



FROM THE PLAYING FIELD TO THE COURTROOM OR THE BOARDROOM. WHAT TURNS A GREAT ATHLETE INTO A GREAT LAWYER?

In the last two Stories Books, we examined the intersection of law, creative pursuits, and other disciplines not often associated with the practice of law: fiction and non-fiction writing (2020) and music (2021). This year, we turn our attention to athletics.

How does one transition from the playing field to the courtroom or the boardroom? What are the connections between such physical and intellectual pursuits? What are the transferable skills and lessons, from sports practice and play to law school and the practice of law? We spoke with College of Law alumni and a current student who have competed in sports at the highest levels in both team and individual disciplines to learn how their experiences as athletes have informed their careers.

ON HUMILITY

Frank W. Ryan IV '90, L'94 (Syracuse University Wrestling 1987-1990) Americas Chair, Global Co-Chair, and Global Co-CEO, DLA Piper

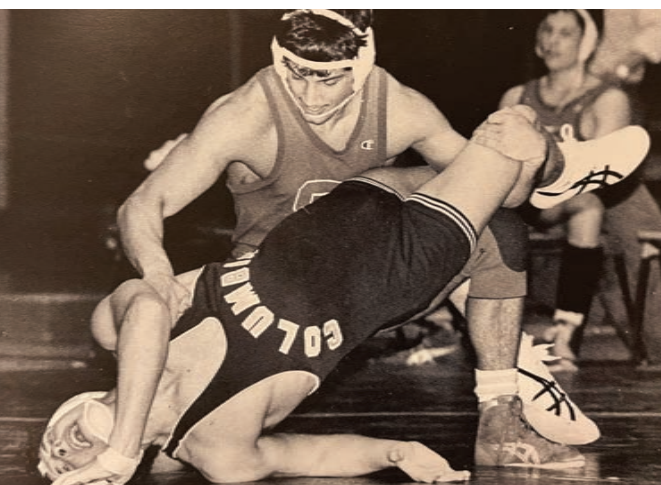
Wrestling teaches you humility. Mistakes on the mat lead to embarrassment. You must prepare to be humbled. You see your teammates struggle, and press, and find out who they really are when the storm hits.

David Moffitt L'96 (Professional hockey 1984-1986, Erie Golden Blades, Mohawk Valley Comets, Flint Spirit, 1996 Binghamton Whalers) Co-Head of US Credit Management, Investcorp

What hockey or any sport teaches you is a sense of selflessness and that you succeed as a team. You know there's a time when you will sacrifice for the team without a quid pro quo, and if you do the right thing, you hope the right thing happens to you. It's a nice intellectual approach but doesn't always work out that way...

3L Tia Thevenin '18 (Syracuse University Women's Track & Field, 2014-2018; Canadian National Track & Field team, 2013-2020) Syracuse Law Student, 3L

All athletes should go to law school! I say that to my friends who are still competing. The determination and discipline are the same in both. You are used to being knocked down as an athlete. First-year law school will humble you and you need the will to wake up the next day and get it done. There's a quote from track, "success is going from failure to failure without a loss of enthusiasm." That is exactly what law school is. You are going to fail and fail and win and fail, and you have to have that spark and enthusiasm.



Frank W. Ryan IV '90, L'94



3L Tia Thevenin '18

ON TEAMWORK

Matthew J. Moore '91, L'95 (Syracuse University Men's Lacrosse, 1988-1991, three-time National Champion; Professional lacrosse, Philadelphia Wings 1992-1993) Partner, Latham & Watkins LLP, Global Vice Chair of the Technology Industry Group, and a former Global Co-Chair of Latham & Watkins' Intellectual Property Litigation Practice.

I learned so much from being on the SU Lacrosse team, such as the importance of preparation and how to prepare; how to support your teammates, and how to be a leader. Sports are all about competition and getting the best out of you and your team, and we learned how to get the best from ourselves, our teammates, and our team. When you were on that team, one of the fun yet challenging things is that every game you play is the biggest game on your opponent's schedule. Our ability to be mentally and physically prepared for every game was special. It was expected that you would bring 100% every day; otherwise you would be letting the team down. This work ethic was critical to the next-man-up philosophy that helped those teams win game after game. That work ethic—if you can take that experience and translate it to any job—you'll be successful.

A trial is also a team sport. I might do the opening and the closing, but if the documents are not ready when I reach for them, the team is not positioned for success. You need the mouthpiece, the people that understand the technology, the people that help with the examination outlines, the people who know the record, the logistics of getting the witnesses at the right time, and so much more. You must value all the people who put it all together with you equally because you would not succeed without them.

