

# playing for keeps

“Litigation is a lot like a tennis match. In my mind, you battle through the match and, when it’s over, you shake hands with your opponent and leave it all on the court. Fight with strategy, ethics, the will to win and leave emotions at the door,” says solo practitioner **Haley Prevatt, Esq.**



**H**er reference to tennis is more than just a convenient metaphor. After winning the regional championship for Lafayette High School in Lexington, Prevatt was given a full scholarship to play at a Division One university. “I am a very competitive person. I love to compete and I love to win. The lessons I have learned in the game of tennis, especially singles, have been hugely beneficial for preparation in the business world. It’s only you and your opponent on center court. You can be down 2-5 in the third set in 100 degree heat, both of you worn out and so hot that you can wring water out of your clothes, but you can still pull out the win. Patience, mental toughness, strategy, and just plain digging deep are all necessary. In tennis and in a case, sometimes you have to wait for the opportunity to present itself. A case or a match can look bleak, but with strategy and patience, what appeared to be on track for a loss can turn into a win. Things can get pretty heated out there, but you must be mentally tough, you can’t be afraid to hit the next shot, and you can’t be afraid to lose. If you’re afraid to lose, you’ll never win.”

Prevatt had always loved negotiations, sales, and the challenges of running a business. She started her first business when she was six years old, parking cars for UK football games in her front yard and driveway. She also developed an interest in the law. Her academic record of a straight-A four point grade point average in undergrad reflects the intensity of her drive to excel. After graduating summa cum laude with a BBA in Marketing and Management from the University of Kentucky Gatton College of Business and Economics in May, 2003, she earned her MBA and J.D. from the University of Kentucky College of Law and Gatton College of Business and Economics in May, 2007.

## Seeing the Law from Both Sides

Following graduation from law school, she worked as staff attorney for Fayette Circuit Judge James D. Ishmael. This



experience allowed Prevatt the opportunity to learn the legal system from the inside-out and gave her an up close and personal look at how the law works from both sides of the bench or conference table. Early on, Prevatt knew she wanted to practice in an area of law requiring courtroom litigation.

She says, “When working for Judge Ishmael, I would sit in his courtroom for as many criminal and civil motion hours as possible. I would observe and try to learn what the seasoned attorneys were doing. It was fun to watch the criminal proceedings and see the characters in the courtroom. When I finished my year with the Judge, I knew I wanted to do criminal defense and personal injury law.”

Judge Ishmael included her in discussions about decisions that would be made on the bench. The position provided

access to insight on how judges think, what influences them, and what they look for in briefs attorneys write. Not a week goes by that Prevatt doesn’t refer to some lesson she learned that year with the Judge. The knowledge was, and continues to be, invaluable.

## It’s in Your Blood

Judge Ishmael pushes his “children” out of the nest and allows his staff attorneys only one year in that position. Starting her own practice was always on Prevatt’s mind, even during law school. One law professor encouraged her goal, telling her that, while he didn’t usually advise such an endeavor without first working in an established firm, he saw in her the personality traits necessary to jump over that step. In 2008, Prevatt took that leap of faith and began

her own practice focused on Criminal Defense, Civil Litigation, Dependency, Neglect and Abuse, and Personal Injury.

She feels being raised by parents who had been owner/operators of two successful businesses helped influence her decision to start her own practice so soon out of school. “I think if you are raised in the mindset of owning your own business, it is in your blood.” However, she is quick to stress none of this was done alone. “The established legal community greeted me with open arms. The support, assistance, and encouragement they gave me has been priceless. I will not forget it.”

## The Prevatt Law Office Today

By the end of 2013, another major business decision had to be made. Prevatt says, “Thankfully, my practice was growing in both the areas of criminal defense and personal injury and it got to a point where I had to decide what the focus was going to be so that I could remain the attorney on my injury cases. I didn’t want to hire anybody. I like being hands-on. I like being the one talking to my clients and knowing everything that is going on in their files. Since there are only 24 hours in a day, a choice had to be made.” Although she remains active in her other practice areas, Prevatt’s primary focus is Personal Injury, representing people injured in motor vehicle accidents, slip-and-falls, while on the job, or a combination thereof.

“Personal Injury law combines many of the things I enjoy in the practice of law and have been trained to do. I love negotiating, strategizing, the medical aspect, going to court, and arguing motions.” This, she believes, is “probably a large part of why I love going to work each day.” Another reason she chose to shift her focus to personal injury over criminal defense is that she represented her father, who was injured in an automobile accident in 2011. She witnessed firsthand what her clients and their families go through in an injury lawsuit. “These people live day and night with their one case and it is constant. They don’t get to take a break from it. Truly knowing what my clients and their families

are going through really helps me assess and work on my cases. That knowledge ignited the passion I already had for Personal Injury law. Navigating through an injury claim can be an emotionally and physically painful process for people. I wanted to help as many people as possible,” she says.

