

AJ Crowder trades in his Govs top hat for an APSU graduation cap

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APSU SUBMISSION



AJ Crowder graduated from APSU on May 8, with a bachelor's degree in communication media with a focus in sports communication. SUBMITTED

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he became Austin Peay State

He arrived in Clarksville in 2022 from Greenbrier, better known then as Bobby the Bobcat, calling Austin Peay his “book of empty pages.”

He wrote his story by making the Gov larger than life and by learning, in the classroom

and on the field, how to tell the university's story well. His final project traced the pop-culture inspirations behind the Gov, from costumes and dances to the "showstopper" pose, tying sports communication concepts directly to what fans see on game day.

"The lessons that I've learned in the classroom, in the costume and just as a human here at Austin Peay State University are some of the biggest lessons that I've learned in my life," Crowder reflects.

Over four seasons, Crowder helped redefine game-day energy at Austin Peay, leading a refreshed look for the Gov midway through his tenure, crafting skits rooted in campus and Clarksville culture, and taking the character into some of college sports' biggest venues at the University of Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama and Louisville. If they remembered the Gov, that was a win in his book.



Crowder hopes to take his mascot talent to the pros now.

He competed at collegiate mascot nationals each year, finishing second as a freshman and winning a national championship as a sophomore, the first in APSU history.

His final national's routine was part reflection, part thank-you note, an homage to his four years at APSU that ended with the high school dance that first put him on the path to becoming the Governor.

He had already reached the top and now he wanted people to remember the name. The last 10 seconds went viral on TikTok, prompting a flood of comments asking, "Who are the Governors?"

Beyond the Gov, Crowder broadened his professional toolkit with an internship at Nashville Soccer Club, working directly with the NSC mascot, Tempo, on professional mascot development, writing skits and building social media campaigns.

Across his college career, he stepped into eight different mascots, adapting to new voices, fan bases and environments while keeping the same core approach: joy first,

people first.

To whoever wears the top hat next, his guidance is simple and sturdy: Be yourself, represent Austin Peay the best you can and do not let expectations bury your passion. Protect your academics and mental health; it is OK to say no to a last-minute request if it costs you more than it gives. The bar is higher than it was, he admits, but the job is not to outdo yesterday, it is to make the right moments today.

Crowder is sending reels and resumes from coast to coast, looking for mascot and mascot-manager roles in the pros. His sports communication degree will travel with him, and he hopes to bring that same mix of showmanship and storytelling that he had at APSU. “Wherever I’m needed, I’ll go,” he said. “I can’t wait to raise the bar and take on what’s next.”

He has a parting message for the place that shaped him.

“If you’re part of this wonderful university or this outstanding community in Clarksville, keep spreading that love,” Crowder said. “Go the extra mile and make a positive impact. It only takes one handshake, one high five, one positive interaction, to turn somebody’s day around for the better.”

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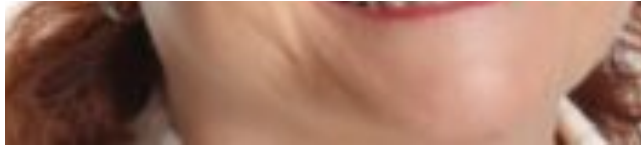
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