

Daily Journal

www.dailyjournal.com

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2017

In Recess

Competitive Compulsion

Personal injury attorney Taylor Rayfield set records on her university's volleyball team.

By Shane Nelson
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Personal injury litigator Taylor Rayfield isn't fond of losing. "There's something innate in me where I just want to beat everyone," the Greene Broillet & Wheeler LLP associate acknowledged with a laugh.

A record-breaker on the women's volleyball team at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Rayfield began competing on an organized level around 12, playing volleyball for her middle school squad and a club team in San Jose.

Although she experimented with other sports, volleyball "just seemed to fit," Rayfield said. "I got bored with softball, sitting in the outfield," she recalled. "And soccer was too much running."

A naturally social preteen, Rayfield realized individual sports didn't make much sense for her either.

"I remember trying to swim once and thinking, 'This is never going to work. I need to talk too much,'" she said.

Not gifted with soaring height, Rayfield isn't the prototypical volleyball athlete, but the 5'7" future litigator didn't let that keep her from playing all four years at Presentation High School in San Jose, where her abilities caught the eye of UNC's volleyball coaches and ultimately landed her a spot on the university's NCAA Division I team.

"I have zero hops," Rayfield conceded. "So I'm not the person in the front row getting the kills." But as a defensive specialist, or libero, foiling the opposition's spikes and serves was a valuable forte.

Rayfield set an NCAA postsea-



Alex Drecun / Special to the Daily Journal

son tournament record of 53 digs during her final collegiate match at UNC in 2005. And she is still the school's single season leader in total digs.

"Taylor is an incredible defensive player, and she plays with a ton of hustle and heart," said Kelly Davies, a former UNC teammate, who still competes regularly with Rayfield in tournaments at Manhattan Beach. "She was always throwing her body all over the floor, and just relentlessly pursuing balls."

Rayfield didn't make the transition to beach volleyball until after enrolling at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, where she completed her law degree in 2010. She and Davies, who works in advertising technology, were quick to mention that playing on the beach is far different from the indoor game they grew up with.

"You've not only got the elements — the wind and the heat," Davies said, "but even the depth of the sand changes how you attack the ball and dig and pass."

Greene Broillet & Wheeler part-

ner Scott H. Carr, who's worked regularly on cases with Rayfield over her six years at the firm, watched his colleague play in a beach pickup match a few years back and immediately recognized a familiar determination.

"Once it's game on, the competitive fire just comes out," said Carr, who described Rayfield as tenacious. "You can see it when she's diving in the sand, and you can see it when she's arguing in court."

Douglas E. Friedman, a longtime litigator at Chudacoff Friedman Simon Graff & Cherin LLP, said Rayfield is "a highly competitive advocate."

"And yet when she gets up in front of 12 jurors, she just converses with them naturally," he continued, noting the two successfully co-first-chaired a \$200,000 verdict last spring.

"Taylor just crushed it," he said of Rayfield's involvement in the case. "She was great in jury selection, and she was great in closing."

Rayfield said the often competitive nature of litigation appealed to

her early in law school.

"Sitting behind a desk reading contracts all day would be my worst nightmare," she explained, noting her worst workweeks are spent entirely in the office doing paperwork. "I want to be in front of the judge, and I want to be in front of the jury."

Today, representing severely injured people appeals to Rayfield, in part, because she said the close connection she often develops with clients makes it easy to fight for them.

"There's nothing better than helping out deserving people," she said. "I'm better at my job when I'm working with someone I feel like is now part of my family and I would do anything for."

Those close-knit emotional connections with clients can, however, make losing tough, Rayfield acknowledged, noting that the magnitude of her most difficult courtroom losses far outweighs the joy of any big win.

And much like the painful defeats of her college volleyball career, bad losses in the courtroom stick with her.

"They break your heart," Rayfield explained. "And then they haunt you."

Although regular volleyball sessions at the beach, often with friends and the occasional cocktails, can help her decompress after a long week in the courtroom, Rayfield indicated the sport can at times create its own stress, because of her competitive compulsion to perform well.

"I'm just nuts," she said, laughing. "Shoot, I'll go to a spin class, and I don't want the lady next to me to do better than I do. It's just my nature."