



## The Athletes of Greene Broillet & Wheeler LLP on Gaining a Competitive Edge

By Susan Cushing



Greene Broillet & Wheeler LLP (GBW) has built its success on a strong foundation of core values. Since its founding in 1973, this Los Angeles law firm has developed a strong reputation for handling some of the most challenging catastrophic and serious injury cases. In its early years, the firm earned the nickname “the patron saint of lost causes” due to its willingness to take on difficult cases with tough liability issues.

In this high-stakes world of legal recompense, success often hinges on perseverance, strategy, and teamwork – qualities that are also considered integral to success in sports. For this special issue of Attorney at Law Magazine, we spoke with four standout attorneys from GBW who all attribute their professional success, at least in part, to their athletic training.

Before excelling in the courtroom, these partners – Geoffrey S. Wells, Scott H. Carr, Aaron Osten, and Christian Nickerson – honed their skills as champion high school and college athletes. Despite excelling in different sports, they share the belief that the discipline, leadership, and competitive edge developed through sports gave them a unique advantage in the legal profession.

## Geoffrey Wells

Growing up in the shadow of a father who played professional baseball, Geoffrey Wells inherited both a passion and an innate talent for the game.

“My father played for the Cincinnati Reds,” he says, “and he probably would have been a major league star, but he contracted non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma when he was about 28 years old. He was told he had six months to live. He lived another 50 years, but it ended his baseball career.”

Wells’ baseball career began with Little League when he was 8. His father chose not to be his baseball coach, but offered one piece of advice: You don’t ease up for anybody. You just throw the ball as hard as you can, for as long as you can.

“My first game I threw a no-hitter,” Wells says. “The bad news is I walked 13 guys, and we lost 10 to nothing. I learned a valuable lesson about how to compromise when taking advice.”

Wells developed into an exceptional pitcher, winning numerous championships and cementing his own legacy in the world of baseball. We asked Wells how his prowess on the diamond carried over into the world of law.

“There are two kinds of pitchers,” Wells says, “those who can throw a ball 100 miles an hour and try to blow everybody away, and those who change speed, hit the corners, and mix up the batter’s timing. I started out as a fast pitcher. As I got older, I learned to pitch with more finesse and read the batter. If they were looking for a fast ball, you’d want to throw a breaking ball. That’s kind of true in cross-examination. They think they know where you’re going, then you can change speed on them a little bit. It’s disarming.”

Wells also looks to the emphasis placed on being a good teammate. “Having honor, accepting responsibility for your actions and praising others. I think that’s how I practice law today. I’m happy for the success of others. We’re that way with our colleagues at the firm but we’re also that way with our competitors. That’s something that stems from the top of our firm, they’ve always preached that. I think it’s in the water. It allows younger lawyers not worry about failure.”

“And that’s the last thing,” he adds. “In baseball, if you’re a hitter you’re going to fail seven out of ten times. That’s a 300 hitter, which is considered a good hitter. You have to know how to deal with defeat.”



## Scott Carr

Scott Carr, who has been with GBW since before graduating from law school, was 5 years old when his grandfather introduced him and his brother to his lifelong passion—trapshooting. Taking them under his wing, their grandfather shared his love for the sport, sparking an interest that would stay with Carr throughout his life.

“I have a photo of 5-year-old me holding a 12-gauge shotgun,” he says, “and my grandfather is standing right behind me, shoulder to shoulder, because the kick would have knocked me over.”

Carr began competing when he was 8 or 9. By 13, he was an All-American in the Maccabiah Games. At 17, he won a gold medal as part of the U.S. team and spent the summer at the Olympics training center in Colorado Springs. He qualified for the Olympic Trials but did not participate because his grandfather had just passed away.

Despite his success in competitions around the world, Carr says his joy in trapshooting was much more personal.

“I spent my summers in Ohio with my grandfather,” he says. “Although I competed in California, much of my trapshooting was in a shooting circuit through Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. It was a great experience growing up as I enjoyed the competitions. But I will always treasure the memories of sharing something special with my brother and grandfather.”



