

## Joe Baldiga Featured in ABA Experience Journal, Holding Court on the Paintball Field

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### A fluke event turned into a love of this game that requires strategy, skill, and teamwork

After a tough week at the office, there's nothing quite as exhilarating as crawling through local woodlands on your hands and knees as paintballs whiz past you through the air.

I'm a paintball warrior. By day, I navigate the complex world of commercial bankruptcy law. On weekends, I trade the courtroom for the paintball field, embracing an extreme sport that has unexpectedly become a significant part of my life.

#### How a ritual was born

I've always thrived on the thrill of competition and the rush of adrenaline. But my journey into paintball began by chance 10 years ago when my son, Rob, attended a birthday party at a local paintball facility. I joined the kids and some of the other dads in a few matches and was hooked.

The experience ignited a passion for paintball that I've carried with me ever since. What started as a onetime adventure has evolved into a weekend ritual.

My son, now 24, eventually got a job at the facility, and I seized every opportunity to play while he was on the clock. However, I limit myself to one day of paintball on the weekends because my wife began referring to herself as a "paintball widow."

#### Paintball for the uninitiated



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If you've never played paintball, think of it as a cross between tag and hide and seek but amplified to an extreme level. Working in teams, your goal is to eliminate opponents from play by hitting them with paintballs. The paintballs are made of gelatin and filled with water-soluble dye of varying colors. They're shot from a low-energy "marker" powered by compressed air.

You can play indoors or outdoors using natural or artificial terrain for cover. The game demands not just physical agility but a sharp mind to strategize and outmaneuver your opponents. I like to hide behind trees, in bushes, or on riverbanks and wait for opposing players to cross my path. It brings out the kid in me.

At first glance, paintball and bankruptcy law seem worlds apart. However, I've discovered surprising parallels between the two. Both require a level of managed aggressiveness and a deep commitment to teamwork.

In my legal practice, being able to work collaboratively with the same people you might oppose on another day is crucial. Paintball reinforces this lesson in a direct, visceral way. The sport also teaches you to think on your feet, adapt to rapidly changing situations, and, most importantly, to work as part of a cohesive unit toward a common goal.

### **What doesn't kill you...**

But paintball is more than just a weekend diversion. It has become a vital outlet for stress relief and a means to satisfy my competitive streak outside the courtroom. The adrenaline rush that comes with navigating through woodlands and executing strategies and the camaraderie formed on the field is unparalleled.

It's a chance to disconnect from the complexities of law and reconnect with a simpler, more instinctual part of myself. The sport demands quick thinking and adaptability, qualities that are equally important in my profession.

Injury, of course, is a part of any physical sport, and paintball is no exception. I've had my fair share of bruises and a particularly memorable incident that left me without a voice for two weeks—not ideal for someone whose job revolves around advocacy and negotiation.

I take precautions, of course, wearing protective gear to minimize injury. But there's something about the risk—the possibility of pain—that adds to the thrill of the game. It's a reminder that there's no reward without a

little risk, a lesson that resonates both on the paintball field and in the courtroom.

### **More than a hobby**

Over the years, I've introduced many colleagues and clients to paintball, hosting semi-annual events that have grown in popularity. These events have become a highlight for many, drawing bankers, lawyers, and other professionals into the fold. It's been incredible to see hesitant first-timers transform into enthusiastic participants eager for the next game.

In the end, paintball is more than just a hobby for me; it's a counterbalance to my life as a bankruptcy attorney, a way to connect with others, and a source of physical exhilaration and mental clarity. It reinforces the importance of strategy, teamwork, and resilience—lessons that are as applicable in the legal world as they are on the paintball field. And perhaps most importantly, it's a reminder that at any age, there's joy to be found in play, in competition, and in the great outdoors.

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