

Mock Trial-Intense and so Much Fun

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This past week was all mock trial, all the time. My partner was Andres Chinchilla in Miami. We did several practices in the lead up to the trial and we were lucky to have attorneys Chase Hattaway, Melissa Softness, and Samantha Duke coaching us. I'm on moot court—not mock trial—so this was very different for me.

The case was a wrongful death case involving a 20 year old girl who died at a frat party after falling off (or, possibly, diving off) a lifeguard chair the frat had set up on their premises. The problem contained the complaint and answer, four sets of depositions, 14 exhibits, jury instructions, stipulations—the whole nine yards.

There was a lot to sink our teeth into. We also had to prepare both sides of the case—we weren't going to find out which side we were going to argue until less than 24 hours before! We agreed I would do openings and he would do closings. I was going to do my direct/cross of the police officer who responded at the scene and of the party planner the fraternity hired. Andres was going to direct/cross the decedent's best friend and the treasurer of the fraternity.

Over the course of working on this problem, our strategy evolved a lot. Working both sides really helped me see how each aspect of the problem worked together. The feedback I got from the coaches as well as from Andres was invaluable. I loved it. I still love moot court but this definitely cemented my appreciation for mock trial.

On the Sunday before the competition, everyone came into the Orlando office to work on the mock trial. It was great getting to meet the other summer associates. They are all incredibly talented and hardworking and I enjoyed getting to know each of them. We were all waiting on pins and needles to find out which side we were on.

Andres and I ended up with Plaintiff. Our focus then shifted to getting justice for the girl who died at the party. We rehearsed all of our directs and crosses in the Everglades Conference room which would be the courtroom. Andres is a seasoned mock trial competitor, he gave me so many great pointers on how to most effectively present in the courtroom space.

Finally, the trial came on Monday morning. I was a little nervous to do my opening. I thought it went pretty well, though. Luckily, I had totally forgotten that attorneys from all the offices were on zoom watching it—otherwise I'd have been even more nervous.

Things started to get crazy during my direct of the officer that responded at the scene. The officer was played by attorney Kayla Platt Rady and she put on a great show pretending to be this police officer. All the while, objections were flying left and right to what I was trying to get her to testify to. I really liked arguing the objections, it's a lot of fun. Less fun when you lose almost all of them, as was the case for me, but I enjoyed the challenge. Luckily, my cross of the party planner, played by HR Coordinator Nicole Green, was a little less objectionable.

Andres did a really nice job on his direct and cross and had an awesome closing. Our opponents, Graham Marcus and Julie Potts, were both fantastic throughout. They would not give us a single inch on our case and did a great job presenting the fact in the best light possible. I benefitted a lot from working with our coaches and with Andres, and from watching Graham and Julie. All have great futures as trial lawyers if that is what they want to do.

Our trial ended up taking over three hours. This threw a wrench into the plan of having a third trial that day. Andres and I ate lunch with Graham and Julie and wondered about how the other summer associates were doing in their trial. Before long, we learned the third trial—scheduled to be between whichever two teams won the first two trials—was cancelled.

This gave us the opportunity to watch the other mock trial. We started watching right at Meghan Kennedy's closing, which was brilliant. She went on to win best advocate, which was well deserved based on the closing I saw alone.

Afterwards, we had a happy hour and then the summers went out on our own. My main takeaways are that I really enjoyed this group and I am so glad I got to be a summer associate at Rumberger. They have prioritized teaching us as many practical skills as possible in ten weeks. I've learned so much that could have taken me years to learn otherwise. This has been an awesome experience and I am grateful to have had the opportunity.