Innovation is one of the core values of SMU Athletics. An athletics department’s openness to new ideas can be a game-changer regarding the growth of a program. The key to innovation is looking into the future, seeing what’s on the horizon, and being willing to take some calculated chances. As a program, we saw the opportunity to connect with our younger alumni, more than digital artwork. We saw it as an opportunity to shape what the next chapter of Division III will look like.

"NFT" is a trendy buzzword today. Everyone is trying to understand this asset and the space that has taken the digital world by storm. SMU is no different, but for us, we saw something more than digital artwork. We saw it as an opportunity to connect with our younger alumni, to meet them where they are. An NFT could be considered an investment in what it represents, and what it allows the owner to access. To better understand this concept ourselves, and for our fanbase, we felt art should be our first step.

We did not want to release an NFT just for the sake of releasing one. If we were going to launch an NFT project, we wanted to do it right, to make it meaningful to both our department and, more importantly, our community. With his induction into the College Football Hall of Fame in December, it became clear to us who should be the subject of this first SMU NFT - famed “Pony Express” All-American and Mustang legend Eric Dickerson. Honoring Eric in itself would’ve been enough to make the NFT meaningful, but bringing in a local artist to do the artwork was the cherry on the top of this digital cake. While blockchain technology is clearly the future, it is a mountainous task to take on alone. We needed partners - and we found them in Zelus.

Zelus is company at the forefront of creativity with a passion for storytelling founded by an SMU alumnus. We agreed with Zelus that there had to be two essential aspects for an NFT project to be meaningful for everyone involved. First, the content has to reach the heart of our fans. Secondly, there had to be real-world functionality. While the digital art aspect of NFTs is groundbreaking by itself, people still crave real-world experiences like a meet-and-greet with Eric. The experiences are just as important as the art. Owning a piece of digital art is a social signal, but participating in exclusive experiences because of that ownership is a higher-form of cultural currency.

We at SMU take pride in being leaders in athletics and academics. We are proud that we will be leaders in collegiate athletics NFTs. We are proud to honor an athlete who has had such great success both in and after college. And we are proud to stay true to our commitment towards innovation in order to bring this historic collection to our community.