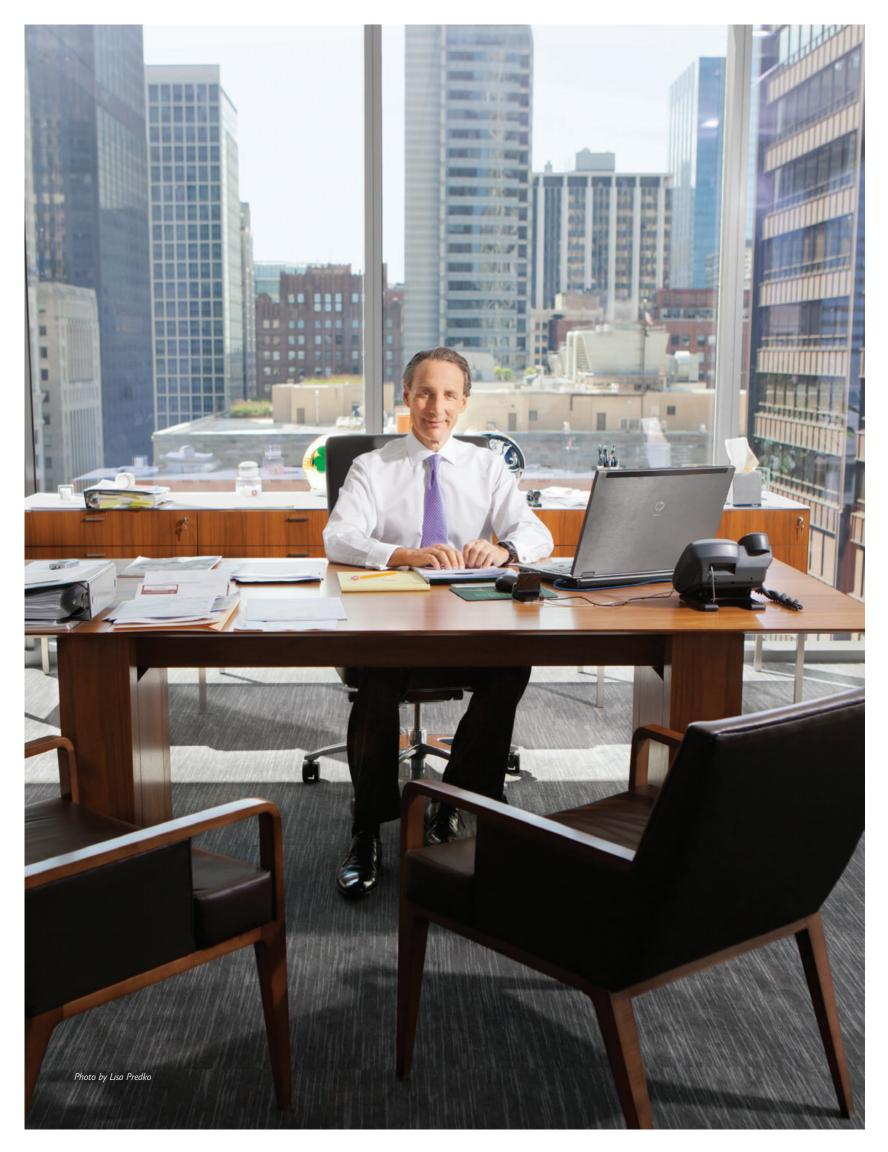


Salvi splits time between counsel's table, owner's box



A life of **competition**

Whether it's minor league baseball, Notre Dame football or becoming an elite trial lawyer, Pat Salvi wants to win.

By Roy Strom

he twilight sky is split — half black, half light — at Boomers Stadium in Schaumburg, and it's causing havoc for the Traverse City Beach Bums left fielder.

To the delight of the 5,985 in attendance on this August Friday, the visitors' outfielder has just lost two lazy fly balls somewhere among the fading sun, rose-red clouds and white lights. As a result, the Boomers have what would be their first run of the game standing at third base.

Pat Salvi, the managing partner of the plaintiff firm Salvi Schostok & Pritchard, looks on from his first-base-side owner's box. As summer grinds on in the independent Frontier League, Salvi's first-place Boomers — losing at the moment — have a slim lead in the standings over the second-place Beach Bums.

Salvi knows the standings like he knows his players' names, the business of minor league baseball and what he and his players have riding on the night's game.

Then a wild pitch reaches the backstop.

"Come on!" Salvi says, leaning forward and grabbing the railing with both hands. As the runner leaves third and scores uncontested, Salvi stands to cheer.

