

# Daily Journal

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## Sports Advocate

*Lawyer and coach Mark Spring says he has found competitive athletics to be a great unifier.*

By Shane Nelson  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

**S**acramento labor litigator Mark S. Spring learned early about the unifying nature of competition.

“When you’re on the sports field, no one cares what religion or race you are,” the Carothers DiSante & Freudenberger LLP partner said, noting he started playing team sports at a young age.

### In Recess

“I was thrown into sports activities with people that were different than me — different races, different religions, different backgrounds,” said Spring, who grew up in Long Island, New York. “And I figured out pretty early we’re all pretty much the same underneath. We’re all looking for the same things.”

A fan of most sports, Spring ultimately focused his athletic efforts on the lacrosse field and the basketball court. He went on to play NCAA Division 1 lacrosse for Georgetown University in the mid-1980s.

“Georgetown was a basketball powerhouse in those days,” he said, adding that the university’s lacrosse team lost more games than it won.

“And as a lacrosse player with knee problems, I spent significant time in the training room with many of the old Hoyas,” he recalled, “including current Hoya [basketball] coach Patrick Ewing.” Today, Spring is an assistant coach for the Folsom High School boys varsity basketball team, working 15 to 20 hours a week with the squad.

Scouting opponents and film study are key contributions, but Spring has done a little bit of everything for the team over the past three seasons, according to head coach Mike Wall.

“Mark’s really good with the kids,” Wall said, mentioning that

Spring offers players an analytical, real-world perspective they often don’t get elsewhere. “He does a lot of mentoring on a bigger-than-basketball level.”

Spring started coaching recreational basketball while attending George Washington University Law School in the early 1990s. He later coached lacrosse, as well, and volunteered abroad at Israel Lacrosse clinics in 2011 and 2013. Spring also took part in a Balkan basketball diplomacy program run by the U.S. State Department and Georgetown University in the summers of 2011 and 2012.

The camps were started by a former Hoyas basketball player from Montenegro whom Spring helped the Georgetown coaches recruit. The Montenegro-based program brought together around 50 high school student athletes from underprivileged regions in five of the countries that were part of the former Yugoslavia.

Connecting older generations would be tough, Spring said, given the region’s not-so-distant wars. The basketball camps are aimed at making progress with the Balkans’ young people, however, offering them a chance to appreciate each other despite such violent history.

“Sports are one of the best ways to break down prejudices and get folks to accept people that are different,” Spring explained. “A lot of prejudices are based on fear, and if people just spent a little more time talking to those different than themselves, things wouldn’t be perfect but they’d certainly be a lot better.”

While sports have certainly been a way for Spring to help bring people together over the years, the attorney will be the first to admit he’s not lost track of his competitive drive. Spring said he and his brother, a former Brooklyn district attorney, share a



Sam Attal / Special to the Daily Journal

Carothers DiSante & Freudenberger LLP partner Mark S. Spring has been coaching basketball since law school.

strong compulsion to win.

“There’s something in our DNA where we like to fight,” he explained, laughing. “We like to compete and stand up against somebody else and try to see how we measure up. With sports and being a litigator, it’s the same thing. You’re putting yourself against others ... and most of the time, you’re seeing how you measure up.”

Fellow Carothers DiSante & Freudenberger partner Brent M. Giddens, who played two years on the varsity men’s basketball team at Columbia University, agreed that his friend has a strong competitive streak.

“He’s passionate about winning,” Giddens said of Spring. “Whether it’s with his basketball team, his clients or even just a game of Tiddlywinks, he wants to win and always puts his best effort into doing so.”

A major college and high school basketball fan, Giddens typically attends five to six Folsom High School boys’ games a year.

“What Mark does for Folsom High is just amazing,” he said. “Watching him interact with his players, they clearly have a tremendous amount of respect for him.”

Sophia S. Kwan, a Seyfarth Shaw LLP counsel who worked with Spring in 2014 at Carothers DiSante

& Freudenberger, said the basketball coach was also a terrific legal mentor. “He’s very supportive,” she said. “If you screw up, he’s not going to yell at you, but he’ll use it as a learning opportunity and work with you to figure out how to improve for the future.”

Kwan, who’s worked with Spring since 2010 on the Sacramento County Bar Association’s diversity fellowship program, spoke highly of his passion for winning.

“I think you need that fire in you to be a litigator,” she said.

A married father of three, Spring said his Folsom High basketball responsibilities limit his family time on occasion, but he added that his wife, a former track and field athlete he met at Georgetown, insists Spring is far more difficult to live with when he’s not coaching. Working with high school athletes provides great stress relief, Spring said.

“For me, it’s definitely a release,” he explained. “I can walk into the gym, whether it’s for a practice or for a game, and it allows me to leave basically everything else behind for two to three hours.”

