



William Miller

The Development of Sports Law at Marquette

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The first time I heard of the concept of sports law and the National Sports Law Institute of Marquette University Law School was in the early 1990s. The idea of combining my two great passions for the law and sports into a potential career had great appeal for me and I was sure that Marquette was where I wanted to go for law school.

In those pre-Internet days, I quickly sent off a request for information about Marquette Law School and the sports law program. Surprisingly, the response I received from the admissions department was rather cold, with a specific warning not to come to Marquette Law School for the Sports Law program. In light of this, I decided to reopen my law school search. In the end, I still made the decision to attend Marquette despite the apparent lack of enthusiasm for the sports law program from the admissions department.

As I went through my first year of law school, I discovered that the lack of enthusiasm for the sports law program was shared by others at MULS. The NSLI offices were in a distant location on 17th Street, and the sports law program had a very small presence in the law school. Many faculty members and administrators that I dealt with seemingly had little need or regard for the program.

When I started my second year at Marquette, professor Marty Greenberg began the first professional sports law class of the semester by stating that it was highly unlikely that we would get a job in sports. At that point, it is safe to say that I was definitely questioning my decision to pursue a legal education at MULS.

However, as my second year went forward, I was able to see a different side of the NSLI and the Sports Law program.

- At the October 1995 Sports Venues, Revenues and Values Conference, I was able to hear noted speakers and scholars from around the world talk about the interaction between sports, the law and finance and why these subjects were so important for both industries and our society going forward.
- At the aforementioned conference and other similar events, I was able to meet many important industry people and hear how they considered the NSLI to be one of the best sports law programs in the world. They also discussed how they viewed it as a necessary and vital resource for both the sports industry and the legal profession. I was fortunate that many of these individuals later became great friends and contacts that have helped me throughout my career.
- I was also able to start working on various NSLI publications including the *Marquette Sports Law Journal*, a variety of newsletters, and research that would eventually start the *Stadium Game* book series.
- I started to meet professors and administrators who clearly valued the Sports Law program and realized the value it provided to the MULS community.
- Finally, I was able to gain valuable industry experience by working for the NSLI as a research assistant and eventually securing an internship with the Milwaukee Brewers, which would greatly help to advance my future sports law career.

By the time I left Marquette Law School in 1996, those of us involved in the Sports Law program felt like we were a small, valuable (and often underappreciated) niche in the MULS community. We often discussed how we felt the program was an underutilized asset of the law school and marveled at the seeming disconnect between the value the sports and legal industries placed on the NSLI versus that placed on it by the MULS community.

Since my departure from Marquette, I have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to stay connected with the Sports Law program and have marveled at the changes that have taken place since I left. Thanks to the vision and leadership of Deans Howard Eisenberg and Joseph Kearney, the MULS community has seemingly fully embraced the Sports Law program and properly valued it for the asset that it is. With ten classes now being offered, gone are the days of students with an interest in sports law like myself having to search for classes that would allow us to do papers or projects that would give us the additional sports law work that we craved. The development of a sport law moot court program that allows students to hone their skills in the context of a subject that is an intellectual passion for them is also a huge advance. Finally, the efforts of Paul Anderson to start a Sport Law Alumni Association in the late-1990s created a sense of lifelong community that allows all of us who go through the program to maintain a connection with the program and the law school as a whole.

While many are stunned by the explosive growth of the Sports Law program over the past fifteen years, the reality is that many of the key foundation elements were already in place. Sure, some names have changed and the scope might be bigger. But, the underlying structure was already there and people such as Marty Greenberg, Charles Mentkowski, and Frank DeGuire are to be commended for their initial vision.

- The NSLI continues to stage outstanding conferences and speaker events with world-renowned speakers that are welcomed by the industry and envied by other schools. These events provide the opportunity for students to advance their knowledge and future career aspirations by meeting top industry personnel.
- While the names and technology might have changed, the NSLI continues to be at the cutting edge in terms of publications and research for the sports law field.
- Students continue to gain valuable experience and contacts through their work for the NSLI and through a variety of high-profile internships both in the Milwaukee area and around the world.
- Finally, the students who go through the program continue to develop into top-notch young attorneys who just happen to have an interest in sports. Because of the broad-based education we received through our involvement with the Sports Law program, our group from the early to mid-1990s would go on to experience varied, yet significant levels of success in the legal and sports professions. The various students I have had the opportunity to meet and work with (who are too numerous to mention) over the past thirteen years have continued that high level of varied, yet significant success in their chosen careers. I have no doubt that future classes will do the same.

In closing, the NSLI and the Sports Law program have enjoyed a great two decades. Thanks to the ongoing leadership of Matt Mitten and the ongoing dedication, skill, and passion of Paul Anderson, the Marquette Sports Law program has clearly distanced itself from its competition to become the premier program of its type in the world. As both the law school and the program begin new chapters in 2010, I and my fellow alumni look forward to seeing what the next twenty years has in store for both.