

## Derek Benedict

With this rewrite, I hope to clarify a few ideas and expand on some others with the intent of illustrating a more complete piece of writing.

At the age of eighteen, I had my first chance to visit to New York City. I was painting custom shoes in my garage for about two years before I was invited to a 'celebrity gift lounge' event for Super Bowl XLVIII. DMC Kicks was the name of my company at the time, and we were urged to be a vendor at DirecTV's Celebrity Beach Bowl gift lounge. At this time, I was working with NBA players and artists across the globe, and I was looking for my shot to emerge as one of the prime sneaker artists in the nation. I was, of course, super thrilled to be headed to the golden land of opportunity, where I would be posing with celebrities and exposing my brand through a Super-

Bowl-affiliated event, and in doing so, one has to be well-dressed and presentable.

I was bringing a friend along who had helped me run the business, and our teenage-minded ideal, go-to apparel in this condition was a set of custom sky blue, retro baseball jerseys, sort of like *The Sandlot's* Benny The Jet Rodriguez. We wanted to match the kicks on display, and we were going to look fly. The event coordinators, however, imposed a more professional dress code, so my mother agreed to buy me my very first nice suit for such an extraordinary event. We settled on a casually elegant pair of Hugo Boss waxed jeans and a blazer, both black. I had never really worn jeans

growing up, and when I wore anything other than sweatpants, they never fit quite right. This pair, however, was truly a perfect fit. I want to describe them with fancy words like “meticulously refined” and “delicately exquisite,” but the only way to genuinely capture their essence is to say that they are *dope*. I was so eager to pull up to this celebrity lounge in this grand outfit and show the world everything that custom kicks could be.

We arrived, and it suddenly became apparent that the managing company in charge of luring in vendors had remarkably oversold what the event would be; even *they* were upset over the circumstances. Representatives of dozens of brands were packed into a hotel basement to market their labels to the reluctant C-grade celebrities filtering throughout the rooms. I had paid to meet the big names from the big screen, not to shake hands with the backup tight end in

a hotel basement, and the event was an immense disappointment. It was a grand promise that had fallen short, not to mention that it was an utter waste of money to hand out free items to people with little intention to promote me.

Now, I still have the Hugo Boss jeans that I wore for all three days of this event, and I don't have some awesome legacy tied to them, but I do still have a strong appreciation for them. I've carried them with me as a piece to wear sporadically for special events, mostly because I feel guilty wearing those nice pants on ordinary days. On some days they remind me of the exciting journey that prompted me to buy them, and on other days I am reminded of the expectations of the brand that were never fulfilled. They serve as a reminder of an era in my life with great promise yet great limitations. They induce a reflection on decisions that I made with this brand that

I have since learned to develop for better outcomes. Simply, there are better ways to promote a brand than to pay someone to hand out your product for free. Do not put your money in other people's hands and expect them to help you out, even if they have the power. We are often promised ideas that are better in theory than in reality, and that is the memory woven into the fabric of those jeans.