

Commencement Speech

Using Your Law School Education

Allan (Bud) Selig, commissioner of Major League Baseball, spoke at the Law School's 2009 commencement ceremony. This is an excerpt from his remarks.

I am a native of Milwaukee, and I am very familiar with this wonderful university and the outstanding reputation of Marquette University Law School. I have also had the opportunity to teach here this past semester, which I enjoyed immensely. Although I never attended law school, my friends will tell you that I have practiced law without a license for more than 40 years. I also have one very important and personal connection with Marquette Law School. My daughter, Wendy, is a graduate, and it has served her very well throughout her career, both in and out of baseball.

The importance of an education was impressed upon me at an early age. My mother, Marie, was a teacher, and she believed that a good and proper education was essential to a successful life. That has never been truer than it is today.

Your education and your years here at the Marquette University Law School have prepared you with the knowledge, skills, character, and strength to confront the future with hope and faith. Your legal education will open many doors and provide opportunities far beyond the traditional practice of law. The role of the law and lawyers in professional sports provides an excellent example of these opportunities.



Virtually every aspect of professional sports involves the law or legal issues. Antitrust laws are applied to franchise relocations and other internal governance matters; intellectual property laws are crucial to our business pursuits; and labor laws regulate the relationship between management and players on a daily basis and imbue every aspect of being a commissioner. My frustration at being unable unilaterally to impose rules on myriad subjects—whether the amateur draft, salary restraints, or performance-enhancing substances—because of the need to negotiate changes under the collective bargaining agreement between us and the union has been well documented. Whether the labor laws were designed to protect multimillion-dollar athletes is a subject well worth discussion, but the fact remains that the labor laws of our country have a profound impact on our sport, and every professional sport.

A legal education also helps develop important skills that can create career opportunities. Your professors at Marquette have taught you to write clearly, speak persuasively, and negotiate skillfully. Skills like these have helped me address a unique dynamic in professional sports. Teams must be bitter competitors on the field of play—after all, what we sell is the integrity of our competition—but they must be partners off the field, or the sport cannot be operated, let alone thrive. When teams put their own interests above the collective good, the league as a whole suffers. That is where we found ourselves when I became commissioner, and it took a decade to get the clubs to recognize that as the entire sport grew, so would individual franchises. We have come through a time of extraordinary growth and competitive balance, with eight different teams winning the last nine World Series, and more than half of the teams in the game making the playoffs over the past two years. That took years of negotiating, cajoling, compromising, and incorporating these positive changes into our governing documents. Young lawyers like you are uniquely positioned to develop the kinds of skills that can help create this type of change. ■