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Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP partner Evan Whitfield spent six years playing professional soccer, mostly with the Chicago Fire. He was a defender for the American Olympic team at the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney; the U.S. came in fourth place that year. *David Thomas*

Professional gooooooooooooooooooooooooooals

BY DAVID THOMAS
Law Bulletin staff writer

It's been years since Evan Whitfield traded in his cleats for a law degree.

Still, the 41-year-old Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP partner said he sees a lot of similarities between his family law practice and the game of soccer. Both require Whitfield to constantly evaluate — and adapt to — the situation on the fly.

Whitfield spent most of his pro-

Soccer star turned attorney says life in sports, 'more absurd,' 'less glamorous' than believed

fessional soccer career playing with the Chicago Fire. His last season was at Real Salt Lake. Whitfield was a defender for the U.S. at the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney; the U.S. came in fourth place that year.

In a written Q&A, Whitfield told the Daily Law Bulletin how his time on the pitch helps with

his time in the courtroom, and what his favorite sports movie is.

LB: What made you decide to go into law after a six-year career as a professional soccer player?

EW: While I enjoyed the team work and competition of athletics, I wanted a career that in many ways was the opposite of my past

experience. I wanted stability, longevity and something focused on helping others instead of being so focused on myself.

I also wanted to continue to be in an adversarial and competitive environment, so my agent talked me into going to law school to become a lawyer. I was a founding member of the MLS Players' Union, so I had experience working with lawyers while I played. The family law focus was what I naturally gravitated toward after getting an understanding of the different areas of practice.

LB: How has your experience on the field translated to your law practice?

EW: Dealing with the infinite variability of a soccer game and pressure to perform when it matters have helped me most in my legal career. In soccer, not only do you have to know the characteristics of your 10 teammates, you also have to know the characteristics of the opposing 11 players and how the respective match-ups may play out.

Each field is different; every referee has their own style of managing a match and the weather is never a given. Your team's current position in the league table, whether you are home or away and who your next opponent is may all affect how the present game is approached and played.

Most importantly, regardless of the prior week's training, the coaches' tactics, or one's personal

designs, after kickoff, everything goes into motion without regard to anyone's plans. A good player constantly assesses all of the aforementioned factors in the present moment and acts and readjusts accordingly.

Family law is similar in that the number of factors that affect the outcomes and the constant fluidity of any particular family's situation are endless. What kind of case is it? Who are the attorneys? Who is the judge? What are the facts and how do they relate to the relevant law? Is your judge interested in hearing all the details or do they want you to cut to the chase?

Is mediation appropriate despite the acrimonious initial pleadings? How is your client reacting? Has someone lost a job? Changed careers or gotten sick?

My ability to continually assess the present circumstances in relation to the client's goals (that

may change throughout the case) while adapting to the fluid nature of the present have given me an advantage.

LB: What do you think are your biggest accomplishments so far, with respect to your legal career?

EW: Going back to school at 29, being the oldest law clerk at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP and then putting in the hours to be elevated to partner is something I am extremely proud of.

LB: What are your long-term goals for your legal career?

EW: My long-term goals are to continue practice and mastery of my craft.

LB: What is the first app you use on your smartphone when you wake up in the morning?

EW: If I have my life in order, then I typically wake up and do 10 to 15 minutes on the Calm app before starting my day. If work is hectic, then I typically check my

e-mail and texts first to see what has occurred in my clients' lives from the evening before.

LB: What TV show did you just finish binge-watching?

EW: "The Handmaid's Tale"

LB: What is your favorite sport-related TV show or movie?

EW: The undisputed best sports-related movie is "Bull Durham." I'm not a huge baseball fan but I love the perspective offered in "Bull Durham."

Most people think only of the top players with long careers. The Messis and Ronaldos of the world are a rare breed. The life of your average professional athlete personified by Kevin Costner's Crash Davis is far more common and "Bull Durham" is a hilarious and irreverent look into that world.

Professional sports are a lot more absurd and a lot less glamorous than what most people think.

dthomas@lawbulletinmedia.com