

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 160, No. 251

Getting into sports agent business is a tough game

Without a doubt, the question that I am most often asked by law students and recent law school graduates is: "How can I obtain a job as a sports agent?"

My answer is always the same. Unless you are related to the next coming of Michael Jordan, it is extremely difficult and, in most cases, not worth your time and financial investment.

The sports agency sector is one of the most, if not the most, competitive and cutthroat industries in which someone could work.

No matter the particular sport, being a sports agent has a certain sex appeal to it. It has been glamorized by movies, television and books, and there always seems to be a considerable amount of interest in this industry (immediately after the movie "Jerry Maguire" was released in 1996, the number of agent applications requested of the NFL Players Association quintupled).

What you see and read about is only one small part of being an agent, however, and it is most often the fun and exciting part that is publicized. With a few exceptions, you don't often hear about the shady, negative and problematic aspects of being in the sports agent industry.

Far be it from me to discourage someone from chasing their dream and following their passion. I think we all are familiar with the saying, "Do what you love, and you will never work a day."

Well, let me add a nota bene: If

you are going to do what you love, make sure that you can earn a living from it. It doesn't make much sense to love what you're doing but not be able to pay the heating bill.

If being a sports agent is truly what you want to do, I wish you godspeed, my friend. It is extremely difficult to be hired by a sports agency, especially if you are not bringing with you an existing book of business. It is a very time-consuming and expensive business in which to be, and it requires a considerable amount of travel.

If you are adamant about being an agent and cannot land a spot with an agency, however, I suggest first obtaining gainful, full-time employment and moonlighting in the sports agent business on the side. This will allow you to have a steady stream of income and pay your bills until such time as you (hopefully) land a few promising clients.

At that point, you can approach a larger company with the proposition of merging with them and bringing with you your clientele. Depending on who your clients are at that time, you should be able to sell this idea as a win-win for both sides.

One of the best ways to get your feet wet in the sports agent industry is to obtain an internship with an agency or firm while you are still in school. Although these opportunities are few and far between and highly coveted, they do provide excellent hands-on experience as well as the golden opportunity to start networking, which is the key to success in any career.

AGENT OF CHANGE



NELLO P. GAMBERDINO II

Nello P. Gamberdino II has represented professional athletes from three different sports in eight countries. He is a Major League Baseball Players Association certified agent. He represents professional baseball players and acts as an adviser to amateur baseball players who are eligible for MLB's annual first-year player draft. In addition, he is the employer outreach coordinator at The John Marshall Law School, where he earned his J.D.

Of course, there is no guarantee that securing an internship will land you a full-time position with a sports agency once you graduate, but it certainly gets you past the first major obstacle which most people face — obtaining experience.

On the flip side, your internship experience may also help you decide that being an agent just isn't the career path for you.

I also advise people who express an interest in being a sports agent to explore other career opportunities within the sports industry. These alternate sports careers may not be as glamorous as being an agent, but they are often easier to obtain (though, still difficult) and have the potential to lead to greater employment opportunities in the future.

In my opinion, one of the best jobs for a young attorney interested in working in sports is to work in the compliance office of a college or university athletic department. This is a role that is becoming of greater importance, especially considering the multitude of issues the NCAA and its member institutions are facing right now. Moreover, there is usually less competition for these jobs, which obviously makes them easier to obtain.

Other opportunities in sports that a lawyer should look into include working at intercollegiate conference offices — the Big Ten headquarters is right in our backyard in Rosemont — the NCAA, professional teams (scout, player personnel, front office), professional league offices, professional league players associations, sports equipment companies, athletic venues, sports marketing companies, sports consulting companies, trading card companies and high school athletic associations, just to name a few.

Make no mistake, no job in sports will be easy to secure, but I encourage those interested in careers in sports to think outside the box and be open to all possibilities. At the same time, however, it's important to remain realistic with your goals and expectations.

Remember, your first job after graduation is not likely to be your last, so use it to gain experience and make contacts within the industry. This will catapult you in to your next, and hopefully, ideal job in sports.