

Tough Terrain Gives Mountain Biking Lawyers Clarity in Court

By Laura Lorek

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At 12,600 feet above sea level, where the thin mountain air burns lungs and legs scream for mercy, two high-powered litigators find something most lawyers long to experience in the courtroom: clarity.

Attorneys Ryan Baker and Tigran Guledjian have spent the past nine years conquering the Leadville 100, one of America's most punishing mountain bike races, pedaling 100 miles through Colorado's unforgiving terrain while juggling million-dollar lawsuits and complex legal battles.

"The peace that it provides, the calmness, the disconnection from emails and phone calls. ... It gives you sort of the time to think with clarity, think about the problems that you know that we have," said Guledjian, a partner at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan based in Los Angeles.

The attorneys' extreme hobby isn't just an escape from their demanding legal practices; it's become an integral part of how they approach high-stakes litigation, using grueling training rides to strategize cases and drawing parallels between mountain biking's split-second decisions and courtroom tactics.



Courtesy photo

Tigran Guledjian, partner at Quinn Emanuel, left, and Ryan Baker, founding partner at Waymaker LLP, right, during the Cape Epic race in South Africa.

Baker, for instance, is known to tape case notes to his handlebars to think through tough strategies on long rides. He's also pulled over during rides to dictate his thoughts into his phone's recorder.

The partnership between Baker, founding partner at Waymaker LLP in Los Angeles, and Guledjian extends far beyond Colorado's high-altitude challenges.

This year, the duo tackled the Absa Cape Epic in South Africa, which is widely regarded as the "Tour de France of Mountain Biking." They completed the eight-stage endurance test that covers

Courtesy photo



Tigran Guledjian, partner at Quinn Emanuel, right, and Ryan Baker, founding partner at Waymaker LLP, left, during the Cape Epic race in South Africa.

nearly 50,000 vertical feet through some of the world's most technical terrain.

During this year's Cape Epic, where temperatures reached up to 120°F, one racer died from dehydration, underscoring the race's extreme difficulty. The harsh conditions required two stage changes—one for excessive heat and another due to heavy rains that turned the trails to mud.

Nearly half of the 1,500 participants dropped out, but Baker and Guledjian finished the race in 47 hours. They competed to support the Anna Foundation, a nonprofit organization that aids rural children in South Africa through education and life skills programs.

Their 24-year friendship, which began when both were young associates at Quinn Emanuel in 2001, has been forged through thousands of training miles and races across multiple continents. John Quinn, one of the firm's founding partners, rode street bikes and led by example in encouraging lawyers to have a hobby outside the courtroom, Baker said.

Maintaining their racing schedule requires up to 10 hours of weekly training while managing busy litigation practices.

"There is always an hour in a day that you can find to go out on a ride," Guledjian said, describing how they use indoor trainers and coordinate schedules around court dates and depositions.

Baker's firm, Waymaker LLP, has sponsored the Leadville 100 race for 10 years, using entries to build client relationships.

Both firms encourage outdoor activities, with Quinn Emanuel's annual firm hikes taking 250 people to exotic locations, such as Peru. Guledjian had just returned from one of those hikes last month.

Both attorneys are chasing their 10th Leadville finish next year, which comes with a coveted "Plata Grande," which is a massive gold and silver belt buckle reserved for those who complete a decade of races. But for Baker and Guledjian, the real prize may be what they've discovered about themselves in their rides.

"You need this outlet because you're not at a lifestyle firm," Baker said. "You're doing intense stuff, and it's nice to have a break."

But they will not have a break for long.

As both lawyers eye their next extreme challenge, which is an Andorra Cape Epic-style race, they've become unofficial advocates for what they call the "work hard, play hard" philosophy.

"Working hard lets you play hard, and then playing hard helps you work hard," Guledjian said. "One helps the other."

This is the 10th story in a series on litigators with hobbies.