

DAN
RYAN

Business Litigator Who Outworks His Opponents

by Elizabeth Davies



When clients hire Daniel K. Ryan of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, they know they're getting a lawyer with the education, experience and intelligence to handle any business litigation they might send his way.

What they might not know is that they're getting a blue-collar work ethic to go along with it.

Ryan worked his way through college and law school by driving delivery and semi-trucks for his family's transportation business, T.H. Ryan Cartage Company. Started in 1905 as a horse-and-wagon company to deliver ice, the Ryan family business has been passed through generations for more than a century.

Ryan went to law school so he could become a lawyer for the family business, and he grew up working low-man-on-the-totem-pole jobs within the company. Little did he know his hours behind the wheel as a driver were a foundation for a career in corporate litigation.

"I was the boss's son, so they thought I would get a free ride," Ryan says. "But it really caused me to develop my work ethic. That has carried me through the legal profession because I learned to work harder than everyone else. There are no shortcuts. You have to put the work in."

Today, Ryan is the practice group leader for Hinshaw & Culbertson's business litigation group. Some of his clients have been with him

for more than two decades, relying both on his expertise and on the broader practice of his nationwide firm.

"He's one of the best commercial litigators, not just in the area but in the country," says friend and peer Michael Salvi of SSalvi Salvi & Wifler. "He likes to win and when he thinks he's right, he doggedly pursues his goal. He's a very committed lawyer."

For Ryan, the intellectual challenge, excitement and high stakes of business litigation are the reasons he still loves his job after all these years.

"If I could have envisioned the kind of practice I wanted to have, this would be it," Ryan says.

LAUNCHING A CAREER

As a young lawyer in Chicago, Ryan knew he had a distinct edge.

"When I would step up in a courtroom, particularly in the Daley Center, I would specifically introduce myself as Dan Ryan, not Daniel Ryan," he recalls. "The judges would look at me funny and wonder if I was connected to the folks at city hall."

It's a mere coincidence that Ryan shared a name with the former president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, for whom a major city expressway was named. And it was a particularly fun coincidence when, near Ryan's

16th birthday, a newspaper wrote about the expressway. Its headline declared, "Dan Ryan: A Driver's Nightmare."

But he didn't actually have any high-up city connections. "There's no relation, but I've used the name to my advantage," he laughs.

These days, Ryan's name stands for itself in the litigation arena. After a short stint in Colorado to be near his wife's family, he returned to his hometown of Chicago. He intended to work in the family business, but his father insisted that he first gain experience in private practice. So, Ryan started with Hinshaw & Culbertson in 1988—and has been there ever since.

"Oddly enough, I never made the switch to the family business," he says.

Ryan says his 30-year run with Hinshaw has been a good one. During that time, the firm has grown from 90 to 475 lawyers.

"I've stayed at Hinshaw in large part because of my partners," he says. "We tend to value camaraderie and treat people with mutual respect."

And with 23 offices across the country, Ryan enjoys knowing his firm has the breadth to offer clients a range of services in a variety of locations.

"My clients appreciate the ability to go with one firm, but have me handle cases in a number of different states," he says.

Ryan's nationally focused business litigation practice has involved representing clients before the 7th Circuit and 8th Circuit, before state appellate courts in Illinois and Indiana, and before U.S. District Courts in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Arkansas, Nebraska, Massachusetts, South Dakota, California, Minnesota and Florida.

He also represents clients before the EEOC, the Illinois Department of Human Rights and the Illinois Human Rights Commission.

Some of Ryan's clients have been with him for more than two decades, knowing they can rely on Ryan to outwork his opponent.

"I demonstrate my loyalty by working hard, and they return it with client relationships that keep going for many years," he says.

That trait is one those around Ryan use to describe him.

"The loyalty he has to clients—he doesn't see them as just a client," says lawyer Michael Salvi. "He puts his heart and soul into cases. His clients are definitely like family."

TODAY'S PRACTICE

As a sophomore in high school, Ryan transferred into Michael Salvi's geometry class. The pair quickly hit it off. Ryan helped Salvi with his math homework, and the two became lifelong friends.

Fast-forward four decades and Salvi has a law practice of his own in the northern suburbs. Not long ago, he was representing a bank that had merged with another bank in a fraud case. The new bank brought in their own lawyer on the case. It was Dan Ryan.

"When I was a sophomore, he was helping me with geometry," Salvi says. "Forty years later, he's helping me with bank fraud cases."

The two worked together on that case for about a year, with millions of dollars at stake. Salvi says he won't forget watching Ryan handle the deposition of a forensic accountant.

"It was a very complex case, and he took this accountant's opinion apart piece by piece," Salvi remembers. "When we walked out of the deposition, we were in the driver's seat. It changed the whole dynamic of the case. I was stunned at how he handled that."