## Keeping It Hands-On

“When you hire me, you get me, not another attorney, working your case. It’s me. I stay in touch with my clients, whether by phone, e-mail, or text-whatever is most convenient for them.”

Prevatt believes in knowing each of her clients on a first-name basis. “My clients are not numbers. They have a name, they have a face, they have a family, and they have a life. I don’t forget that. I like being able to talk to my clients when they call. I haven’t, and won’t, hire another attorney because I don’t want to lose the personal aspect of the business. This often means working on weekends and foregoing vacations, but it is worth it to me.”

It’s not to say Prevatt works totally alone. Prevatt’s mom is an R.N., whom she used early on in her practice as a nurse consultant. As the practice grew and she took on more injury cases, Prevatt was able to convince her mom to work with her at the office as her assistant and office manager. The transition was seamless and Prevatt is quick to note, “She’s priceless. Clients love her and are disappointed if they miss seeing her when they come in for an appointment. I’d not say she works for me so much as we work together; we just have different functions. Having a nursing background is a big asset on the medical side of things...not to mention it is nice having someone I can trust handling the books!” Prevatt also persuaded her dad to come out of his forced retirement, secondary to the wreck, to handle the ever increasing need for electronic document storage.

A significant portion of the firm’s time and energy is directed not only at getting the best possible legal outcome, but also in obtaining appropriate medical treatment to achieve as much wellness as possible for her clients. “These people are hurt through

no fault of their own. Money is great, but it is no substitute for good physical health.” Toward this end, she conducts ongoing discussions with her nurse consultant about client injuries, conditions and treatments. The client is included in these discussions and encouraged to actively participate in their care. She makes a point of holding regular face-to-face and phone conferences throughout the case to keep each client fully aware and up-to-date on its status. She is careful to give each client copies of documents and materials that have been sent to the insurance adjusters or to the defense attorneys.

## Making the Numbers Work for Her Clients

Prevatt feels just as strongly about her clients obtaining the best, appropriate medical treatment as she does that they walk away with the best financial outcome possible. She balances the empathy she has for her clients with a business-minded approach to their cases, intended to benefit her clients’ financial bottom line. “It can be devastating for an injured party when their damages arguably exceed the liability limits of the at-fault party’s insurance and (1) the injured party does not have UIM on their own insurance policy and (2) an asset check of the at-fault party reveals that pursuing a trial and jury verdict for an excess judgment over and above policy limits would prove fruitless, as there are no realistically-collectible assets. In those cases, I do my best to reduce my client’s expenses as much as possible so they can walk away with the largest settlement, given the imperfect circumstances. For this reason, and because I want people to be compensated to the full extent of their damages, I try to educate each client on the law with regard to insurance policy limits in Kentucky and the importance of both purchasing UIM insurance and not opting out of UM coverage. With many insurance companies, UIM adds only a few extra dollars to the premium.” She wants her clients to be armed with valuable, real-life information that may help protect them even after their case is completed.



## The Happy Client

“I have been hugely blessed to have a referral-driven business, whether from attorneys and law professors to whom I remain eternally grateful or from wonderful clients who have remained loyal through the years.” Someone who refers a client to Prevatt knows their client or friend is going to be in good hands with an attorney who cares about the outcome of the case. “I am going to take care of their client or friend. When they trust me with a referral, I realize their name and reputation are on that referral. I take that responsibility very seriously. When the case is finished and I have a happy client, that’s worth more to me than any tennis trophy or title.”

## Staying on Top by Staying in Top Form

It is no secret stress comes with this job. Prevatt believes balance is the key to staying in this profession for the long haul. She rises at five o’clock a.m. to get in her first workout of the day with an hour of swimming, a six mile run, or a couple sets of tennis before going to work. “During my workouts I spend time thinking about my cases. You can make some great decisions and come up with some great ideas while working out. I’ll get a good hour of work done before I even come into the office. A lot of strategic decisions are made during that sweaty, brainstorming hour! I like to finish the day with another workout to use as a de-stressor and to clear my head,” she says.

Goal setting, planning, preparation, strategy, emotional control, physical and mental mastery of oneself and assessment of the situation at hand are lessons taught by the game of tennis. “Just hit the ball. It doesn’t matter who is on the other side of the court. Do what you know how to do,” her favorite tennis coach would say. The same goes for the law. “Passion without personalization – you have to have it in tennis and in litigation. Years on the tennis court gave me that foundation.”

## At A Glance

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