



**PLAYING TO WIN:**

# Championing Representation in Sports Law

Deborah Dixon '07 didn't grow up dreaming of a courtroom, but she did grow up full of questions, and her mom took notice.

"My mom will say that she knew I was going to be a lawyer from an early age," Deborah recalled. "She wanted me to stop asking questions or arguing." Eventually, her mom told her she might as well make a career out of it.

That spark grew into something bigger during her time at University of California, Santa Barbara, where a powerful moment in a domestic violence clinic pushed her closer toward wanting to actually practice law. While helping a woman prepare for a court hearing,

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Deborah was stopped at the courtroom bar — the literal gate separating attorneys from the public. “It was like a visual understanding of what you need to do to pass the bar, literally and figuratively, to be able to advocate,” she said. “My mom was right; I have to become a lawyer. I have to be able to speak on behalf of people.”

At California Western School of Law, Deborah found an environment that matched her ambition. She gravitated toward classes with real-world application. “They were very well known for being a practical, hands-on training law school,” she said. She took full advantage of the school’s litigation-focused offerings and joined the trial team. “Being on the trial team was a pivotal moment in my experiential learning. It was what I think differentiated me to getting a job outside of law school, because it taught me the skills I needed in a practical way.”

## The Road to the NFL

Deborah’s path to the NFL wasn’t part of some grand plan. In fact, it surprised even her. Years after representing a client in litigation, she got an unexpected call. The message came out of the blue: “Hey, I have a life-changing proposition for you. We want you to consider being the next general counsel of the Chargers.” Her first response? “I literally laughed. I thought he was kidding.”

But her former client had seen something in her, not just her courtroom skill but her ability to lead, adapt, and think strategically under pressure. “You take issues, you figure them out, you problem solve,” she recalled him saying. “You deal with people. You deal with difficult personalities.”

Though she wasn’t sure she was fully qualified, Deborah trusted her instincts. “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t shoot,” she said. She didn’t know exactly what the job would involve, but she said yes anyway. That decision shaped the next phase of her career. Today, she continues to support the organization as special counsel, helping guide strategic NFL initiatives.

## More Seats at the Table

Deborah’s journey through the NFL carries weight—not just for herself, but for everyone watching. Her visibility in one of professional sports’ most competitive legal roles stands as quiet proof that leadership doesn’t have to look one way.

Throughout her career, she’s seen how critical it is to diversify leadership spaces, especially in industries where women have historically been underrepresented. “I believe that as a woman, I am going to think analytically, just like men do,” she said. “But I may look at something in a different perspective, which is why inclusion in the law is important.” That diversity of thought, she believes, leads to better outcomes for clients and more open doors for the next generation.

## A New Definition of Success

Today, Deborah leads a thriving law firm, mentors young attorneys, and continues to lend her expertise as general counsel/special counsel to the Chargers. But for her, success has never been about status. It’s about substance.

It means building something that reflects your values, making space for others to rise, and showing that strength doesn’t come from fitting into the mold, it comes from reshaping it. “I get all these talented people to work with me simply because I allow them to be humans,” she said. “You can be a human being and you can have priorities that are not how many billable hours and still be incredibly successful.”

That vision of success hasn’t gone unnoticed. Recently, Deborah was honored with a Women, Influence & Power in Law Award, a recognition of her commitment to meaningful leadership, community impact, and breaking barriers for women in law from Lawyers Club. For Deborah Dixon, leadership isn’t about checking boxes. It’s about kicking open doors and pulling up more seats at the table behind her.