Ryan: *Student-athletes can be powerful lawyers. Great athletes learn the selflessness critical to being an effective teammate, which translates well in the legal industry. Teamwork, equality, and hard work all equal success in sports and law.*

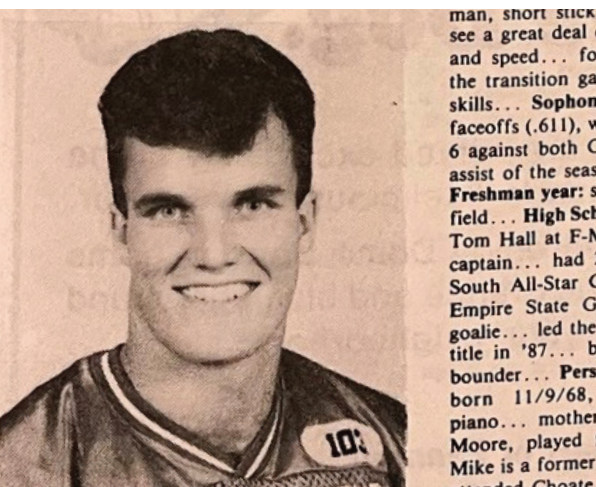
Thevenin: *I use the lessons learned through my athletic experiences every single day in law school, and this was true especially during my first year. Things come at you fast in the 1L year. My classmates are my teammates. True, we are ranked, and that's a mechanism that can divide us, so some people fear it in law school. But I remember sitting in class one day in my first year, as my classmates were speaking, they were offering perspectives that I didn't consider, and that made me better. It's like how teammates with different talents helped make me better. I realized I needed them to make me better. You put in work to see incremental changes. In law when you are trying to grasp a concept there's always room for improvement, so it reminds me of hurdles.*

I contrast the hurdles to life. You have obstacles you have to tackle and keep going. Track and field allowed me to stay sharp. I'm a high-energy person so hurdles were a good way to express who I am. The relay allows you to work with a team for a common goal. That's transferable to any place in life as teamwork.

ON COMPETITION

Moffitt: Law school is almost the antithesis of playing a team sport. There's a lot of competitiveness in any forced ranking system that mitigates against being a team player. Because it is a forced ranked competitive environment, many don't know how to handle the competition. The one thing that helped me in law school was that I was a competitive athlete, and I knew how to handle one-on-one competition. You would watch people melt down in ways that were modestly embarrassing, like a teacher gives you a facial in class because you said something stupid, and I would just laugh. I had this great professor that I was terrified of but learned a lot from in first-year: property Professor **Laura Lape**. She terrified everybody. She was so tough in the Socratic dialogue that if you said something ridiculous, she would pause, and you knew it would be five minutes of torture. She is a genuinely nice person but takes her job seriously and the level of intellectual rigor you needed to bring to that class was probably the most I had to bring to any class. I've been yelled at by coaches, had things thrown at me, been verbally humiliated... the level of mental toughness coming out of a professional sport, knowing what it is like to spend three days on a bus you are sleeping on, play three games in three days and have your "A-game," prepares you for law school.

Moore: A trial is just like a game. You use individual skills, work ethic, and preparation. What great athletes and trial lawyers learn to do is overcome the fear and anxiety of competition. So many people never get over the fear of public speaking much less speaking in front of a jury. One of the things about being a trial lawyer is that it is the opposing counsel's job to make you look bad. You are in that arena every day. You, and everyone on the team, must prepare enough so that your case comes through to the jury. Whether it's the National Championship game or in a trial, you need to prepare and execute so you deserve victory. One of the things that gravitated me to this job is I can continue to compete and get the thrill as I did with Syracuse winning national championships.



Matthew J. Moore '91, L'95



David Moffitt L'96

ON LEADERSHIP

Moffitt: When you are a leader on a sports team, you need to lead from the front, make the sacrifices and be the one willing to give up the most. By doing that, others will emulate the behavior, and if you have a good team they will do even more. It's something I learned from sports and it's something I do to this day.

I recently read a quote from Napoleon: "leaders transact in hope." And that's the difference between leadership and management. Managers will tell you what to do, how to do it, and when to get it done. Leaders create a vision and communicate it to internal and external stakeholders. They don't tell you how to get there, they lead you there. If you go off the track, they'll go back and bump you back on the track. Leaders never tell you how to do things. They give you a vision of what it will look like when it's done and leave it to your creativity to get it done.

Moore: We had some great leaders. Gary Gait was not one for great speeches, but I can see why he's so successful as a coach. He led by example. He never acted like he was the best player on the team. Same with Paul [Gait]. They were just always working on the game. They did not think of themselves as the best or most important players. They were very humble, nice, and respectful to everyone. When you are that good, sometimes those lead players can put themselves before the team - not the Gaits. They acted like they were any other player. They valued and appreciated everyone on the team; the walk-ons, the trainers, the backups, they made everyone feel just as important as they were. That's not easy to do at that age, getting all that attention and having all the success they did. But they demonstrated leadership by example, working hard to get the most out of themselves and supporting everyone around them to get the most out of the team.

Thevenin: The best way to lead in sports is by how you carry yourself, through example and learning as a servant leader. I learned in law school it doesn't have to be just one way. Leadership plays into how you affect changes.

THE FINAL WORD

What are the ties that bind athletes and lawyers? The competitive spirit, the strategic and tactical thinking, the willingness to sacrifice for the team and the greater good, the ability to perform under pressure, the desire to excel, and the determination to stay fit (physically, mentally, and emotionally). Moore sums it up: *Successful athletes can be good at anything if they learn how to transfer their work ethic and leadership on the field into their work ethic and leadership off the field. Some get it and some don't. If you can transfer what you learn from sports into being a lawyer, you will be successful.* ■