Such cases are the core of Ryan's corporate practice. He handles contract disputes, class action defense, and litigation in the life, disability and health care arenas. A large part of his practice encompasses managed care disputes and employee benefits litigation.

Since coming on board with Hinshaw, Ryan has been deeply involved in his firm's growth. He has served on its hiring committee, the associate evaluation committee and has been an instructor for Hinshaw University, the firm's internal training program. At present, he is a member of Hinshaw's executive committee and leads the firm's business

litigation practice group.

He's equally involved in professional development outside the firm, having trained in mediation with Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law. He's a member of the American Bar Association's Employee Benefits Committee and the International Association of Defense Counsel. He also serves on the Defense Research Institute's Health, Life and Disability Committee, as well as its Employee Benefits Committee.

Recently, Ryan won a four-week jury case before a federal court in California on behalf of United Healthcare. The claimant was seeking eight figures in punitive damages, and the case had several failed attempts at settling through mediation.

As it happened, the jury ruled in favor of United Healthcare, with no damages awarded.

"There's no substitute for the long hours and hard work that goes into a trial," Ryan says. "It was a significant case. It was a hard-fought battle, but I loved it."

The competitive spirit that brings litigators particular satisfaction in court is one asset Ryan says gives him an advantage.

"If we're not able to resolve it, they need a lawyer who has the experience to try the case," he says. "A good trial lawyer brings a willingness and expertise to try a case."

That's certainly the case for Ryan, says Dan Cozzo, lawyer for client Cigna Corporation.

"He's a competitor," Cozzo says. "He doesn't like to lose, and he's a good enough lawyer that he doesn't lose often. It's good to see that ability along with the desire for success."

Cozzo also appreciates that Ryan has his client's best interest in mind as he makes decisions. He understands Cigna's dedication to finishing a claim quickly and painlessly—and becomes creative when necessary in resolving problems.

"I can't tell you the number of times Dan has come up with resolutions that worked for the company," Cozzo says.

One of Ryan's favorite memories stems from a pro-bono case. The Chicago White Sox asked him to step in on behalf of a former baseball player in a personal matter.

"Double Duty Radcliffe" was renowned for his ability to play both catcher and pitcher. He grew up in Mobile, Alabama, playing with Satchel Paige and went on to play for more than 30 teams in his league. Reportedly, Radcliffe had more than 4,000 hits and 400 home runs during his career with about 500 wins and 4,000 strikeouts to boot.

When Ryan became involved, Radcliffe was in his 90s and living alone. He had a large family who helped him stay independent in his home, but a bank called in authorities when they suspected elder abuse. Ryan helped

Radcliffe maintain his financial independence when the Cook County Public Guardian tried to take over.

"It was pretty contentious proceedings, but eventually we prevailed and the family was very happy," Ryan says.

Radcliffe went on to live independently for many more years and is among only a handful of centenarian professional baseball players. Every year after he turned 100, until his death at 103, Radcliffe threw out the first pitch at a White Sox game.

FAMILY VALUES

Ryan grew up in one of Chicago's classic Irish Catholic families. Family and church were of utmost importance. To that end, he was one of eight kids, and today his mother has 33 grandchildren. Most Sunday afternoons are spent with extended family.

The Ryan kids were raised both in the Catholic church and in Catholic school. Ryan's father was active in the family transportation business, and his mother worked as a flight attendant until staying home to raise her children.

Ryan attended high school in the northern suburbs, then graduated from the University of Notre Dame and Loyola University Chicago School of Law. When he headed to college, he knew law school was in his future. It might not have come as much of a surprise to those around him. At age 16, he managed to convince his mother to let him buy a motorcycle even though she was set against it.

"She knew I had the ability to argue my case," Ryan laughs.

For Ryan, law school brought intellectual challenges and a profession that would be useful in growing T.H. Ryan Cartage Company. It also called into play the dedication and focus he had honed as high school wrestler. Even today, Ryan will get engrossed in a trial and forget about eating until a co-worker mentions it.

Ryan isn't trying to cut weight these days, though. He stays active enough golfing, snow skiing and water skiing. His wife, Julie, is a former architect who stopped working to care for their four children. Ryan raised them in much of the same way he grew up: church, family, education.

Today, all of the Ryan kids are in their 20s and have gone on to top colleges such as Holy Cross and Colgate. Still, Ryan and Julie stay busy at their Wilmette home and at St. Francis Xavier Parish, where he serves on the finance committee.

At 58, Ryan is able to look back on a career that perhaps didn't go as planned—but has been satisfying nonetheless.

"I consider myself fortunate to be able to say I still really love what I do—getting into the courtroom and trying cases," he says. ■