Between lost fly balls, a wild pitch and a bottom of the seventh inning that began with three Boomer walks, everything seemed to go right for Salvi's team that night. They won 4-3. This is Salvi's recreation.

"My primary focus, every day, is running a law firm and being a trial lawyer," he said. "Some guys play golf. Some guys travel. Some guys hunt and fish. I own and operate three baseball teams."

Salvi — who owns the Boomers, Gary SouthShore RailCats and New England's North Shore Navigators — seems to take only three things more seriously than his role as CEO of Salvi Sports.

There is his job as a trial lawyer and managing partner of 14-attorney Salvi Schostok & Pritchard, the firm he started as a one-man

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show in Waukegan in 1982 that he says now has one goal: To become the No. 1 plaintiff firm in Chicago.

While Salvi admits that is a difficult task considering the stiff competition in the city, his firm has won historic verdicts and negotiated settlements that, according to the *Jury Verdict Reporter*, include the highest Lake County verdict on record at \$33 million in 2009; the highest Jefferson County verdict at \$11 million in 2002; and a 2012 verdict of \$8.25 million that broke a \$4 million record in Illinois for an infant death.

A second is Notre Dame football. The Notre Dame Law School alumnus sat in the stands for 38 of the last 39 Fighting Irish game days before this season as he watched his sons — Will and Christopher — don gold-colored There is a piece of turf, but that's just from a salesman who wants to install it at one of Salvi's baseball fields.

What Salvi first pointed to is a portrait-size cover of Sports Illustrated hanging on the adjacent wall. The cover shows No. 24, Chris Salvi, running behind a Notre Dame kick returner at Michigan Stadium.

The photo is a proud moment, but the memory of the game — Michigan won by scoring a touchdown with two seconds left — still stings Salvi and his son, Brian, as they discuss it two years later.

"It was about as heartbreaking a way as you could possibly lose," said Brian, who graduated from Notre Dame Law School last year.

"We won. We lost. We won. We lost," his dad responded.

reach his goal, Salvi began by saying he thinks the legal talent is in place. Admitting his own bias, he said he feels like he got "the first pick in the draft" by adding sons Brian and Patrick. And picking up Jeff Kroll, a 17-year attorney at Clifford Law Offices before he started his own firm, was "like a big free-agent signing," Salvi said.

The firm's name and marketing — the bulk of which is handled by Chief Operating Officer TJ Saye — means it "gets the cases" necessary to rank with the biggest of names in Chicago.

What's left, he said, is the execution and consistently large results.

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helmets and take the field, the last time in Miami at the BCS National Championship Game.

A third is his family. He and his wife Lindy have five sons, two of whom — his oldest, 31year-old Patrick, and 26-year-old Brian — are lawyers at the firm. The family is also mourning an unexpected loss. Michael Schostok — Salvi's first law partner, whom he described as a brother — died last year of a brain tumor.

Chicago Lawyer spent time with Salvi and the lawyers of Salvi Schostok & Pritchard to discuss where the 31-year-old firm stands after what has been, in many ways, a remarkable and challenging past 18 months.

Great expectations

You could easily mistake Salvi's corner office on the 16th floor of the Block 37 office building for a shrine to Notre Dame football.

A wall-length cabinet is lined with used cleats and game balls. There are pictures of Salvi's sons at games in Ireland, Soldier Field, Yankee Stadium, FedEx Field (home of the Washington Redskins) and, of course, Notre Dame Stadium. Sitting at his desk, Salvi showed a highlight of Chris making the tackle on the opening kickoff at FedEx Field against Maryland in 2011. (Notre Dame won, 45-21.)

"That would be all year," Salvi said. "That's what a joy it was to watch those games. ... He (was) on kickoff and kickoff return. And so when everyone's ready for the game, no matter what, he would be right on the front line."

While this is the office of a "proud papa" as partner David Pritchard called Salvi — it is also where the managing partner guides his law firm as he attempts to accomplish what he says has been his main goal since 2005.

"Both my sons joining me make me feel as if I still have some of my best days ahead of me, not just behind me," Salvi said. "And, as a law firm in Chicago, we've been here since 1999. But relative to our competition, that really isn't that long. And so we still have a long ways to go to get to where we'd like to be. And that is to be regarded as the best plaintiff's personal injury firm in Illinois."

When asked what the firm needed to do to

see those as the firms that we're kind of chasing," Salvi said.

"It's friendly competition. And I think it was Bob Clifford who always said — I don't know if it's still true, but he always said — "There's plenty of business for all of us.' I don't know if that's as true as much as it used to be. Maybe it was when it was just a handful of lawyers."

