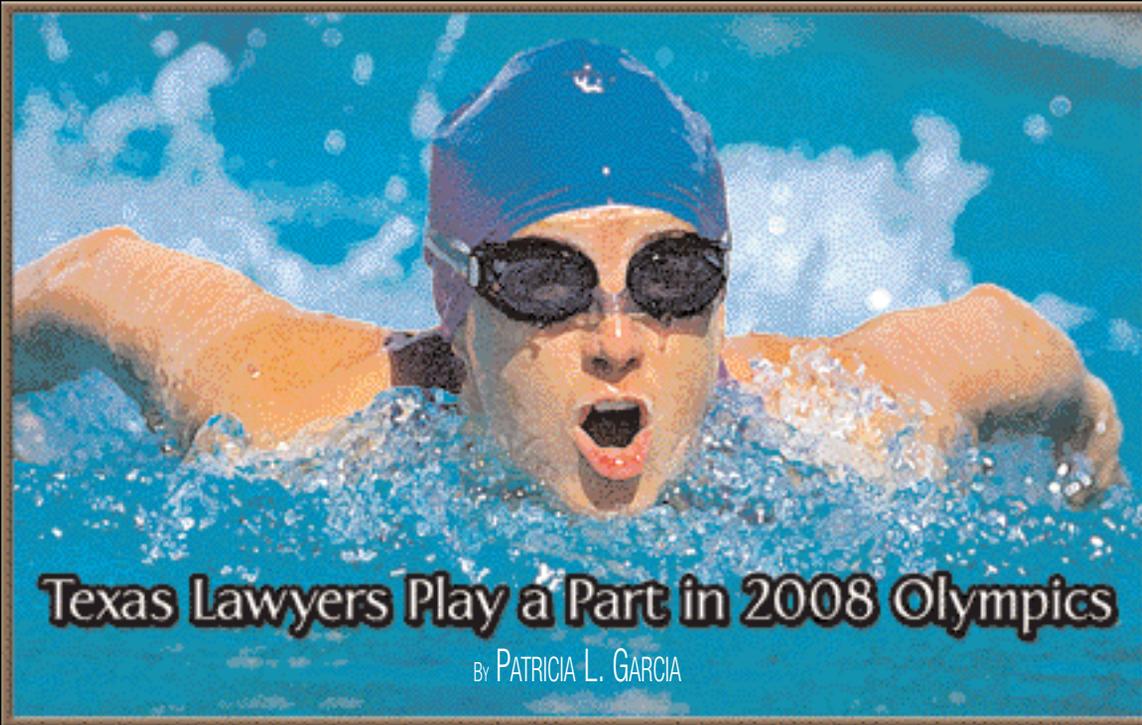


... NOW SHOWING! ... NOW SHOWING! ...

ENTERTAINMENT & SPORTS LAW



Behind every good athlete is a good coach ... and probably a very good lawyer. Olympic athletes face a hurdle of obstacles. Buried beneath the triumphant stories of physical and mental challenges Olympic athletes in Beijing faced were legal issues. Some were easy to deal with. Others, not so much. Here are the stories of two Texas attorneys who became heroes to the heroes of the 2008 Summer Games.

All In the Family

Martin Valko's foray into the Olympics sports world began at home, with his wife Martina Moravcova, a five-time Olympic swimmer, two-time Olympic silver medalist, and multiple World and European Champion from Slovakia. Valko, a named partner in the Dallas immigration law firm of Chavez & Valko, L.L.P., has represented Martina for more than 10 years. "I have handled every legal aspect of Martina's professional career, and after a couple of years, I also replaced her previous agent to fully maximize her marketable potential. One could say that your spouse is your ultimate client — every agreement better be iron-clad, otherwise you wouldn't hear the end of it," Valko quipped.

As Martina's attorney, Valko has helped to ensure that her endorsement contracts are suitable for all parties involved. "My job is to make sure that everything is sound and that she is fully protected. At the same time, you want to be fair to the sponsor as well," says the Oklahoma City University School of Law and the SMU Dedman School of Law graduate.

