

BRIAN PANISH ON HOW A FOOTBALL BACKGROUND HELPED HIM PREPARE FOR HIS 18-YEAR WIN STREAK

The last time prominent plaintiff's attorney Brian Panish lost a case, the Internet was something only the government had access to, Nirvana was topping the album charts, and the eldest George Bush was trying to force Iraq to disarm, just a year after the first Gulf War. One hundred-plus victories later—what does Panish owe his 18-year consecutive win streak to?

"I think just having deserving clients is most important, in that when you have someone that's deserving, then no matter where you are, people generally get it right and follow the evidence," Panish says, knocking on wood as he speaks. "Despite all of the attacks on the jury system, the jurors usually get it right. My dad always said that if a lawyer tells you they've never lost, they haven't really tried a lot of cases. So I try to keep that in mind."

The son of a successful trial lawyer, the AV-rated Panish, who describes himself as a "fierce competitor", grew up in the Los Angeles area and played football, basketball and baseball in high school, where he still holds several single season records. Upon graduation, Fresno State offered him a football scholarship; he played free safety for the school, and later, worked as a football coach for an all boys school while attending law school. In fact, Panish was named an outstanding alumnus at Fresno State during the school's recent 100th anniversary celebration.

"I wanted to be a lawyer because of the competitiveness of it, because the trials are like games," Panish, who earned his JD from Southwestern Law School in 1984, explains. "The only difference is, in football, if you lose, you have a game the next week. In law, you don't know when the next trial will be. I'm a competitor' and all of my life, I've had to kind of dial it back and realize, you don't always have to win."

But Panish, who has three children with his wife Rosie, has long encouraged his kids to get involved in sports, even coaching some of their teams himself—



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does win time after time, and he owes a lot of his success in law to the life lessons he learned playing with the pigskin.

"In order to be successful, the weaker players have to become better players, and that makes the team better," Panish, a frequent lecturer on trial practice and a Master with the American Inns of Court, says. "And at a law firm and in lawyers, it is the same thing. It is a team and the key is getting the talented people on the team and then developing them. That has been part of our strategy as a law firm; we have a lot of great young people who have grown with us, and gotten the opportunity to get the training and experience, which is hard to get in our field."

Panish has secured several multimillion and multibillion-dollar awards for his clients. Only four times in California's legal history has a jury awarded more than \$50 million in compensatory damages and compensatory damages alone; Panish was on the winning side of three of those cases.

Despite everything, Panish, who rose through the ranks from associate to partner, and later started his own firm in 2005, is humble. The man doesn't brag about his successes, not even when implored to. "I let my record speak for me," he says.

"We have passion for what we do. Just to get to the trial, you have to fight off all the motions, but once you get to the jury, you have to be able to take the most complex things and bring them down to a level where everyone can understand it and relate to the story of what really happened."

Panish says the most rewarding aspect of this profession has to be the work he's done for his clients. Winning is nice too, but "being able to do something for the clients, and when the clients, they realize everything that you have done for them, they're so appreciative and you know that you've made their life better," he says. "There are so many people out there that we've made their life better and we've made products safer. We've been able to not only benefit our clients but the public in general, and where else can you do that? We're doing the Lord's work."

—Chris Harris