

Playing Beach Volleyball Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Amy Drushal** (March 6, 2025, 10:24 AM EST)

*In this **Expert Analysis series**, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.*

Growing up, I had two goals: to be a professional athlete — specifically, to be the first female pitcher for the Detroit Tigers — and to be a lawyer.

Today, I have been a practicing trial lawyer for over 20 years. While I never achieved my goal of playing for the Tigers, or playing any sport professionally, I have played beach volleyball for over 20 years on three to five teams a week.

I take my career as an attorney very seriously. But I also take my commitment to playing volleyball seriously, not only because I have made a commitment to my teams, but I also find it integral to my performance as an attorney.

Playing beach volleyball makes me a better lawyer because it helps me constantly develop my teamwork skills, it teaches me to deal with defeat, it helps me develop relationships with opponents, it is an incredible stress reliever, and it provides business development opportunities.



Amy Drushal

Behind every successful litigator is a successful team.

Any good litigator needs a team with whom they can work, communicate and share the stressful times — and there are many stressful times. I have never and will never try a case alone.

Beach volleyball obviously is not a solo sport, and your relationship with your teammates is key to winning — and if you are a losing team, teammates are key to enjoyment of the game. Beach volleyball requires constant communication with my teammates. We need to communicate our defense, we need to communicate about who will get the ball, and we need to communicate our positions on the court. Failing to communicate is the quickest way to a loss or an injury.

We also need chemistry, and we need to be able to trust each other. My teammates need to know that they can depend on me to be where I am supposed to be, to make plays and to show up. In over 20 years of playing, I have played with many variations of teams, and there are some that work and some that don't.

Playing with a variety of people has helped me learn how to communicate with people who communicate differently than I do, and to find chemistry with new people. Each time I join a new team, I must learn to communicate with a new group of people. There is no continuing legal education that can provide this kind of development.

The communication skills I have developed in volleyball have translated to my legal practice by highlighting the importance of being able to work and communicate with the many different litigation teams that I collaborate with on a weekly basis.

Winning isn't everything.

Litigators have a reputation for being competitive and always wanting to win — and we are and we do. But we also learn early on that we aren't going to win every argument, every hearing or every case. There are going to be bad rulings, bad days, and other surprises or events for which we cannot account.

Playing volleyball teaches me how to be competitive while embracing losses, bad calls, miscommunications and other events that lead to losses. It also teaches me how to win gracefully.

No matter how prepared my team is or how well we play, sometimes the other team outscores us. Volleyball helps me realize that no matter how well I play or how much effort I put in, sometimes the other side has a better shot, a better dig or better calls, or they just played a better game. And it teaches me to accept that I lost and to keep playing.

Losses in the courtroom have much more at stake and hurt more than losses on the volleyball court, but playing volleyball has highlighted the importance of persevering after a loss. As lawyers, we have to understand that regardless of performance or effort, there are going to be losses, but we have to keep working and give our best effort for the next hearing and the next case.

Keep your enemies closer.

There are always two sides in litigation, and there is almost always a dispute between the two sides. As the lawyer, your client is often best served if you can work with the other side's lawyer. I wish that were always the case, but as I said earlier, lawyers are competitive and we like to win.

Beach volleyball has taught me the importance of being friendly with the opposing team. Players on opposing teams have become my friends. If I act like a jerk, but then need to join a new team, or I need a substitute player, no one is going to want to play with me.

If I play terribly or show up unprepared or late — or I don't show up at all — no one is going to want to play with me. In the same way I need to build trust with my teammates, it is important to build trust with the opposing players.

While not always possible, building trust with your opposing counsel can be beneficial to your clients and your career. If the opposing counsel knows that you are reliable and trustworthy, you are likely to get a more efficient and effective result for your client. Plus, you may have to work with that lawyer on the same side in the future; that lawyer may need to send out conflict work; or that lawyer could be a mediator, arbitrator or judge in a future case.

We all need a break.

Litigators are a stressed-out bunch. We have endless deadlines, and we fight with people all day long — usually about trivial things such as whether one side will agree to a five-day extension to a deadline. I am called terrible things some days by opposing counsel. I sometimes get yelled at by judges. It's nonstop.

I need volleyball. It gives me an outlet to release the stress and aggression that builds up from being a litigator.

It is not uncommon that I jump off a work call in my car right onto the volleyball court. As I am making my way to the volleyball court, I am usually thinking about a deadline (or four), an email I need to send or an email from opposing counsel demanding an unreasonable deadline. Then, for 60 glorious minutes, all I think about is my next dig, my team's next point or my teammate's awesome block.

And every night when I walk off the court, win or lose, I feel refreshed, destressed and happy — ready to wipe off the sand from the volleyball court and step back into the courtroom the next day.

Build a network.

When I first started playing volleyball, I didn't realize the number of people I would meet. Beach volleyball has led me to develop an unbelievable number of friendships, which all lawyers need.

Many of the people I play ball with I have been playing with for decades. Over the years, whether playing with or against them, they have become friends who trust me, which has led to some really great client relationships — not just for me, but also others in my firm.

Find an outlet for you.

While beach volleyball translates into many skills I need for my practice that I cannot get from continuing education, its main function is that it gives me an outlet away from the practice of law. Everyone needs something that will put a smile on their face after a long day of work. For me, it's the sand, the game and my volleyball community.

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