

CAREER SPOTLIGHT: NORMAN WAIN

Norman Wain is the Chief of Business & Legal Affairs of USA Track & Field. University of California-Berkeley in 1992; Pepperdine University School of Law in 1996.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

I. CAREER QUESTIONS

1. What sort of current challenges do you face in executing your role?

The current challenges, and the ones making the headlines these days, tend to be issues related to governance, transgender athletes, and safe sport. These are all complicated issues that impact our constituents, stakeholders, and fans. This need to balance all of those interests and remain true to our mission of achieving competitive excellence and popular engagement in our sport presents a lot of challenges.

2. From your experience, what are ways junior attorneys can be immediately impactful to their employers?

I think the immediate impact junior lawyers bring to employers is their fresh perspective on the issues and their technological prowess. Junior lawyers can also provide value with their social network and access to others who might have different approaches to tackling some of the challenges their respective organizations face.

II. TREND QUESTIONS

3. What changes or developments have you seen in entertainment and sports over the past few years?

The manner in which the entertainment and sports product is being consumed and monetized continues to evolve. My interests have always been in the business of sports, so I have been paying close attention to how those business models change as we continue to embrace new technologies. The digital media rights landscape and the newer ways sports properties exploit their intellectual property (IP) are the changes that I have been following over the past few years. Hello Amazon! Wait, I can watch edited versions of games on replay now, or watch multiple games at the same time (tuning into games when teams get into scoring position)?! I can tune into a different platform and get extra audio from the field of play too? I can consume sports while streaming within a digital community? These developments are exciting to watch (and learn about).

4. Law students interested in entertainment and sports are learning that it is an industry or client base and less of a practice area. What practice area expertise do you see a need for in the industry in the next few years? (ex.: IP, labor, advertising, privacy, real estate, etc.)

For me, it would have to be IP. Between esports, the metaverse, Non-Fungible Token (NFT)s, etc. And that doesn't even address the issues with evolving media rights. The IP components are real and the more educated you become in this area, the more valuable you can be within the entertainment and sports industry.

III. ADVICE QUESTIONS

5. With entertainment and sports being a difficult field to break into, what advice would you have for law students trying to do just that?

It's your journey—don't sell yourself short! The path is very difficult, but it's not impossible. The obstacles are challenging and real, but only you know the extent of your commitment and your own willingness to confront that adversity. The journey starts with a commitment to learning how to be a really good lawyer first. There are four core areas of the law that are integral to any corporate generalist (labor & employment, IP, corporate transactions, and litigation), so gaining experience in these areas while you are early in the journey is important. From there, you start building your social network and finding opportunities to get involved in different areas of sports to keep yourself relevant and ensure your intentions are clear. Lastly, you have to be willing to get through the constant rejection and disappointment (which is certainly not easy) as you continue progressing in your career.

6. Practicing law is relationship-based. How do you balance getting to know new people and maintaining your network?

Meeting new people has always remained a priority. When I attend conferences, I am constantly looking to meet new people in addition to catching up with friends. If I collaborate with someone on a panel, I try to reach out and get to know the person and develop a relationship. As previously mentioned, building a network is extremely important on multiple levels, so it requires prioritization and commitment. That said, the benefits are enormous on multiple levels.

IV. PERSONAL QUESTIONS

7. If someone made a movie about your life, who would play you and what would the title of the movie be?

It would have to be Adam Sandler starring in a movie entitled, “How Did HE Get Here?” There have been so many times I have been blessed by certain accomplishments where I just look around and am amazed about how things happened. For example, the national boards of Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) and the Sports Lawyers Association (SLA) are so distinguished that it genuinely feels surreal that I was selected to serve and collaborate with such brilliant and accomplished individuals. Like Sandler, I do tend to be reclusive, but when I do step out publicly, my quirks and my humor are what stands out.

8. What is your favorite music album of all-time?

Depeche Mode 101. It was just that time in my life where the group was alternative (as opposed to mainstream), and they were crossing over and exploding in popularity, which was awesome. The lyrics resonate more than music, and every time I hear the songs, it is like getting in a Bill & Ted’s phone booth time machine and transporting back to that era and those emotions. A most excellent experience!