When asked to explain how he feels trapshooting has helped shape his auspicious law career, Carr doesn't hesitate.

"Certainly, I would say competitiveness," he says. "It's about how you compete. I'm very competitive in the courtroom, but I'm also civil and respectful. It's important to know how to win and lose with dignity, grace, and respect for your competitor or, in the courtroom, your opposing counsel. When you're shooting, being highly focused is key. You have to be able to focus on the task in front of you and tune out everything else. It's the same thing as practicing law. You need to be singularly focused on what's in front of you."

Carr expresses his appreciation for the hands-on training and mentoring he received during his early years with the firm.

"I learned from some amazing trial lawyers, the best," Carr says. "I learned how to practice law, the thing they don't teach you in law school. It's the people who drew me to the firm and what's kept me here for 35 years."



## Christian Nickerson

Christian Nickerson also shares Carr's feelings about learning from his fellow attorneys at GBW. He joined the firm as a clerk and has continued to build his career there.

"I've learned so much more here than anything I learned in law school," he says. "These are some of the smartest and most ethical attorneys I've ever met."

Playing ice hockey for virtually his entire life, Nickerson wasn't even 2 years old when his mother strapped on his first pair of skates. Still too young to attack the puck, he became proficient on the ice in figure skating, a skill that would serve him when he did start his hockey career at age 5. And, as they say, the rest is history.

Nickerson would go on to compete on the ice throughout his school years, scoring the game-winning goal in the 2003 Pennsylvania High School Hockey State Championship. He served as team captain during his senior year and received the prestigious Bob Johnson Memorial Award from the Pittsburgh Penguins, recognizing him as the top academic high school hockey player in Western Pennsylvania. Nickerson continued to play hockey in various leagues after high school and still plays in an adult league every Thursday night. Like his colleagues, he likens his role in law to playing on a competitive team.

"Just like in sports, we're a team here," he says. "Sports teach you not just how to win but how to lose. As trial lawyers, we deal with ups and downs and a roller coaster of emotions throughout the life of a case, and hockey taught me how to deal with those highs and lows."

Before attending law school, Nickerson pursued a sports agent career interning with the Erie Otters, the Philadelphia Flyers, and the New York Rangers. Fortunately for his clients today, Nickerson quickly realized that was not where he wanted to build his career, preferring the life of litigation.



## Aaron Osten

While Nickerson was taking advantage of the long Pennsylvania winters, Aaron Osten was on the opposite coast developing into a world-class surfer and ocean paddleboarder. Like his partners, Osten began at a tender age.

"I was 5 years old when my dad tossed me in the ocean," he says. "I've loved it ever since."

Osten feels most at home in the water, particularly his beloved Pacific Ocean. Growing up in a California beach town, he took every opportunity to ride a wave and challenge Mother Nature. A key member of his high school surf team, Osten won every heat and was named Surfer of the Year in 1998. In college, he continued to compete at San Diego State and helped lead his team to the National Championships.

"Surfing takes years to learn and just feel comfortable out there," he says. "There are so many variables in the ocean that constantly change, sometimes by the hour, and you can't control them. Jury trials present the same challenges, and surfing gave me the tools to stay present and adapt on the fly. You're going to have bad days, but keep confident and stay the course."

Osten is a lifelong surfer, endurance athlete, and dedicated animal advocate. He shares his surfing passion by teaching U.S. veterans with PTSD and anxiety how to surf. In addition, he is a 12-time finisher of the Catalina Classic Paddleboard Race, a grueling 32-mile open ocean race paddled on a traditional paddleboard. He is also actively involved with the Animal Legal Defense Fund, where he advocates for legislation aimed at combating animal cruelty.

Whether in the locker room, conference room, or courtroom, these dynamic professionals exemplify how the skills gained in athletics can seamlessly translate into a thriving career in law.



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## At a Glance

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