Career Spotlight: Joe Curtis

Joe Curtis

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/feslr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/feslr/vol3/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UF Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Entertainment and Sports Law Review by an authorized editor of UF Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact rachel@law.ufl.edu.
CAREER SPOTLIGHT: JOE CURTIS

Joe A. Curtis is the Executive Vice President & Chief Legal Officer of LAA Sports & Entertainment and Managing Attorney of Jocur Legal. Joe’s practice focuses primarily in corporate & business law, sports & entertainment law, and intellectual property. Additionally, he has represented a broad array of clients in state and federal criminal defense, landlord/tenant, corporate formation, and venture capital. Joe received his J.D. from the University of Miami School of Law, and B.A. in Political Science from the University of Miami.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Please briefly explain your career path and what led you to your current position.

I began practicing law in 2017, first working at a firm doing business/specialized visas, and then joining another firm in 2018 where I practiced criminal defense and general civil litigation. My perspective on the legal field was, and still is, that a lawyer’s job is to tell a compelling story. Great stories can change minds, and the art of telling great stories effectively is what separates lawyering from other professions.

With this perspective, I pitched the idea of opening up a Sports & Entertainment division at Seltzer Mayberg, my law firm at the time. My goal in doing this was to connect with clients on a deeper level than just the typical transactional lawyer-client relationship. Sports & Entertainment law is different than “regular” law practice, not because of the substance of the work, but because the clients live in a context that is not experienced by the average person. Clients in sports and entertainment live with expectations and pressures that expand past the case at hand, and these influences that they encompass can impact their professional careers. This context is important because holding space for that type of client and being understanding and aware of the various dynamics at play will make you stand out.

A year into the Sports & Entertainment division, I was introduced to Zac Hiller, and we built a relationship largely due to my ability to “get it” when it came to various pressures and circumstances that came with professional athletes and entertainers. I consider myself an artist at heart, and I can understand and connect with clients from that point of view. Over time, I found myself wanting to be more involved in the representation and management of athletes and entertainers in order to empower them to reach their full potential.

I joined LAA Sports & Entertainment in September of 2021 as Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel and became VP and Chief Legal Officer in 2023.
2. What are the most common legal challenges or issues that you encounter in the athlete and talent representation business, and how do you address them?

The most common “challenge,” I believe, is the reality that people generally feel that the world is more complicated than it actually is. When it comes to any actual or perceived challenge, the first step is to analyze and approach the challenge from a human standpoint; what is the other side’s leverage in a negotiation or disagreement, and what is the best way to reach a genuinely fair resolution? Most of the time in the sports and entertainment industry, people lead with ego and not reason. Being able to keep this in mind allows myself and my clients to respond to any situation from a levelheaded and contextual point of view, instead of emotion.

3. What was the first professional “win” that made you confident that you belonged in your role or the industry overall?

I think a culmination of “wins” is what built up my confidence, and each win played a different part in helping me realize that I belonged. After I completed a few speaking engagements and “sat at the table” is really when I was able to actually take a look at how others in the industry think and express themselves, and that is when I felt that I definitely belonged.

4. What is one of the biggest misconceptions in your industry?

The biggest misconception is that those in power hold absolute power. The only time you really don’t have the power within yourself to accomplish something is when you convince yourself that the moment is too big for you. I have a saying that I repeat to myself and those around me, “Closed Mouths Don’t Get Fed.” If something is bothering you or making you feel wronged, speak up. More often than not, when you speak up you learn one of two things: how to solve a problem or what the actual problem is.

5. How do you stay up to date with the ever-evolving legal landscape of entertainment and sports law surrounding individual representation services, and how do changes, such as state and local NIL legislation, affect your ability to accurately forecast in the industry?

I feel like I am supposed to say CLEs, but in reality, I stay up to date with social media. I make sure I follow any account that could give me
information and sometimes set up push notifications, so I don’t miss an update.

6. **What was your experience like building out a sports practice from scratch at your previous law firm and how does that builders mindset translate to your current role working with individual athlete representation?**

   My experience building out the sports practice helped me realize what I am capable of in terms of marketing and business acumen. Each person is his or her own business, and with the ever-expanding world of self-expression and personal likeness, it is important that your decision takes into consideration any possible short-term and/or long-term impacts on your brand.

7. **What is some advice you would give to law students interested in working in your field and what are some action items they can execute now to stand out?**

   My advice is to go out and do it. Many people spend time trying to figure out how to get in the door instead of walking up to the door and knocking. You would be surprised what can happen and how quickly your life can change just by having someone simply answer the door. It is important to show people, who will eventually become your peers, that you are not afraid to put yourself out there and make things happen. It sounds cheesy, but it is really that simple.