



STEPHEN STARKS

Legal Affairs Director
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FINDING HIS NICHE

Stephen Starks jokes that his parents knew what his career path would be before he did. “I loved to argue, so they always thought I would make a great lawyer,” he says with a laugh. However, Stephen had other plans during his undergraduate education. His love of biology led him to take the MCAT to see if medical school would be a good fit for him. At the same time, Stephen’s love of basketball and an outstanding senior year on the court resulted in an offer that he couldn’t pass up: a spot in the National Basketball Development League. Before leaving to play abroad in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, he decided to cover his bases by also taking the LSAT.

“I knew I couldn’t play forever,” he explains. “And after two years of playing, I realized that my dream of playing for the NBA probably wouldn’t happen, so I began to do some soul-searching.”

After taking some time off, Stephen enrolled at the Valparaiso University Law School. He immediately got involved in extracurricular activities, including earning a seat on the Regional Board of the Black Law Student Association and a role as Chief Justice of the Moot Court Honor Society. He credits his involvement in the law school community as a great way to build relationships with people.

“It can be tough when you don’t see many people who look like you,” he says. “At first, I felt I didn’t relate to the average law student or even my professors. But then I realized people saw me as an asset because I brought a different perspective to the table.”

MAKING THE CONNECTION

In law school, Stephen wanted his future career to involve sports but wasn’t sure in what capacity. He was able to connect his two passions by participating in one of his law school’s clinics.

“We had a sports law clinic that handled pro-bono cases for people who normally couldn’t afford counsel.” The clinic gave Stephen the hands-on experience he was looking for. After arguing a case against the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), the organization was so impressed that they came back to him with a job offer. Stephen now works as Legal Affairs Director for the USADA where he handles doping cases against athletes.

His greatest advice for students considering a career in law comes from his dad: “You aren’t going to get it if you don’t ask for it.” He urges undergraduate students to share their ideas with other people and ask for help when they need it. “You’d be amazed at how receptive people are when you assert yourself.”