. He stays in touch with his athletes long after the final whistle, helping them with resumes, job referrals, or sometimes just a pep talk. He sees Athlink as a way to extend the sideline—to keep coaching even after the game ends.

**ARCHETYPE**

**"The Builder"**  
He's not here for credit—he's here to see his players win the next chapter.

**GOALS & NEEDS**

- Maintain connection with past athletes to help them transition into real careers.
- Quickly and credibly vouch for the character and discipline of former players.
- Build a trusted digital "coaching tree" that reflects the legacy he's built.
- Reduce reliance on spreadsheets, texts, and email chains for alumni tracking.

**BEHAVIORS & ATTITUDES**

- Straight shooter. Doesn't sugarcoat anything.
- Respected in the coaching community for integrity and development-focused approach.
- Slow to adopt new tech, but once he's in, he's loyal.
- Finds pride in quietly watching former players thrive in life after football.

**MOTIVATORS**

- Wants to be remembered as more than a coach—someone who helped shape futures.
- Cares deeply about athlete identity beyond sport.
- Legacy is more important to him than record books.

**PAIN POINTS**

- Constantly asked to introduce players to recruiters, job contacts, or alumni—but has no clean workflow.
- Doesn't trust most recruiting platforms—they're built for talent acquisition, not personal development.
- Feels guilt when a hardworking athlete like Darius gets left behind because they weren't "lucky."

**PREFERRED TOOLS & CHANNELS**

- Uses email regularly and iPhone for calls/texts.
- Checks social media passively but doesn't post much.
- Familiar with Hudl, GroupMe, and Google Sheets for team management.
- Needs tools that don't waste his time—he's got "coach brain."

**PERSONALITY**

Introsert ————— Extrovert  
Analytical ————— Creative  
Bay ————— Time rich  
Mehy ————— Organized  
Independent ————— Team player

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

AGE 54  
GENDER Male  
ETHNICITY White  
SPORTS Former D-Back Coach - UofA  
EDUCATION B.S. in Education  
OCCUPATION Semi-retired  
INCOME \$85K  
EXPERIENCE 25+ years in college coaching

**PERSONALITY**

LOYAL DISCIPLINED PRAGMATIC PROTECTIVE  
RESPECTED TRUSTED MENTOR

"I didn't coach these kids just to win games. I coached them to win long after the scoreboard shut off."