In addition to his wife, whom he also assisted in obtaining her extraordinary ability green card, Valko has advised and represented several international Olympians and other professional athletes. Among his current clients is a Slovak Olympic hammer thrower who is ranked No. 2 in the world, Libor Charfreitag, whom Valko is representing before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Valko's roster of athletes

doesn't stop with Olympic competitors; he has represented and also provided immigration advice to National Hockey League players, most of whom were Slovaks. Because of this experience, Valko finds that representing Olympians isn't too different from his daily practice as an immigration lawyer. "It's in the same realm," he says.

The biggest issue facing athletes is dealing with contracts. "Most of your endorsement contracts include a product promotion of some kind, and trademark and copyright issues often arise," he says. "A lot of athletes don't really think about the entire process. Take image and likeness for example, you have to define the time period, the media, and venues where things can be shown. Imagine your product endorsement contract that concludes in two years, but you didn't clearly define its terms. Even after termination of the contract, the company may try to use it in perpetuity, which they would love, especially if your career explodes. Also, let's say the athlete gets injured or even pregnant, in the case of a female client — those instances can put the athlete in default or keep them from being reimbursed."

As a former collegiate tennis player and a Slovak native (he earned a bachelor of law degree from Comenius University School of Law in Bratislava, Slovakia), Valko says his background helps in his representation of athletes. "The athletes I have represented over the years appreciated the fact that I am an attorney, and a lot of them appreciated the fact that I spoke their language."

Valko's representation of Slovak athletes has even led him into the entertainment industry. Word got around in Slovakia about Valko's quality of representation. So, when the Slovak pop/rock singer Pavol Habera and his band Team needed to clear up a copyright issue with Sony Pictures Entertainment regarding the use of part of its song in the 2005 horror film *Hostel*, Valko was the go-to guy. He was picked over an entertainment law firm who had represented Habera's Victoria Secret model spouse. Valko obtained an out-of-court settlement and a written apology from the film's director, Eli Roth. As a longtime fan of the band, Valko was delighted to help out: The funny thing about the whole situation was that as a kid, I used to go to their concerts and here I was teleconferencing with a very famous client and negotiating a settlement with a Hollywood production company on his behalf. How cool is that?" Valko says with a laugh.

Helping Make History

On Aug. 22, 2008, U.S. Olympic athlete Sheila Taormina made history by becoming the first woman to qualify for the Olympic Games in three different Olympic events. Her story could have been much different had Dallas attorney Scott DeWolf not stepped in to help her face the U.S. Olympic

Committee (USOC). Taormina was concerned she would not be selected as one of two women chosen by the USOC to represent the United States in the modern pentathlon despite her No. 9 ranking in the world based on her performances in the past five World Cups.

DeWolf's experience as a collegiate swimmer made him invaluable to Taormina (in fact, DeWolf and Taormina knew each other from rival swim clubs in Livonia, Mich., where both grew up). While another attorney advised Taormina to wait it out, DeWolf knew each second of not knowing her fate would eat her up. "It helped that I have been in that arena. I understand how [athletes] think and what they worry about and what they think is important," says DeWolf, a partner in Rochelle, Hutcheson & McCullough, L.L.P. in Plano. "Most athletes never think that their Olympic fate is going to be decided in this way. They think that it's going to happen in a field of play instead of in a courtroom in front of a judge."

"Part of it was from being an athlete in the past and knowing how hard they work and what it means to be on an Olympic team," he says. "If you are on the team, everything should be done to help you."

DeWolf wrote a letter arguing that Taormina be chosen for the U.S. pentathlon team to the USOC and the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Modern, which presides over the modern pentathlon. Taormina was named to the team in June.

In addition to Taormina, DeWolf came to the rescue of two other U.S. Olympians who were eventually allowed to compete on the team. "I enjoyed getting emails and looked forward to watching them compete," he says of the experience. "It was a really satisfying experience. I never wanted to deliver to them the news that they were not on the team."

Because of DeWolf's success, his name has been added to a list of attorneys who are approved to represent Olympic athletes. Simply putting your name out to athletes doesn't guarantee you'll be able to represent an Olympic athlete. "The [Olympic] community is smaller than you think. If you don't know anybody, athletes are not going to call you. You have to understand quickly the rules and all of the governing bodies and who has the power to do what," he says, adding that any attorney interested in representing an Olympic athlete should be willing to put in the time to learn the athlete's sport.

DeWolf insists he's not ready to leave his complex commercial litigation practice solely to represent Olympians. "I'll do it as it comes up," he says with a laugh.

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