

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

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and the

LAW

Profiling Sports Lawyer Carla Varriale-Barker of Segal McCambridge and Her Impactful Legal Career

Varriale-Barker, Chair of Segal McCambridge's Sports, Recreation & Entertainment practice group, is an accomplished litigator who is at home in a courtroom, board room or classroom.

Varriale-Barker is one of, if not the only, female chair of a major sports law practice in the country.

She has represented a portfolio of clients in the sports, recreation, amusement, and hospitality industries with a client-centered practice focusing on tort, discrimination, contract, insurance, and spectator injury matters, including the defense of claims arising from alcohol service, security lapses, discrimination in places of public accommodation, sexual abuse, and molestation.

Varriale-Barker also counsels clients involved with the U.S. Center for SafeSport, an organization established by Congress to address sexual abuse, bullying and other misconduct, and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movements.

She is an adjunct instructor at Columbia University's School of Professional Studies where she has taught in the Sports Management Program since 2008.

Prior to joining Segal McCambridge, Varriale-Barker was a founding partner of a women-owned law firm in New York. She has also written for the American Bar Association about diversity and inclusion and the importance of mentorship and sponsorship.

To learn more, we recently interviewed her about her career.

Question: *How did you get into Sports Law?*

Answer: *Accidentally. Many years ago, I was an associate at a firm handling professional liability and some premises liability work for its clients. I was asked by a colleague to handle a case for a team arising out of a claim of malpractice at the first aid station located at the team's stadium. It was a wrongful death action involving a spectator and the general counsel for the team was very involved. And we worked well together! I learned a lot*



Carla Varriale-Barker

from him and how to view case through the eyes of a team and its business professionals. We won the case, he was a pleasure to work with, and I got a referral from there for more work. And it never stopped.

Q: *How would you describe your practice?*

A: *Never the same day twice! And even though I work long hours, even at this stage of my career, the day feels as though it was only three hours long. I am the Chairperson of the firm's Sports, Recreation, and Entertainment Practice Group and my team has a healthy blend of work across the sports, recreation, and hospitality industries. We have a vigorous ADR and litigation practice and a number of talented, lawyers and paralegals. We just launched a podcast, "TortsCenter", and we have started to feature some of my colleagues from the sports, recreation and entertainment industries.*

Q: *Who are your typical clients?*

A: *I have done work for numerous teams and leagues in the amateur, professional, and recreational context. I also have a U.S. Center for SafeSport practice that is both interesting and challenging because the matters often involve claims of sexual abuse and misconduct in sports.*

Q: *How does your work in academics support your work as a sports lawyer?*

A: *I have taught Sports Law and Ethics at Columbia University's Sports Management program for 15 years. It keeps me in a place where I am constantly learning and growing. I tell my students that I grow along with them every semester. My students are generally not lawyers, so that influences how I break down what can be complex legal concepts. We also weave in current events during each class and that keeps me reading new filings, reading peri-*

odicals like yours, following certain journalists on Twitter for the latest updates. My students are very interested in NIL rights and the rights of athletes in general-as am I. Recent cases involving those issues are at the forefront of their awareness and our classroom discussions.

What trends are you watching in 2024 and why?

There are a few. The student athlete's rights to monetize their name, image, and likeness because it is evolving rapidly and represents a paradigm shift in amateur sports.

Also, the meteor that is women's sports right now- it is such an exciting and overdue development. I am excited to see what that means for opening markets and opportunities and for fostering equality and equity in sports. I am hoping this is something we can discuss and capitalize on as part of the SLA's Women's Affinity Group, which I am a part of.

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Protecting Your Business

Segal McCambridge represents clients in the sports, recreation and entertainment industries, with a focus on venue liability and counseling clients on changing regulations and evolving liability trends.

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