

Judging Figure Skating Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Megan Raymond** (October 2, 2025)

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.

When I mention that I judge figure skating competitions, people are often caught off guard. It's not what they expect to hear from a patent litigator. But almost immediately, the conversation shifts.

They'll tell me about a sport they played in high school, an instrument they used to practice or some other pursuit that shaped them in ways they haven't thought about in years. Or they tell me about a sport, hobby or interest that they've newly learned, rediscovered as an adult or continued from their childhood.



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They ask me about my connections to figure skating. (I was a competitive figure skater growing up.) Before long, we're talking about something personal.

That shift is one of the many things I appreciate about my experience as a skating judge. It opens a window into a different part of people's lives and takes us both out of the usual script.

As a law student years ago, skating judging was almost always a topic of conversation when I was interviewing for jobs, and it opened up the conversation to better get to know the interviewer. I still vividly recall an on-campus interview where the interviewer asked about a passion of mine. I discussed skating and skating judging, and he shared insights into a passion of his as well. I ultimately accepted a job with the firm he represented.

Now, decades later, such conversations with clients help us get to know each other better outside of work and our professional relationship, build trust, and ultimately make us more effective collaborators.

I've been judging skating since I was a teenager. A skating judge I'd known for a long time ran into me at a skating competition and encouraged me to start trial judging, which is a key step to becoming a skating judge. I started trial judging at 16 and received my first judging appointment on my 18th birthday, as soon as I was eligible. Since then, I've judged skating tests and competitions at many different levels and in several disciplines, including singles, dance and pairs.

The time commitment varies. I spend some weekends at rinks from morning until night — sometimes fitting in work calls and emails between individual events — while other judging obligations simply involve evaluating tests online from home. It's all volunteer work, and the pace can sometimes be intense. (I recall judging a multiday competition as a 1L in law school and concluding that law school was less intense at times!) But I stay involved

because it's meaningful and it allows me to stay connected to a sport I love.

And even now, years later, it still challenges me in the right ways and connects me to a sport that was a big part of my formative years.

Judging skating also exercises muscles that benefit me in the courtroom. It requires concentration and decisiveness. You need to prepare, know the rules, recall them instantly and apply them consistently. You're watching multiple things at once and making real-time evaluations. There's very little room for second-guessing, especially when the skaters have poured so much into their preparation and are counting on a fair and thoughtful assessment.

Just like judging a skating competition, being on your feet in court demands intense focus and the ability to process complex information in real time. Sharpen your concentration. Know the rules cold. Be ready to apply them instantly and consistently, even under pressure.

In the courtroom, you'll often be juggling multiple inputs — witnesses, objections, juror reactions and opposing counsel — all at once. Trust your preparation and don't get distracted by second-guessing yourself midstream. Learn from your experiences and try to improve your skills each time.

Hold yourself to a high standard. Fairness, integrity and poise under pressure are not just ideals; they're tools of the trade.

Finally, find something outside of work to get more comfortable being under pressure and in the spotlight. And remember: Your clients are counting on you for thoughtful, principled advocacy. Show up prepared and ready to deliver, just like an elite athlete would show up prepared for competition and ready for anything that could happen.

But what I value most about judging isn't just what it demands of me; it's what it gives back.

My legal life, like that of many litigators, revolves around other lawyers. I practice in a specialized area of patent litigation. My fiancé is a lawyer. Many of my close friends are lawyers. It's a small world, and one in which the conversations, while interesting, tend to follow familiar paths. Skating takes me somewhere completely different.

At competitions, I'm surrounded by people I wouldn't otherwise encounter — skating parents and coaches, former athletes, competitors of all ages, longtime judges, and volunteers from all walks of life. We all come together with a shared purpose, but our backgrounds couldn't be more varied.

It's refreshing to spend time in an environment where your job title doesn't matter and where conversations move in different directions. And while the people I encounter in the skating world are not representative of a typical jury, they're more representative than the rest of the people in my everyday life.

I also believe hobbies like mine play a critical role in sustaining a long career. Legal practice can be all-consuming. The deadlines, the intensity, the tendency to measure yourself by productivity — it's easy to let work expand into every available corner. But carving out time for something outside the profession helps fend against that. It gives you perspective, and often, a healthy sense of balance.

Skating gives me that. It reminds me that I'm not defined solely by my role as a lawyer. It provides structure and community, but on a different frequency from firm life. And because it requires a different kind of focus, it's restorative, not depleting.

That's something I try to convey to younger lawyers when they ask about managing work and everything else. You need something that's yours, even if it's something small — something that makes you think differently, move differently or interact with people outside your usual circle. That could mean a creative pursuit, a sport, a class, coaching, teaching or a volunteer commitment. It may sound paradoxical, but adding a meaningful outside commitment can feel like gaining time and energy from nowhere — somehow, you find space for it.

Protecting that time isn't always easy, but I've learned to approach it similarly to how I would schedule a client meeting. While I pick my judging commitments carefully, once I'm scheduled to judge, I plan around it. I don't cancel unless absolutely necessary. Over time, that boundary becomes part of the rhythm of my professional life, and I've found that colleagues and clients alike are usually supportive when you're clear and consistent.

Legal practice gives us a lot of flexibility in theory, but we don't always take advantage of it in practice. Our calendars fill up with meetings and deadlines, and we forget to block time for the things that replenish us. Treating outside commitments as more than an afterthought allows that replenishment to happen, and enables us to sustain our energy, focus and effectiveness as lawyers.

I've been judging for a long time. It's not something I lead with in professional settings, but it comes up. And when it does, it often sparks a more interesting conversation than anything else on my bio. It reminds people of who they were at a different point in their lives, and it reminds me that the people we work with have full lives shaped by experiences we rarely see.

Judging skating helps me stay grounded, curious and connected to a sport I love that has significantly affected the person I've become. On the days when I feel nerves before a hearing or a high-stakes meeting, I sometimes think back to all those competitions — standing in front of a panel of judges and an audience on thin blades, trusting they'll land on solid ice. After that, staying calm in court feels entirely manageable.

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