

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Balmain puts function first, per new Puma sports drop

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In partnership with Puma, the brand has released the first-ever playable designer basketball sneaker, the centerpiece of a new campaign. Image credit: Puma

By AMIRAH KEATON

French fashion label Balmain and German sportswear brand Puma are back with a second-time luxury release for American basketball fans and global sneakerheads alike.

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In a move that merges cultures, the house has brought two of the league's best talents together for a tribute to fostering childhood dreams, a category under which professional athletic pursuits often fall. National Basketball Association player Kyle Kuzma meets the Women's National Basketball Association's Skylar Diggins-Smith on the court for Balmain x Puma.

"Back in 2019, I worked closely with the Puma team on a boxing-inspired Balmain x Puma offering," said Olivier Rousteing, creative director at Balmain, in a statement.

"Obviously, I loved creating that capsule but for this second time around, I really wanted to set our focus on the thrills of basketball," Mr. Rousteing said. "Over here, we're all big fans of 'le basket' and French people are extremely dedicated to their favorite American teams."

"So, I've long believed that a mix of Balmain's modern Parisian luxury codes and 'b-ball' emotion would make for the perfect combination and I am very happy that Puma has joined with me and my team to help prove that hypothesis."

The "Balmain Court"

The new, limited-edition collaboration embraces function with a few updates.

Whereas Mr. Rousteing's initial go with Puma honed in on the world of boxing, this round doubles down on one of the most popular sports in the U.S.

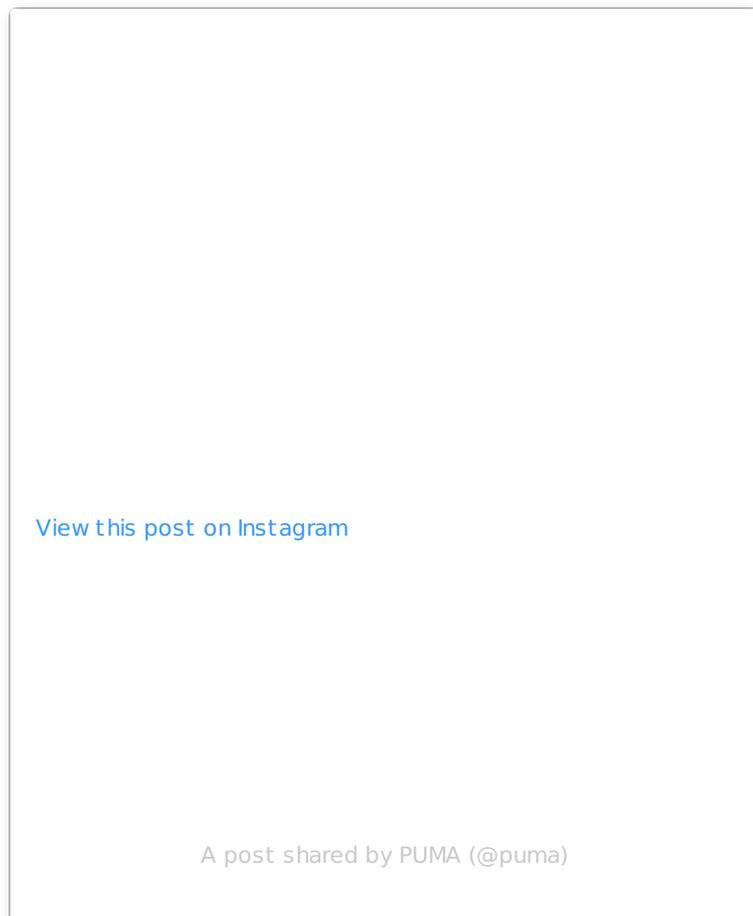
Here, the world's first-ever playable luxury basketball shoe, "The Balmain Court" selection steals the show.

Essentially, the sneaker pairs such materials as performance mesh, supportive cushioning via high-rebound

ProFoam and high-abrasion rubber at the midsole, a multi-directional traction aid, with the maison's high-quality Italian leather.

The Balmain Court also features a golden, branded tongue label and co-branding at the midsole and strap, in addition to Balmain x Puma heel webbing. Packaging is not exempt from the custom conversation – shoes come with an exclusive Balmain basketball shoe box as well.

The special-edition dunks serve as the centerpiece of a new campaign.



Within the excerpt, younger versions of Mr. Kuzma, who has played for the NBA's Washington Wizards team since 2021, and Ms. Diggins-Smith, of the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury as of 2020, are seen striving towards a rare caliber of elite athleticism from the early onset.

Decked out in Balmain x Puma goodies, viewers watch as the two defy gravity in the gym, and confirm that greatness is always within reach at a press conference.

"Only you can deem a dream a dream," reads the post's caption.

Fashion-meets-sports affair

Balmain x Puma clothing designs are now available at Balmain.com and at the brand's Paris, Milan, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York City and Miami flagships. Harrods Men in London, Printemps Homme in Paris and Saks in New York will also stock the collection.

Meanwhile, priced at \$1,000, the Puma x Balmain Court sneaker can only be purchased via the Puma and Balmain sites, in addition to the Puma New York City flagship, its only offline destination.

As seen throughout the clip, codes are transformed to fit a set of familiar clothing silhouettes, including warm-up tops and tees. Jogging bottoms, shorts and baseball caps help complete the look.

Otherwise, a leather varsity jacket embroidered with the Balmain x Puma logo retails for \$5,395 and, at \$475, the collection's black-and-gold basketball is standout.

A few factors differ from the partner brand's first stint, which tapped English model Cara Delevigne ([see story](#)) with Puma, working to strengthen this second delivery.

For one, the models featured are actual sports stars.



American professional basketball player Kyle Kuzma of the NBA's Washington Wizards fronts Balmain x Puma. Image credit: Puma

Heightening authenticity through trial, Mr. Kuzma was able to premiere the limited-edition designs, wearing the "Balmain Court" ahead of launch at a game between his home team and the Charlotte Hornets this month.

With Balmain's frontrunners hailing from the industry themselves, a relatable campaign narrative flows with relative ease.

Also, lest audiences forget, Balmain was established in 1945 ([see story](#)).

With a comparatively recent founding year, and a younger-than-average creative director, perhaps the house is more poised for a partner like Puma, or a product like those to be found across its most recent collection

Of all luxury entities, dipping into the athleisure market may make the most sense here.

"Over here, we're all big fans of le basket' and French people are extremely dedicated to their favorite American teams," Mr. Rousteing said, in a statement.

"Plus, honestly, is there any group of athletes more fashionable than basketball players?"