

# Thought Leader Spotlight

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As part of The Azara Group's monthly newsletter, we select a business leader to share insights about leadership, being an influencer, and career development. Our objective is to help support your ability to flourish as a leader and share what makes people thrive in business.

## Hal Biagas

Senior Vice President  
Excel Sports Management

**Education:** UCLA School of Law (JD)  
Boston University (B.A. in History)

**Previously With:** Wasserman Media Group  
National Basketball Players Association (NBPA)  
Allstate Financial

**Interesting Details:** Grew up in the DC metropolitan area; met his wife in 1997 in a law firm cafeteria while working on the Latrell Sprewell arbitration after Sprewell was suspended and his contract was voided by the Golden State Warriors as a result of an altercation with Coach P.J. Carlesimo.



### 1. What attracted you to your chosen field and profession?

At the beginning of 2015, I decided to shift from practicing law to being a sports agent. Excel is a premier sports agency with over 200 clients in baseball (MLB), basketball (NBA), football (NFL), golf (PGA Tour), and Sports Marketing. I run the coaching and executive representation business – focused on coaches and executives in the NBA, NFL, MLB, and NCAA men's basketball, football, and baseball. I used to be General Counsel at Excel. Prior to that, I was the Executive Vice President of Team Sports at Wasserman Media Group and also the Deputy Counsel and Assistant General Counsel for the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA).

I've been on the periphery of representation for years, and enjoy advocating and negotiating for people. I felt it was time to focus on being an agent. I didn't want to have any career regrets. As an agent, I prefer focusing on coaches over athletes. I see them as peers and work well with them. They have a need and I help them reach their goals. I love working in sports – it's challenging, dynamic, and newsworthy. During my career in sports, I've worked on issues touching broader societal issues – employee relations, race, gender, and class.

### 2. What person, opportunity, or game-changing moment had the biggest impact on your career?

When Arn Tellen (a top basketball agent) brought me to Wasserman, it was a pivotal moment in my career. I had been at the NBPA for 12 years, and Wasserman wanted me in a COO role. It was a shift from the union side to the agency side of athlete representation and advocacy. It broadened what I envisioned for myself in sports, and planted the seed of wanting to be an agent. Today, I feel empowered in my role at Excel and am enjoying being able to grow a new business line for the company focused on collegiate and professional-level coaches.

### **3. What is the biggest challenge you faced professionally? How did you overcome it?**

As an attorney, my first courtroom trial where I was first chair was very challenging. No matter how much you prepare, you feel like you could always do more – read another deposition, rewrite your opening statement, or read another case. It was an intimidating experience, especially jury selection. I rewrote my opening statement five times because I wanted to tell a compelling story. I could barely sleep before the first day. I was anxious and pushed my body to the limits – I wasn't sleeping or eating right during the lead-up to the trial. I wanted to do well. I put myself at ease by doing the work, anticipating any objections from opposing counsel, and getting advice from colleagues.

In the end, all of my hard work and dedication paid off. Not only was I fully prepared, but I won the case! Once I got through this first experience, trials were no longer intimidating. Winning affirmed that I made the right decisions along the way. It was exciting. Helping my client win validated my confidence and confirmed I was a good lawyer.

### **4. What tools or tactics do you rely on in being a more effective leader and team member?**

I've learned the importance of good communication and candor. This is important in all aspects of my job, but particularly with clients. Throughout my career, both as an agent and as an attorney, I have to tell people what they need to know and not just what they want to hear. I also need to share information in ways that resonate with them. The challenge is in learning people's communication style since everyone likes different levels of engagement. Some clients want to speak frequently – sometimes daily – and others are happier touching base once per quarter. You have to figure out the right balance and their preferences, and then deliver what works best for each client.

At the end of the day, you need to build trust and tell people the truth. You have to be honest about a client's prospect for success and not give them lip service. I believe in being positive, but also pragmatic and realistic.

### **5. Share a story about an interesting or difficult negotiation and how you were able to gain more influence and leverage as a result.**

My most difficult negotiation involved the 1999 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with the NBA. Negotiations started in 1997. For almost two years, it was incredibly stressful and tense. The players were locked out for half of the season. Players weren't being paid, owners were losing money daily, and both sides were concerned the sport would be irreparably harmed. Players fought with one another, and owners had vehement disagreements with each other. We had to find a solution or else we would reach the point of no return. Everyone had to compromise.

The positive was that we gained more leverage, had great internal communication, and earned the trust and respect of players and the league. In 2005, the next CBA negotiation with the NBA was far less contentious as a result. When you are on the precipice of the edge, you know you're not going to jump off nor fold under the pressure but fight for what you believe is fair. Once you prove this to yourself and the other side, future dealings can be much better.

### **6. What do you see as your unique value proposition and how has your personal background prepared you to excel?**

It's a combination of skills – I'm a skilled negotiator, I have a deep understanding of the industry, and my personality allows me to work well with clients and others. I don't see negotiating as win-lose but the need to reach a fair result. My parents divorced when I was 10, my father lived overseas, and I have a mentally disabled brother that I needed to protect. I learned how to be independent, tenacious, and draw on an inner strength that's served me well in life.

### **7. What is your proudest achievement?**

I am extremely proud of my role in forming the first major women's sports union in 1999 – the Women's National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA). I served as General Counsel and helped negotiate the 1999, 2003, and 2008 CBAs. We went on an old fashioned roadshow to educate female players to gain their support, and fought off objections from the league. We were trailblazers. We got them better employment terms – money, healthcare, safety and welfare, and started a pension. My work continues to positively impact female athletes and their families.