

PROFILES IN LAW

Golf or Debate? Stuart Singer Opted for Words, But Putting With Byron White Was Fun

by Carlos Harrison

If Stuart Singer had been a better golfer, he might not be in the law.

“My two main activities outside of class in high school were I was on the debate team and on the golf team,” he said. “And I soon realized I was a very mediocre golfer on a mediocre golf team and debate offered more possibilities.”

Debate led the Miami native to Northwestern University and later to Harvard Law. It also indirectly connected him with Boies Schiller Flexner, the law firm he’s been at for the past 17 years.



J. ALBERT DIAZ

The Boies Schiller Flexner partner transitioned from debate team coaching to a litigation career that has touched millions of people.

STUART SINGER

Born: 1956, Miami

Spouse: Rose

Children: Matthew, Mark

Education: Harvard University, J.D., 1981; Northwestern University, B.S., M.A., 1978

Experience: Partner, Boies Schiller Flexner, 2000-present; Partner, K&L Gates, 1993-2000; Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig, 1983-1993; Clerk, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron White, 1981-1983

It started at Miami Senior High School.

“Probably before I got involved in debate I was more oriented toward science,” he said. “Science in the sense of I did nerdy things like science fair projects and

physics and chemistry, things like that. But that never lasted once I got a hold of debate and started focusing on dealing with issues rather than test tubes.”

He majored at Northwestern in communication studies “in part because they have one of the best debate programs in the country.” Singer won 11 tournaments while he was there, including the 1978 National Debate Tournament.

Last year, Northwestern inducted him as one of the inaugural members of its Debate Society Hall of Achievement.

He said he knew exactly what kind of law he wanted to practice.

"I've always been interested in litigation," Singer said. Specifically, "I was drawn to the civil side. ... I think you lose too often as a criminal defense attorney."

Singer served as editor and president of the Harvard Law Review, but he never abandoned debate. He taught it at the University of Redlands in California during the summers while he was in undergraduate school. During law school, he served as East Coast assistant coach for Redlands' debate team. That's how he met Bill Isaacson, who also would go on to become a Boies Schiller partner. Isaacson was on the Redlands team Singer coached.

"I am certain that my success in law school was assisted by debate," he said. "It teaches you to organize argument under time pressure, which is a useful skill in litigation and in law school."

After graduation, Singer got a two-year clerkship with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron White.

"It was an amazing experience," Singer said. "I had a chance to work for a really incredible individual who was one of the greatest football players of his time as well as a Supreme Court justice."

They didn't play football together, but "we did have

putting contests in his chambers," Singer said. "That was our usual post-lunch golf match."

GETTING INTO COURT

When the clerkship ended in 1983, Singer returned to Miami as a Greenberg Traurig associate.

When friends questioned his decision, he told them, "Well, that's home, and I think it's an interesting place to practice and give me a lot of opportunities to do more interesting things at an earlier age. And some of those same people who said I was essentially crazy to go back to Miami a few years later were calling me up and asking if there were job opportunities in the South Florida market."

It worked exactly the way Singer hoped it would. Knowing Singer was coming from the U.S. Supreme Court, firm co-founder Mel Greenberg said, "I guess you just want to work on our largest cases," Singer recalled. "I said, 'No, I'd like to work on whatever cases you have so I get to go into court.'"

He did. And he started winning, right from the start. "My first jury trial, which was not long after I joined the firm, I won a jury verdict for \$13,000. It involved an irrigation explosion on a golf course."

He left Greenberg Traurig in 1993 to head the Miami office of what is now K&L Gates. Seven years later, he went to work with his old debate team friend, Isaacson, at Boies Schiller.

"I discovered that I enjoyed practicing law more than managing the

lawyers," he said. "I also thought, correctly, it would be interesting to be in a position and the platform where you could do plaintiff cases as well as defense cases. And that turned out to be true."

His work based in the Fort Lauderdale office involves complex litigation on behalf of clients including NASCAR, Next-Era Energy, Carnival Cruise Line, 9/11 victims and investors bilked in Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme.

"I love the fact that there's a lot of diversity of subject matter. That's what keeps me, after doing this for 30 years, still very interested and excited every year about the challenges that these cases present," he said. "These are not cookie-cutter cases."

He also earned recognition as one of the Daily Business Review's Most Effective Lawyers in the 2015 pro bono category for winning enforcement of federal Medicaid rights for 2 million Florida children.

"I can't think of any case that's been more satisfying," he said. "This is the kind of case you go to law school to become a lawyer to be able to do."

And he continues to promote debate in Miami and across the country. He chairs the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues, which involves 10,000 students at 500 schools around the United States.

Carlos Harrison is a freelance writer in Miami.