

YOUNG LAWYERS

Jason C. Pizatella

Chairperson
Young Lawyers Section
The West Virginia State Bar



WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: LAWYERS INVOLVED IN SPORTS

At the recently concluded State Bar Annual Meeting, a woman asked me a question that I'm sure almost all of us have been asked at one point: "Did you always want to be a lawyer?" After a brief pause, I explained to her that long before I decided to go to law school, my dream was to one day be the commissioner of Major League Baseball. But I quickly realized that, despite a persistent letter-writing campaign to Commissioner Allan "Bud" Selig's office, it was unlikely that America's pastime would ever need my services.

And just like the vast majority of high school student-athletes, I did not possess the skills necessary to play at the next level. With my eyes already set on attending law school, during my second year of college at West Virginia University I decided to start officiating high school baseball and basketball. It was a logical way for me to stay

involved in two sports that I liked but no longer played. I found that it also made for an interesting conversation piece. Case in point, the same colleague who asked if I always wanted to be a lawyer followed up by, after hearing this story, inquiring as to how the skill set we possess as lawyers translated into sports officiating.

The answer was easy, if not overly simplistic. In most sports you have two teams who are adverse to each other with each team trying to "win." There is one set of rules to follow, and at the end of the game one team leaves unhappy. Sound familiar? Lawyers, mediators, judges, etc. all face the same set of circumstances on a daily basis but with much higher stakes.

Nonetheless, I began my term as chair of the Young Lawyers Executive Committee reflecting on the role of lawyers in sports generally. I am not referring to the

topics that are taught in traditional "sports law" classes that include many areas of law with general application outside sports such as contract negotiation and drafting, antitrust, labor, intellectual property, anti-discrimination, etc. Rather, my goal here in this abbreviated space is to simply highlight some "big-time" names in sports who have also made their living in the law.

Mike Florio

A native of Wheeling, W.Va., Mike Florio is the editor and primary contributor of Profootballtalk.com, a news and rumor website affiliated with NBC Sports that is devoted to covering the NFL. Florio is a 1991 graduate of the West Virginia University College of Law and practiced labor and employment law for almost 20 years in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Clarksburg, W.Va., before dedicating his full-time talents to writing about professional football.

Ed Hochuli

Ed Hochuli is one of the most respected referees in the NFL, having worked numerous playoff games and two Super Bowls. In his day job, however, Hochuli is a founding partner of the firm Jones, Skelton and Hochuli in Phoenix, Ariz. He specializes in civil litigation and products liability defense. Comparing his law and officiating professions, Hochuli said that “on the football field, people like that I’m in charge and know what I’m doing, but a lot of the time, it’s just appearance. I’m going to sell you on my decision. It’s the same in the courtroom. You don’t stand in front of a jury and say, ‘I think my client is innocent.’ You say, ‘We’re right!’”

Jay Bilas

Jay Bilas is a former college basketball player for Duke University who helped lead the Blue Devils to the Final Four and a national championship in 1986. Bilas received his law degree from Duke University School of Law in 1992 and is currently of counsel in the Charlotte, N.C., office of Moore and Van Allen, where he focuses on litigation. Bilas is probably better known, however, for working as a college basketball analyst for ESPN and CBS Sports.

Dan Bellino

Major League Baseball promoted Dan Bellino to the full-time umpiring staff in 2011 after having worked in the minor leagues since 2003. A graduate of the John Marshall Law School, Bellino previously worked for the personal injury firm of Morici, Figlioli & Associates in Chicago, Ill., and served as an aide to Judge Charles P. Kocoras in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

Finally, a very honorable mention goes to David Stern, the commissioner of the National Basketball Association, a Columbia University Law School graduate and a member of the bar in New York State, and Oliver Luck, director of athletics at West Virginia University, graduate of the University of Texas School of Law and member of the WVU Sports Hall of Fame.

I look forward to spending the next year as chairman of the Young Lawyers Executive Committee and encourage you to visit www.wvyounglawyers.com for more information on the services we provide to our membership within The West Virginia State Bar. **WVL**

¹ Bommersbach, Jana (June 2007). Zebra Lawyer. Southwest Super Lawyers 2007: pp. 10–13.

Somerville & Company, P.L.L.C.
 Certified Public Accountants and Consultants

Celebrating
80 YEARS
 1932-2012

Somerville Building
 501 Fifth Avenue • Huntington, WV 25701
 (304) 525-0301 • Online: www.s-co.com

Partners (From left to right)
 Wade S.C. Newell, CPA • Floyd E. Harlow, Jr., CPA
 Barry L. Burgess, CPA • Mark E. Richardson, CPA

Estate & Financial Planning • Accounting & Auditing
 Income Tax Preparation & Planning
 Technology Consulting
 Medical Practice & Healthcare Consulting

Dedicated to providing a variety of financial and strategic services