



Two Decades of Growing Success: The National Sports Law Institute

When the National Sports Law Institute (NSLI) was created two decades ago, it was housed in offices on N. 17th Street, six blocks from the Law School's Sensenbrenner Hall. But in recent years, the NSLI's offices have been one of the things that a visitor encounters upon entering the Wisconsin Avenue doors of the Law School.

Both locations were selected in large part as matters of practical circumstance. Yet there is a symbolism in the two: When the institute was founded in 1989, sports law was not widely recognized as a field of legal study. Academically speaking, it was a pursuit on the periphery of what law schools did.

Now, legal issues are clearly at the heart of much of what happens in American sports, and the validity of sports law as a field and as an academic pursuit is widely recognized.

Furthermore, the sports law program at Marquette Law School has gained national acclaim. Students from across the nation have come to Milwaukee solely because of the program. It now holds an important

spot on the roster of specialties offered by the Law School.

As the National Sports Law Institute celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2009, those involved from the start were able to take pride in what had been accomplished and look with some humor on the early days when they had to struggle to get respect for their choice of legal specialties.

Almost every day now, the news carries a clear underlying message that sports is a huge business—and that huge legal issues, ranging from athletes' contracts to antitrust disputes, are at the core of that business. In fact, in its current term, the U.S. Supreme Court is considering an important antitrust case on whether the National Football League is a single entity or a collection of legal entities, namely, the teams. At stake is control of the lucrative business of team logo paraphernalia, with implications for other business sectors.

The NSLI at Marquette offers a rich set of courses and seminars for students, as well as for practicing lawyers. Over the years, the institute has been host to important sessions

with many of the key figures shaping the American sports scene. Some experts are close at hand: Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig frequently speaks to classes. Others have come from far away to take part in programs.

"The National Sports Law Institute has grown tremendously over the years with its move to the main Law School, its annual conference and journal, and its reputation across the country," Greg Heller, L'96, senior vice president and general counsel of the Atlanta Braves, wrote in a recent newsletter published by the institute.

Clark Griffith, commissioner of the Northern League of Professional Baseball, wrote, "Sports law is the most exciting area of the law for students and practitioners, and the NSLI is the leading institution in furthering the study and practice of sports law."

William Miller, L'96, a faculty member in sports and fitness at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, concluded, "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."

James Ghiardi, L'42, professor emeritus, recalled the roles of people such as Professor Martin Greenberg, L'70, and Dean Frank DeGuire, L'60, and the late Associate Dean Charles Mentkowski, L'48, in launching the institute. "It can be stated with certainty that the NSLI has filled an important need in legal education," Ghiardi wrote. "Nationally and internationally, it has added prestige and recognition to the school." ■



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