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REMEMBRANCES OF BOB WOOLF, AMERICA'S FIRST SPORTS AGENT

Bob Woolf was a true pioneer. He blazed new trails by representing athletes and entertainers and left an entire industry in his wake. Every agent and every person who has ever been represented by an agent owes Bob Woolf a debt of gratitude, both for creating the field and for setting a standard of professionalism that remains beyond reproach. The entire legal profession can learn much from his negotiating techniques, his client contact philosophy and his unimpeachable ethics.

Robert Woolf was born in Portland, Maine, on February 15, 1928. He attended Boston College on a basketball scholarship and graduated from Boston University Law School in 1952. After law school, Mr. Woolf served in the United States Army Judge Advocate General Corps. He left the Army in 1954 and began a successful criminal law practice.

In 1964, an encounter with Boston Red Sox pitcher Earl Wilson led Bob Woolf down an unexplored path. Wilson asked Mr. Woolf to represent him in obtaining endorsement contracts and personal appearances. In 1966, Bob Woolf became the first lawyer to represent an athlete in contract negotiations, negotiating Wilson's contract with the Red Sox. Word of Woolf's negotiating talent spread among the Red Sox players, and soon others, including Carl Yastremski, Luis Tiant and Jim Rice, were anxious to have Bob Woolf represent them.

Bob Woolf's practice would remain centered around great athletes and entertainers for the rest of his life. He represented over 500 athletes and entertainers, far too many to detail here. His diverse clientele included Boston Celtics greats Larry Bird and John Havlicek, Heisman Trophy winner Doug Flutie, NFL great Joe Montana, Olympic Gold Medalist Florence Griffith-Joyner, Cy Young Award Winner Tom Glavine, radio and television personality Larry King, the music group New Kids on the Block and violinist Itzhak Perlman. Clients were always more to Bob Woolf than names on a file. Being represented by Bob Woolf was like joining an enormous extended family.

In addition to being an outstanding lawyer, loyal friend and devoted husband and father, Bob Woolf lent his energy to numerous societies and causes. He was an active member of B'nai B'rith,

the Friars' Club and the Shriners. He also was devoted to charitable projects in Israel and Boston.

In 1976, he took on a new role: Bob Woolf the author. His first book, *Behind Closed Doors*, was a biographical account of the birth of sports and entertainment representation. Woolf's second book, *Friendly Persuasion*, was published in 1990. It grew out of his lifetime of negotiation experience and provides valuable insight into the negotiation process.

Bob Woolf was a man of talent who never lost sight of his ethical standards. His staunch adherence to "the rules of the game" generated great respect from clients and management alike. Woolf advised negotiators to "[b]e sensitive to the other side's position in order to take advantage of any weaknesses, but don't ever lose sight of having compassion for them as well." He approached negotiation from a friendly perspective, saying "you don't win through intimidation."

The industry Bob Woolf created and nurtured owes him a debt that can never be repaid. His ethical standards should inspire those who come after him to act honestly and fairly and to treat others with compassion. His negotiating skills should serve well as a foundation for wise negotiations that satisfy both sides and create a relationship for the next meeting.

Bob Woolf was 65 years old when he passed away in his sleep on November 30, 1993. He leaves behind a family, an industry and a legend. The following tributes were written by a few of those whose lives Bob Woolf touched. They paint a picture of a compassionate, energetic man with a pioneering spirit.

It is with affection and great respect that we dedicate this inaugural volume of the *Villanova Sports & Entertainment Law Forum* to the man who made it all possible, Bob Woolf.

BOB WOOLF: BRIEF REMEMBRANCES

The word great is bandied about far too easily today. It has become difficult to sort out the great from the merely overblown. Bob Woolf was one of the truly great. His death leaves a void in my life, in the lives of those many he represented and helped and in the industry he created.

Bob was the only agent I ever had. But he was more than my agent; he was one of the best friends I have ever known. No man ever had more friends. He took such great pride in everything he did, from representation to the birthday party he threw for me shortly before his death. He called it the "50th anniversary of my 10th birthday" and nobody was happier that night than Bob.

Bob leaves behind a loving family, a wealth of friends and a ton of admirers. The world will miss him. And when God meets Bob, He's going to meet the best negotiator there ever was—and the meeting will be upstairs.

Larry King

Twenty-two years ago I walked into Attorney Bob Woolf's office at 9:00 A.M. on a Monday morning for an interview that had been set up by a family friend because of my knowledge of, and interest in, professional sports. The main components of my interview with Bob consisted of sharing our thoughts about the important things in life and our preferred code of conduct toward others, followed by questions, such as "Can you spell Yastrzemski?" (I could), "Who was last year's MVP in basketball?" and "Can you type?" I started working for Bob that very day, researching chronological information for Bob's first book about negotiating, *Behind Closed Doors*, and thus began a most interesting and rewarding odyssey, led by a man named Bob Woolf, who (along with my own dad) possessed the strongest commitment to ethical principles that I have ever seen.

At first, I was not so aware of his integrity as I was more affected at that time by his brilliant intuitive skills, his compassion for every person that guided him in his daily care of his many clients. I marveled at how he turned potentially vitriolic negotiations into rolls of laughter with a self-effacing remark or a quick change to a more palatable subject for the moment—Bob was a master at controlling a situation without ever appearing to do so. He brought his genuine joy in experiencing life to his work and it showed every day. Even when a negotiation was not going his way, he remained ever optimistic and kept forging ahead, never losing faith in himself, the person he was negotiating with or it the sometimes arduous process. As the years went on and I learned more and more about the business of representation, I saw the difficulties and even tragedies that occurred because of unscrupulous or inexperienced people in our business, many taking advantage of their trusting clients. It was then that I clearly recognized and admired Bob's courage in maintaining his values and never falling to the vagaries of an industry that had economically exploded and brought with it the many opportunities to deviate from the high road for personal gain. Bob always took the high road and along the way he gave so generously to those of us around him, taking the time each day to teach the nuances and skills he had spent thirty-five years honing to such a high level.

As an extremely successful criminal attorney before his sports and entertainment representation developed, Bob brought all aspects of his law background into his subsequent career and while I miss my mentor and friend every day, I thank God every day as well for allowing me to benefit so much from working with such an exceptional, dynamic, one-in-a-million person. As I, and our staff,

continue on each day, we are all aware of the precepts and caliber of representation that Bob created and we will continue always at our very best in tribute to him and to all for which he stood.

*Jill Leone,
Executive Vice President,
Bob Woolf Associates, Inc.*

When I first came to Boston from the small town of French Lick, Indiana, I felt a little overwhelmed with the size of the city and all of the demands that were immediately placed on me. Having to talk to the press everyday, learning a whole new system of basketball, being away from my hometown friends, meeting so many new people each day—I was just trying to keep up with it all. I feel that the person who helped me through that whole process and allowed me to keep an even keel throughout so that I could concentrate on being the best basketball player that I could be was Bob Woolf. He was the man I depended upon to guide me through the ups and downs of a professional sports career. He told me what was going to happen before it happened so that I always felt prepared to cope with the roller coaster aspects of an NBA career. He listened to the way I felt about things and then figured out the best way to handle a particular situation that was affecting me. He was always there for me. I always felt so comfortable with Mr. Woolf and I know he was always be trying his best for me. I feel Mr. Woolf helped me in my desire to do the best job I could for the Celtics and for the fans throughout my career. Unfortunately, his untimely passing prevented me from personally giving him the commemorative ring I had made for him to thank him for all that he had done for me over the years. My wife and I miss you, Mr. Woolf, and we will always be thinking of you.

Larry Bird

