Proskauer

Alumni Reflections: Game Strategies for Success with Robby Forbes and Susan Gutierrez

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Robby Forbes, chief business officer at Blizzard Entertainment, began his career at Proskauer as a litigator before transitioning in-house with the Washington Commanders and later Activision Blizzard. In this conversation with litigation partner Susan Gutierrez, Robby reflects on his journey from sports law to esports, the lessons he's carried from Proskauer and how his legal background has shaped his approach to business strategy.

Making a New Play

Susan Gutierrez: Robby, it's great to catch up. Can you give me an overview of your work at Proskauer and where life has taken you professionally since leaving?

Robby Forbes: I left Proskauer in 2013 to go to the Washington Commanders. I spent five years there, starting off as associate general counsel and then moving up to VP of legal and government affairs. In late 2017, an opportunity came up with Activision Blizzard. The company was launching a first-of-its-kind global esports league with independently owned teams based in five countries across three continents. Team owners were a mix of professional sports team owners, entertainment and media companies, and early-stage venture capital-backed companies.

Susan Gutierrez: That's very exciting. How did you navigate that opportunity?

Robby Forbes: We had commercial success right out of the gate. Across the 32 teams we launched across the two leagues, there were significant monetary entry fee commitments as well as additional monies secured through media, sponsorship, and licensing deals. However, the need for long-term, patient investment, along with the impact of COVID, ultimately led us to unwind the leagues into the more stable structure that they continue in today. My work in navigating the challenges with our esports business exposed me to Activision Blizzard's CEO. In late 2022, I joined the CEO's office as Chief of Staff in addition to my ongoing legal responsibilities. After Microsoft completed its acquisition of Activision Blizzard, I assumed my current role as chief business officer of the Blizzard Entertainment operating unit. I now focus on the commercial exploitation of Blizzard IP, including new game development, licensing, publishing partnerships, linear media, and other commercial agreements.

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Robby Forbes, Chief Business Officer, Blizzard Entertainment

Changing the Game

Susan Gutierrez: I'd like to step back to when you first left Proskauer to join the Commanders. How did that opportunity present itself? Was there a relationship that you had while you were at Proskauer that either directly assisted in you securing this opportunity or helped you once you were there?

Robby Forbes: I came to Proskauer in large part because of the sports practice and spent most of my time at Proskauer on sports-related matters. I worked with Brad Ruskin and Scott Cooper on the litigation side, and Joe Leccese and Jon Oram, among others, when there was overlap with the corporate transaction side. We've all kept in touch, and they've been very supportive throughout my career. As far as the joining the Commanders, it felt like a serendipitous opportunity. I grew up in the Washington, D.C. area, as did my wife, and we had a young daughter and were expecting a son. In addition, the team was in the early stages of pursuing a new stadium. The downstream impacts of stadium developments are huge. They help to shape a city's culture. For these reasons, I viewed working for my hometown team as a huge opportunity both professionally and personally.

Susan Gutierrez: How do you think your exposure at Proskauer to both litigation and transactions helped you going forward?

Robby Forbes: I believe what makes the Firm's litigation and transactional teams so successful is that it maintains close relationships with their sports industry "institutional clients." There's an understanding and importance placed on how each legal matter fits into a client's overall business. I believe this outlook translates well to in-house roles. You're advising on risk, but your job is to mitigate that risk relative to business opportunities. Effectively communicating these risks in a manner which helps internal business clients make an informed decision has helped me a lot over the years.

Susan Gutierrez: What about your training as a litigator has helped you most in your role at Blizzard?

Robby Forbes: As a former litigator, I'm a bit biased, but I think litigation skills, especially the critical and analytical thinking needed to tackle a diverse set of fact patterns, are well suited for in-house roles. For example, when reviewing contract language, a litigator's ability to assess the practical implications of changes helps balance legal concerns with business priorities. Now that I'm on the business side, I appreciate this dynamic even more, and I find that my legal background allows me to cut through issues quickly and work more effectively with our legal team.

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Reviewing the Playbook

Susan Gutierrez: What were some of your most memorable experiences at Proskauer?

Robby Forbes: My time at Proskauer was relatively short in the context of my overall career, but it has had an outsized impact on me professionally. As a first-year associate, I was fortunate enough to be staffed on a high-stakes litigation for a sports client. The case was a bet-the-company matter that went to trial. Observing how the lead attorneys ran the case was an invaluable experience. I appreciated the trust they put in me as a junior attorney to help prepare a witness for trial. Sitting with the witness a day before their testimony and preparing this individual was tremendous. I still appreciate that opportunity.

Susan Gutierrez: What advice would you give to junior lawyers joining the Firm?

Robby Forbes: Identify mentors, and take advantage of those relationships. Mentorship is a two-way street, so you also need to bring something to each relationship. Take time to understand a partner’s practice and ask thoughtful questions about their work.

Susan Gutierrez: You gave me similar advice early in my career after I expressed a desire to focus on entertainment litigation. We were fortunate to work with Sandy Crawshaw-Sparks, and, when you left, that advice helped accelerate my career.

Robby Forbes: I remember you stood out as someone who was talented and genuinely interested in the work. It’s not just about liking music and wanting to be an entertainment lawyer. It’s about understanding the issues and figuring out how to add value in the relationship.

Susan Gutierrez: Absolutely. Thank you so much!

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