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Close-up: Steve Strauss

Attorney's caseload includes Seau family, Doug Manchester

By **DOUG SHERWIN**

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San Diego litigator Steve Strauss' client list reads like a who's who of Southern California.

Qualcomm, the Salk Institute, Doug Manchester, Ernest Rady.

His latest case involves another local icon — former NFL star line-backer Junior Seau.

Strauss, a partner at the law firm **Cooley LLP**, is helping represent Seau's family in their wrongful death lawsuit against the NFL.

Seau committed suicide in May, and his family claims the NFL is responsible because the former San Diego Charger standout developed a serious brain disease as a player, which ultimately led him to take his life.

"They want to honor his legacy and his career and definitely bring attention to this issue," Strauss said of the reasons behind the lawsuit, adding that the family also wants to discover the true effects of the sport "so that in the future, athletes will be fully informed about the risks they're facing when playing a sport as violent as football."

Strauss, who has enlisted the help of personal injury attorney David Casey of **Casey Gerry Schenk Francavilla Blatt & Penfield LLP**, said the family also wants to make sure manufacturers are doing all they can to make the sport as safe as possible.

The family donated Seau's brain to the National Institutes of Health and, in the most extensive study ever conducted on the brain of a former athlete, doctors found evidence of chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

Seau's litigation is the latest in a string of lawsuits accusing the NFL of being negligent in its treatment of players' head trauma — and arguably the most important.

"You see the renewed publicity he's brought to the case," Strauss said. "He's shined a light on the NFL. How safe is it? Has the League been completely open and honest? Junior has provided a whole debate over that."

Strauss first met Seau in the 1990s when the football star needed legal help after falling victim to a Ponzi scheme run by John Gillette. The two stayed in touch, and Strauss later became involved in Seau's charity foundation.

A judge will consider several motions in the case in April, and then the case will proceed to the discovery phase.

Strauss is also defending Manchester's proposed redevelopment of the Navy Broadway Complex.

Last month, the California Coastal Commission filed a lawsuit claiming the project has experienced substantial growth since the commission approved it more than 20 years ago and is in need of a new review to see if it complies with the California Coastal Act.

Manchester has been trying to redevelop the 16-acre waterfront property since entering into a 99-year lease with the Navy in 2006. The project has already survived many legal challenges, and Strauss said he hopes this is the last legal hurdle.

In addition, Strauss recently finished up a pair of cases, both resulting in significant victories.

A federal judge dismissed the last patent infringement claims against **Qualcomm** (Nasdaq: QCOM) by **Gabriel Technologies** and ordered Gabriel Technologies to pay \$12.4 million in legal fees for pursuing baseless claims.

Gabriel, which initially sought \$1 billion in damages when it filed the

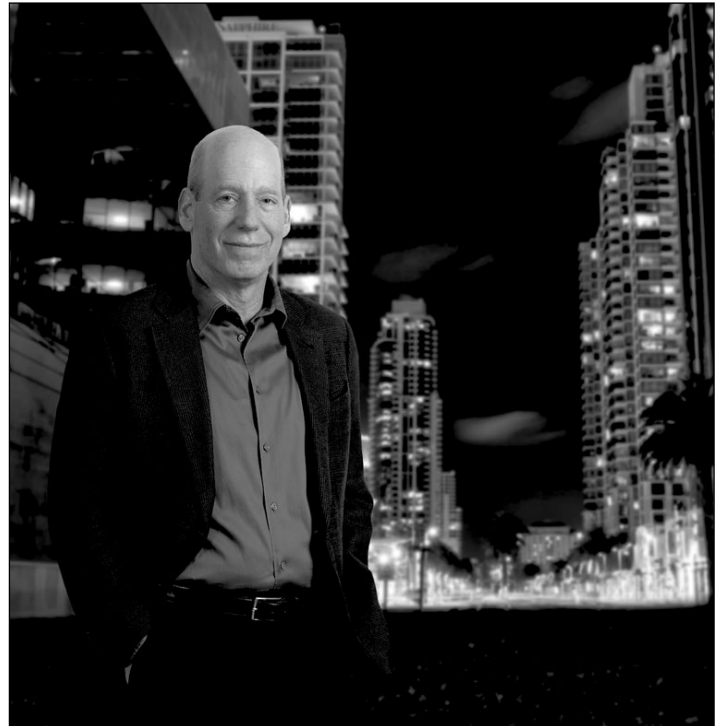


Photo courtesy of Cooley LLP

Steve Strauss, a partner with Cooley LLP, says his broad practice keeps the profession "challenging and fresh."

lawsuit related to GPS technology in October 2008, filed for bankruptcy after the attorney's fee award.

Strauss also successfully defended energy company Kinder Morgan against a \$250 million lawsuit filed by the city of San Diego over the company's pollution cleanup efforts at its Qualcomm Stadium site.

"To succeed in anything long-term, it takes passion about what you do," he said. "What still makes [the practice of law] enjoyable for me, 32 years later, is that I have a broad practice with different and interesting subject matter. I think that's what keeps the practice challenging and fresh to me. I'm really defined by the types of clients that come to me.

"Unfortunately, lawyers are more pigeonholed today."

Strauss graduated from UCLA School of Law in 1981 and went to practice for **Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch**.

He stayed at Procopio for 23 years before joining Cooley in 2005 to expand his practice.

"I did some work for Qualcomm, but found I was limited in the sizes of the cases," he said. "I didn't have a national footprint. I didn't have the depth and breadth of practice areas.

"Cooley gave me that opportunity and to try bigger cases — the billion-dollar cases."

He's gotten just that and doesn't plan on retiring anytime soon.

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