From Lake County to Chicago

That handful of lawyers didn't always include Salvi.

Born the oldest of nine children to an attorney father who worked as a general practitioner in Lake Zurich, Salvi always had an interest in sports. He coached his younger brothers' baseball teams and scratched his own sports itch by playing goalie for traveling hockey teams in Northbrook.

He went to St. Mary's University of Minnesota with hopes to play goalie at the NCAA level, but he didn't make the cut — the team had seven goalies vying for two spots. So he spent four years manning the net in a Winona

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city league that he said "really taught me toughness." He also attended the school at the same time as Chicago Blackhawks President John Mc-Donough, whom Salvi calls a personal friend.

"There would be some of the most brutal fights I would ever see," Salvi said about the league. "But in hockey, even in that level, so long as a goalie doesn't insert himself into the fray, it's kind of like an unwritten rule you don't go after the goalie."

After graduating from Notre Dame Law School in 1978, Salvi went into his father's general law practice. He was drawn to the courtroom and soon found the fastest way to spend time at trial was picking up cases from the Lake County public defender's office.

He then handled a medical-malpractice case in Lake County. He remembers hiring an economist, which was at that point "unheard of" in Lake County, he said. Trying a medicalmalpractice case wasn't typical, either.

"A lot of lawyers at the time said you didn't want to handle malpractice because you'll antagonize the doctors who are your witnesses in personal-injury cases," Salvi said.

They were wrong about that, he said — but he didn't mind, since his practice benefited from a statewide explosion of medical-malpractice claims in the 1980s. On Jan. 1, 1982, Salvi opened his own firm in Waukegan.

"I didn't really have a mentor," he said. "I didn't come from one of the big PI firms in Chicago, so I had to just kind of learn on my own. And so I became very involved early on in the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association. And I would attend every seminar I could. I would constantly be asking questions of all these bigshot lawyers."

Salvi served as ITLA president in 1993 and he began practicing with Mike Schostok out of their Waukegan office. A string of successes led up to the firm's 1999 opening of a Chicago office.

"I tried two cases back-to-back," he said. "I was fortunate to get a \$3 million verdict in Waukegan — and then I was sleeping in a hotel, working out of Joe Power's office and we got a \$7 million verdict (in a Chicago case). And I tried the case with Mike Schostok at the time. And he said, I remember, he would call me 'chief.' He said, 'Chief, we gotta have our own office in Chicago.'"

Shortly after that, Salvi & Schostok became Salvi Schostok & Pritchard, with the addition of David Pritchard, who at that point was a 22year veteran defense lawyer.

"I liked him right away," Pritchard said of Salvi. "I like people who are really good at what they do but still laugh and have fun and see the joy in life. And he was like that when we first met. ... He has a great capacity to enjoy things and be fun, but he's a damn serious lawyer. I mean, he's really intense when he's on a case. He's just completely focused in and going to town on it."

In 2008, with his law firm established in Chicago, Salvi bought the Gary SouthShore RailCats. It was the first of what are now his three minor league baseball teams.

His second team — the Schaumburg Boomers — came in 2011 after the Schaumburg Flyers franchise stalled; its overdue rent payments led to the Boomers' lease at the Schaumburg stadium. The North Shore Navigators are a New England wood-bat, summer league team for college players based in Lynn, Mass.

Sitting in his owner's box at Boomers Stadium (the team is still looking for a naming rights agreement), Salvi said he had always been a baseball fan and when the opportunity to buy the RailCats emerged, he figured it was "now or never."

And, the White Sox fan joked, "I couldn't afford the Cubs."

For a man constantly watching the scoreboard at his law firm (One actually exists: It is a list of expected settlements and their payment dates on a whiteboard in the COO's office), owning three minor league baseball teams may seem like a work overload. Salvi said that isn't the case.

"Minor league baseball is a great escape," he said. "I work seven days a week — 10, 12, 14 hours a day. But I enjoy it. I really enjoy the legal side and the business of running a law firm. And on the sports side, I love the competition."

To a large extent, he's able to be a fan of the teams. In minor league baseball, the managers do most of the player-personnel work. His teams have general managers who attend road games and Salvi Sports — the entity that owns the teams — is staffed with a president and general counsel to handle a large portion of day-to-day matters.

He said he mostly gets involved in league issues, future planning (the Boomers will host an all-star game within two years) and strat-

egy.

"The nice thing about baseball is that if you lose, you play the next day," Salvi said. "In a legal case, if you lose, you may not try a case for another six months, a year or two years. And you've got to live with that bad result all the time. In baseball, you can lose two in a row; they can be gut-wrenching losses. And in the next week — in one week — you can be on top of the world because you won seven games in a row. It's unbelievable."

