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COVER STORY

Triathlete lawyer helping LA with Olympic bid

By Steven Crighton
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Outlasting the competition in an effort to win the 2024 Olympic bid has been something of a marathon for Los Angeles. Luckily, the city's hired someone with experience.

Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP partner Noah Balch has been working out of the Los Angeles 2024 Olympic bid team's office since May. He was initially tasked with helping the bid team finalize its marketing and vendor agreements and has since been moved to securing lodging for the event.

Though athletes would stay in the Olympic Village, the International Olympics Committee requires a host city to book rooms for other groups involved with the event, such as planning committees and the media. Balch has spent much of the last few months working on a series of structured deals with local hotels to secure 40,000 rooms within 30 miles of the events.

"It's been a staggering scene, I must say," Balch said, "Most of the hotels don't structure their agreements in this fashion, so we've had to overcome quite a few hurdles to get the amount of hotel rooms we'd need."

Balch said he's always been captivated by the event, having been inspired by the athletes competing in the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Games in particular. As he began researching how to contribute to the city's bid, Zia Modabber, managing partner of Katten Muchin's Los Angeles office, coincidentally announced that the firm would be offering its assistance to the bid committee.

"I was more than happy to help, so it just kind of worked out," Balch said.

Another big motivator may have been that Balch is something of a



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Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP partner Noah Balch works on the Los Angeles 2024 Olympic bid team and, in his free time, trains for triathlons.

serious athlete himself, particularly when it comes to an Olympics classic – the triathlon.

Though he dabbled in various sports like wrestling and football throughout his youth, he had never considered entering a triathlon until he joined Katten Muchin. At the time, the firm was trying to put together a team for a 75-flight stair climb competition, and Balch was tasked with recruitment. He asked a group of summer associates whether they'd like to join, and instead, they gave him a challenge – race a triathlon.

"Needless to say, they all turned out to be great negotiators, because I signed up for two sprint triathlons on the same weekend," Balch said.

Balch researched the events as best he could in preparation for the daunting challenge and joined some local triathlete groups to get accustomed to the rigorous training regimen. He was particularly concerned about his swimming time, given that he had no swimming background.

Looking to test his abilities ahead of any race, he found he was barely

able to swim 200 yards without running out of steam. But his technique improved after joining a local swim group, Tower 26, where he learned all the skills one would need in a triathlon. Balch said he now averages about 20,000 yards per week in the water.

His first taste of a true event came in the form of two spring triathlons – which run about a quarter of the length of a traditional triathlon. After winning first place in both, Balch felt confident about his chances in the full event. He entered his first full triathlon in Austin, Texas about three years ago, finishing it in about five hours.

Balch initially decided he'd never do another triathlon – but after some time, he convinced himself to do one more. He's been performing in them ever since, having won eight overall and placing first in his age group in nine others. He's even competed in two 70-mile Ironman triathlons, ranking 16th out of nearly 1,000 competitors.

He found that triathlons help keep him focused, as he's always striving to improve on previous performances

in the lead-up to the next big race. They also help satisfy a competitive urge, he said.

"It's a lifestyle change and a big commitment. But I'm highly competitive, so if I'm not at trial, then this is something that can allow me to compete, to use it as an outlet," Balch said. "With my intensely competitive side, it is no surprise that I also enjoy earning a spot on the podium."

Balch said he feels he doesn't have the genetics or athletic skills of some of the world's top triathletes. But as is the case in law, he finds that determination and hard work trump all.

"I have the capacity to work a lot harder than some might find," Balch said. "If we're working on a summary judgment motion, it's not just about getting it done, but making certain that it was well developed and procedurally sound. For me, there's just a part of that competitive drive."

Modabber said given Balch's lifestyle and attitude, he was a "natural fit" for the Los Angeles 2024 bid team.

"Noah is a very resourceful and personable young lawyer with boundless energy and what seems to be a passion for hard work," Modabber said. "He truly is a go-getter who loves to dig in on big projects and will work non-stop to achieve his goals. So, of course, his name immediately came to mind when I learned that LA24 was looking to add to their team."

Balch expects he'll keep working with the Los Angeles bid team through September 2017, when the International Olympic Committee will make its decision. Should Los Angeles be chosen, he hopes his work with the group will continue.

And while he's not holding out hope that they'll need another runner, he knows if they ever need someone to carry the Olympic Torch through downtown, he'll be prepared.