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Bailey Samuel leads the Montana Big Sky Wildcats, a select travel team for women ages 16-19, as team captain during the 2011 USA Hockey National Championships tournament in Anaheim, California. Samuel now is an associate with Shook, Hardy & Bacon and a youth hockey coach in Kansas City. Photos courtesy of Bailey Samuel

Hockey experience readies Shook attorney for seat on KC sports commission

ICE in HER VEINS

BY DAVID BAUGHER
Special to Missouri Lawyers Media

The adversarial process can be tough, and like any attorney, Bailey Samuel sometimes runs across a lawyer who tries to bully or intimidate her.

Those lawyers don't have much luck.

"I have the confidence to be aggressive right back because I'm used to that," said Samuel, a civil litigation associate at Shook, Hardy & Bacon. "It doesn't faze me a bit."

As an avid and accomplished hockey player from preschool through college, Samuel, who turns 28 this month, credits her athletic background for that thick skin. She was frequently the only female player on her team and has taken far harder hits on the ice than anything she could be dealt in the courtroom — often delivered by men considerably larger than her.

"I've already been called every name possible, so I have no fear of any plaintiffs' attorneys," she said, laughing.

She's also suffered three concussions — at least that's how many she remembers.

"I'm not sure how many I actually had, honestly," she admitted.

Today, Samuel earns most of her accolades off the ice, handling defense work for product and general tort liability cases, particularly those dealing with fires or explosions. But the Wisconsin native who grew up in Montana is still heavily connected to athletics and the pastime that she loves.

She recently was named to the emerging leaders board of the Kansas City Sports Commission & Foundation, which works to enhance the quality of life and economic success of Greater Kansas City by supporting amateur and professional sporting events and organizations, and promoting the lifetime benefits of sports for residents of the city.

Samuel also coaches youth hockey for children ages 8 and under in the Kansas City Fighting Saints club in northern Kansas City. She became connected to the commission through WIN for KC, an initiative that helps to empower girls and young women through sports.

"Typically the skills you learn transfer well in the boardroom or the courtroom," she said. "The confidence you learn at a young age has made women successful in male-dominated fields."

She believes that was the case for her.

"Sports teaches you at a young age to be a team player and to be a voice for your teammates," she said. "But for a female, I think it really teaches you to stand up for yourself, and that's something I don't think always transfers from men to women in this field. I think women have to speak up more about opportunities that they want."

Influenced by her brothers' participation in the sport, Samuel started playing hockey at age 3. She found it taught her confidence, strength and independence — even through tough times as her parents went through a difficult divorce.

"I think the structure of sports really probably made a huge impact on my life," she said. "It teaches you to show up, that you have to be there for other people."



Bailey Samuel

Her small-town high school in Montana didn't have a team, so she drove half an hour each way to join, practice and play with a high school team in Bozeman. Through the years, she spent a lot of time on the road going to and from games from the Dakotas to Idaho.

Through high school, the young hockey center often was the only female on the team — which presented challenges. Take the locker room facilities, for one thing.

There weren't any. "I'd have to get dressed either in a utility closet or a public bathroom with people coming in and out," she recalled.

Those challenges continued on the ice, where she played on checking teams and often skated against larger competitors who knocked her into the boards. But that made her a better player.

"It taught me to be very fast so I could dodge out of those hits," she said.

That speed helped her to score more goals, and she became assistant captain of her high school team.

She also played and served as captain for three years with the Montana Big Sky Wildcats, a select travel team for women age 16-19, and for club teams while she attended the University of Northern Colorado.

Whatever the obstacles, she said she believes that playing against males was a great benefit, and even helped to convince her to go into law.

"I'm very competitive, and those skills I learned transferred well into a field where I would have to be strong and have a voice for others," she said. "It was a pretty easy choice for me to pick the law. I never really contemplated being anything else but a lawyer."

Jeff Elkins, a partner at Shook, Hardy & Bacon, said her team-minded diligence is appreciated and has earned her more autonomy than an associate with her tenure might ordinarily expect.

"She is very driven. Whether it is getting ready for a plaintiff's deposition or putting together a dispositive brief or getting ready for a client meeting, no one works harder than Bailey," he noted. "She personally invests in all of her files."

Partner Charlie Eblen praised her pro bono work, calling her fearless and eager to learn. He said he believes Samuel's sports background contributes to her success.



Bailey Samuel, shown during the 2011 USA Hockey National Championships tournament in Anaheim, California, credits her sports background with helping to forge the competitive strength she draws on as a civil litigation associate with Shook, Hardy & Bacon. Photo courtesy of Bailey Samuel

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"I think it gives her a competitiveness and a willingness to take on new challenges and accept risks that maybe other lawyers might shy away from," he said.

The Washburn University School of Law graduate, who was first in her family to attend college, believes other young women should benefit from the same experience. She said research shows that a majority of female CEOs played sports at some point.

Unfortunately, female dropout rates from athletic pursuits tend to increase as girls progress through middle and high school. Samuel said young women may tend to blame themselves more after a bad game or have lower self-confidence. She believes parents can play a big role in keeping kids committed to sports.

"If you are a female, growing up, sports are kind of pushed aside," she said. "I think they are very important, and I would like to spread that message across Kansas City for young girls to try different sports and be as active as they can be."

She said she also hopes her role with the sports commission will enable her to focus on showcasing the value of sports to children who live in low-income areas.

Regardless, her work as a volunteer coach already is making her important to a lot of little ones — boys and girls alike.

"I try to be positive. That age is really hard because they can barely stand on skates," she said. "I try to smile a lot and make sure it is fun. I don't want it to be so competitive at that young of an age."

Ken Stoke, an IT contractor who works with Shook, introduced Samuel to the volunteer coaching job. Parents love having a female coach, he said, and the kids are always enthused to hit the ice when she arrives.

"When she's there in practice, she just lights up the room with them," he said. "They are just so excited to see her."

Samuel said it can be difficult to work her team leadership duties into an already busy schedule, but it takes a commitment to helping youth through community outreach.

"I told myself I would never lose that aspect of my personality. It is very important to me. So if I need to make sacrifices at work to make sure I'm staying involved in community, I'm there for the games and present on the ice as much as I can be, I do that," she said.

"I think it is just as important as the billable hour."