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Embracing the new normal in sports and the practice of law

AS LAWYERS, WE ARE SKILLED IN ADJUSTING OUR OUTLOOK, TACTICS AND STRATEGIES TO EACH CASE

As I write this article, the Los Angeles Dodgers have clinched Major League Baseball's National League West Division, the Los Angeles Lakers lead in the NBA Western Conference Finals, and the Los Angeles Rams have won their first two games of the NFL season. It feels great to have sports back in the picture after COVID-19 brought seasons to a halt, even if they look and feel a little different. I have been an LA sports fan since I was a young child. Being able to watch games on TV again has felt like the return of part of my identity.

My father and his law partners owned Dodgers season tickets during my childhood and through my 20s, so I was fortunate to attend many games. My first vivid memories were rooting for the teams of the late '70s and early '80s with players like Steve Garvey, Davey Lopes, Ron Cey, Pedro Guerrero, Steve Yeager, Mike Scioscia, Bill Russell, Dusty Baker and Kenny Landreaux. I was lucky enough to attend a game in each of the 1978 and 1981 World Series matchups between the Dodgers and the New York Yankees. I can still feel the excitement that built up with phenom pitcher Fernando Valenzuela's rise to stardom in the 1980s. And it seems like only yesterday that I was jumping up and down in the stands as we watched an injured Kirk Gibson hobble around the bases with his pinch hit walk-off home run in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series vs. the Oakland A's. All these years, I have held on to the World Series baseball cap my dad bought me at that game. I wore it back to Dodgers Stadium in 2017 when the team returned to the World Series for the first time in 29 years. Unfortunately, it did not bring them luck.

The LA Lakers dynasty years

As much love as I had for the Dodgers, I had it tenfold for the LA Lakers. I had watched the Lakers on TV for years before I attended my first live game as a 9-year-old in 1983 when my father's partner gave him his two front-row seats behind the Lakers bench. That team was the reigning champs, featuring Magic Johnson in his third year in the league, as well as Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Jamaal "Silk" Wilkes, James Worthy,

Michael Cooper and Kurt Rambis. My dad had just bought a new VHS recorder and recorded the game. When we returned home I found that, during the singing of the national anthem, we were shown on TV as the camera panned the stands. I still have the VHS tape (and have converted it to a digital file, which I keep in my Dropbox). Like all Angelenos, I was spoiled by the dynasty of the Showtime Lakers who went to the finals nine times between 1980 and 1991, winning five Championships. Eventually, as an attorney, I joined friends in sharing season tickets and was privileged to witness the greatness of the Kobe Bryant era and his five championship runs (three with Shaquille O'Neal and two with Pau Gasol).

Cheering on the Rams

Although I never had the opportunity to attend an LA Rams game before they moved to St. Louis in 1995, I enjoyed watching them on TV when I was young. Even though they had recently moved to Anaheim, and the Oakland Raiders moved to Los Angeles, the Rams still felt like the home team I grew up with. I remember Coach John Robinson leading the team featuring star running back Eric Dickerson, and ultimately quarterback Jim Everett. The Rams had some success during those years, although no Super Bowl rings. Nonetheless, I have fond memories of cheering them on. I have been a season ticket holder since the Rams moved back to Los Angeles and going to those games are amongst my favorite ways to spend a day.

I am a father of two teenage boys. We have attended, and watched on TV, countless Dodgers, Lakers and Rams games together. Those experiences are a part of who we are.

So, after all this time since the pandemic hit and upended so many aspects of our lives, it is incredible to get a dose of normal with the return of sports on TV. Yet, it is a new normal. The Dodgers, Lakers and Rams play in stadiums without any fans (unless you count the video feeds of fans watching from home that are featured in NBA games, or the cardboard cutouts that

appear in the stands of Major League Baseball and the NFL). Games feature audio tracks of crowds cheering in an attempt to re-create the same listening experience we are accustomed to when watching a game. It takes some getting used to, but in the end, I have cherished watching my teams play, and excel, in this new reality.

The new normal for the courts

As attorneys, we also have been returning to some normalcy after having experienced the shutdown of the courts and the need to socially distance. However, again, it is a new normal. Although we still need civil trials to return, after four months without law and motion in civil cases, we have resumed arguing before the court on behalf of our clients, albeit primarily via audio or video conference through LASC's LA CourtConnect platform. Mandatory Settlement Conferences and mediations are happening, also mostly by video. With changes in the law, we are able to take depositions remotely even without a court reporter being in the same location as the deponent. In some counties, there have been civil trials where all have had to adapt to the times, keeping jurors, attorneys, witnesses and judicial staff appropriately socially distanced, using masks and plexiglass barriers to provide additional protection. Some trials have featured remote witness testimony. Like with sports, the practice of law is slowly returning to some level of normalcy. However, we have to be open to the changes, be willing to adapt, and let ourselves appreciate the aspects of the practice of law that we can still enjoy even though they look and feel different.

As lawyers, we are skilled in adjusting our outlook, tactics and strategies on our cases with the emergence of new facts, rulings which may not be in our favor, or changes in the law. We are therefore adept at achieving goals, even in the face of great change. Let us not forget that as we embrace this new normal, bringing justice to our clients while appreciating what we do for a living, even in these challenging times.