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# THE AMERICAN LAWYER

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LIFETIME ACHIEVERS



## AT THE WHEEL

With a fragile plan to save Chrysler in hand,  
Corinne Ball and a Jones Day team had six weeks  
to win bankruptcy court approval.

It was lawyering at the speed of Daytona.

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD ASSOCIATES ■ THE PATENT LITIGATION RANKING ■ AIG'S WEIRD LITIGATION POSTURE

# The Loneliness of the Long Distance Lawyer

BY BEN HALLMAN

**ON THE FIRST DAY** of the 350-mile Iditarod Trail Invitational in Alaska—somewhere around the eighteenth consecutive hour running through temperatures that dropped to minus 35 degrees—Robert Struble considered quitting. “I was cold,” he says, understandably. But Struble, a corporate lawyer at Meyer, Unkovic & Scott in Pittsburgh, pushed on, surviving a charge by a moose, a torn nerve in his shoulder, and the loss of three toenails to frostbite. He crossed the finish line six days later at Kaltag, a village on the Yukon River.

For Gibbs & Bruns litigator Scott Humphries, a relaxing day out of the office means a 2.4-mile swim and a 112-mile bike ride, followed by a 26-mile run. He has completed 20 of these Ironman triathlons in the past five years, usually finishing in about 13 hours. It hurts. At the end, Humphries says, “you are racing against your desire to stop.”

If the first question to ask these endurance athletes is “Why do this to yourself?” the second is “What’s with all the lawyers?” Cycling, running, triathloning—the starting lines of endurance races are crowded with attorneys. Jean Knaack, the executive director of the Road Runners Club of America, who is married to a lawyer, says she has noticed that lawyers seem especially drawn to the longest, most grueling distances. The odds that a racer will have a juris doctorate also seem to increase with age. Robert “Bo” Phillips, Jr., a Reed Smith partner in San Francisco who has completed 46 road marathons, estimates that as many as half of all long-distance runners over the age of 50 are attorneys.

The reason that so many lawyers run or bike distances that others would hesitate to drive—rather than chill with a book and a beer—has something to do with the genetic code of the lawyer, say more than a dozen long-suffering lawyer-athletes interviewed for this story. These lawyers note that en-



durance racing and the practice of law both demand mental discipline, stamina, and a high threshold for self-abuse. “The profession draws overachievers and people who are goal-oriented,” says Eric Berlin, a Jones Day litigator who blazed through the Chicago marathon in two hours and 38 minutes a few years ago. Berlin says he runs “as a form of meditation,” but that doesn’t explain why he subjects himself to punishing 80-mile weeks in preparation for a race. Maybe it has something to do with a lawyer’s sense of entitlement, he says: “Why do I run a marathon? Because I’ve been able to do anything I want to do in my life.”

Many lawyer-athletes also say that with endurance sports, they can race competitively at an older age. They can’t dunk a basketball at 50 (if they ever could), but they can grind it out mile after mile on the hot tarmac. The mind is more important than the legs in such a sport, and with age and experience comes mental toughness. “One of the things I discovered about running longer distances is that I’m stubborn, and that people I can’t outrun in three miles

or six miles, I can outrun in 26 miles,” says Phillips, the multiple-marathoner from Reed Smith.

Struble, who is 58, also cites competition, or at least peer pressure, as a motivating factor. A friend of his ran a 50-kilometer race, so he did the same. Then another friend did a 50-miler, so Struble ran a 50-miler. If someone runs a ridiculous distance and doesn’t die, Struble tries it.

Professional predisposition and competitive instinct help explain the motivation, but not why lawyers are attracted to sports in which they compete alone. Could it be that lawyers simply don’t play well with others?

By nature, says Jamie MacPherson, a sports psychologist in Princeton, most lawyers are loners. They manage their own matters, argue their own cases, generate their own business. And they don’t like to share—the origination credit, the ball, or the glory.

Not surprisingly, few lawyers admit to being a bad teammate. Most said that they simply preferred solo sports (or, when we asked if they were bad sports, laughed nervously). But Timothy Epstein, a sports lawyer at SmithAmundson in Chicago, came clean. Neither he nor his lawyerly brethren make particularly good teammates, he says. “I did the lawyer’s league basketball thing,” he says. “Every time someone went to the hoop, someone would call a foul. Fights would break out. Lawyers are just way too contentious.”

Epstein has come to embrace his bad sportsmanship. He plays two-man beach volleyball on Lake Michigan with a teammate who is also a lawyer. Other players on the beach use positive energy to encourage each other. Not Epstein. “We fight all the time,” Epstein says. “Other teams high-five, but we tell each other that we suck.”

Call it professional courtesy.

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