Remembering a 'brother' and partner

Pritchard said he knew Salvi's reputation before he started the firm's Chicago office. He was less familiar with Schostok, but remembered having the chance to see him on trial in Cook County while he was negotiating to join the firm.

"I went and I watched him," Pritchard said of his late partner. "And he was so good. Trial lawyers will never admit that someone's better than they are. He's better than I am at trial."

Schostok, a father of three and husband of Illinois Appellate Justice Mary Seminara Schostok, died at age 51 in July 2012. He was diagnosed with glioblastoma brain cancer in April 2011.

A former ITLA president, Schostok won at least \$142 million in verdicts and settlements for his clients from 1989 until last year. Some of his record-breaking cases included a \$15.35 million jury verdict in 2008 in DeKalb County, the high mark for that venue at the time. In 2001, he won \$13 million from a Cook County jury in a birth negligence case. The law firm said it was a then-national record for a brachial plexus injury.

Salvi, though, remembers Schostok as a friend first.

"He was a very loyal, true friend. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for you," Salvi said. "And we were a very good team in court, too. ... A lot of times you try a case and you're on pins and needles when somebody else is doing something — opening statements or taking a witness. And you're thinking to yourself, 'Oh I wish I'd be doing it,' or 'I wish I could take over.' I never felt that way with Mike."

Pritchard said he knew Schostok mostly as a colleague until the past year, when he began making the three-mile trip to Schostok's home multiple times a week.

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"All three of us have really great families, and it's probably the old joke that we married well," Pritchard said. "I love Michael's kids and I love Pat's kids too. But (Schostok) really became like a brother to me that last year. And you couldn't get sad because you had to be kind of strong."

Tara Devine, who began her career at the firm in 2004, said she remembered Schostok as someone "jurors would want to hang out with after a trial."

"I think that's how he really stood out. He was someone who was likeable," Devine said. "And there are no words that can describe his impact on this law firm and his presence," Devine said. "And we miss him every day. Not a day goes by that any of us don't think of him or his impact on the firm." tled just before trial.

"The confidence he had intimidated me, to an extent," he said. "And then we worked on that case together ... and I was so glad we did that before he got diagnosed with that horrible cancer that he had. Because even though he always respected me, I felt that I had earned his respect through that process."

The next generation

Getting the opportunity to work more cases with Schostok, the younger Salvi said, would have made him a better lawyer.

While he lost a mentor, Salvi gained a mentee this year — his brother, Brian, joined the firm after graduating from Notre Dame Law School.

While Patrick and Brian are good friends —

learning process as a young attorney — one that can be difficult with your father's name on the door.

"As Pat Salvi's son, I want to overcompensate for that. And what I mean by that is, I don't want anything handed to me. I want to make sure that I make my own way; I make my own reputation," Patrick said.

As far as settlements go, he appears to be off to a quick start. He won the aforementioned \$33 million verdict in Lake County as the second chair with his father in 2009. And last year, he and David Pritchard reached a \$29.1 million settlement in a birth-injury case that played out in federal court because the doctors were federal employees.

Pat Sr. said having two of his five sons choose to join the firm is a proud accomplishment.

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Saye, the firm's COO, also serves as president of the Michael Matters Foundation, which was started to raise funds to benefit glioblastoma cancer research. In May, the group took in \$70,000 at its inaugural event.

"Before he passed away, he told Mary Schostok that if he had one wish, it would be that everyone could have their life extended, even if it's by one week or a month, to get that extra time with their family," Saye said. "And so that's what our mission is. ... Ultimately, it's to find a cure."

Patrick Salvi II, a partner at his father's firm, worked on one case with Schostok, which setthey traveled nearly 16,000 miles together attending every Notre Dame game last season and Brian will be Patrick's best man at his November wedding — Patrick said he looks forward to teaching his younger brother a thing or two about the law.

"He understands I've been out six years. He's been out zero, so he's got to listen a little bit," Patrick said. "He'll come to realize very quickly how much work and preparation goes into working up a case and trying a case. And when we do ultimately get that opportunity to try a case together, I can't wait for that."

Patrick said he is going through his own

"There's really kind of nothing like trying cases in terms of the intensity, the emotion, the human drama (and) the chess moves," Salvi Sr. said.

"And when you combine that with the relationship of one of your sons, and you experience that together — and we've had the good fortune of doing that now four times that's fantastic. And it obviously helps when you win."

The same goes for his baseball teams. And Notre Dame. ■

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