

JAMES C. GOODALE, ESQ. *The Man Who Saved Sky Rink*

By Edward Z. Epstein

Whether one's passion is ice hockey, figure skating, or both, neither love of sport, competitive zeal nor talent can compensate for the lack of an additional vital element: slap shots and split jumps require a rink.

In the late nineteen-seventies, the future appeared bleak for Sky Rink, Manhattan's only year-round, Olympic-sized indoor ice surface. Located on the 16th floor of a skyscraper at 450 West 33rd Street, financial woes threatened to shutter the venue permanently, when a benefactor appeared: James Goodale.

What inspired a renowned attorney to come to the rescue? "He's a very interesting fella," observes his friend Palmer Baker, who's known Goodale since they met years ago at the law firm of Lord, Day and Lord.

Born in 1933 in Cambridge, Mass., a city noted for its historical, literary and educational contributions to the country, James Goodale gravitated toward the field of law through his fascination with the subjects of history, politics and journalism. "I was interested in those things from the time I was ten years old," he recalls. He understood that the education required for a career as a lawyer "would be a very good thing to have, so that whatever you did, from actually being a lawyer to running a newspaper company - or an ice rink - would serve you well."

During college days at Yale (he received his B.A. in 1955 and earned his law degree from the University of Chicago), Goodale was "a big jock. I was on the baseball and hockey teams." He loved to play hockey, and competed regularly in post-college hockey leagues. In later years, he was a youth hockey coach and organizer ("No," he responds with a hearty laugh, "I don't play hockey any more!").

The young man's burgeoning law career coincided with a turbulent time in American history. As the sixties and seventies evolved into a time of political and social upheaval in the U.S., an explosive legal issue arose with ramifications affecting every citizen: whether newspapers had the right to publish the Pentagon Papers.

Palmer Baker recalls that a senior partner at Lord, Day and Lord "couldn't represent The New York Times in this case, and Jim Goodale took control. He was a leading authority on the First Amendment, and Jim was one of those who felt the papers should be published."

Goodale eventually became Vice Chairman of The Times, where he also served as its General Counsel. As General Counsel, he represented the newspaper in the historic Pentagon Papers case and led the Times's legal team to victory.

Meanwhile Goodale was a family man, father of three children (Tim, Ashley and Clayton). His wife, Toni, a Smith College graduate, was a woman with civic, social and business interests (a leading development consultant, she's also, via her company, T.K. Goodale Associates, a highly successful fund raiser).



"And she was a skating Mom," relates her husband. Their daughter Ashley was a figure skater (she eventually passed five U.S.F.S.A. tests). In the late nineteen-seventies the nine-year-old was a member of the Junior Club of the Skating Club of New York, "and Toni and I both took turns at Ashley's five-day-a-week sessions at Sky Rink. Toni took more turns than I did," recalls Goodale with a smile. "While she didn't know anything about figure skating at the start, both she and I became enormous fans. We were really into it."

The Skating Club of New York had built Sky Rink in the early seventies after it's former home, the famous Iceland rink in the old Madison Square Garden building on Eighth Avenue and 50th Street, had succumbed to the wrecking ball.

Around 1979, Sky Rink was on the brink of bankruptcy. James Goodale, at Palmer Baker's urging, took a special interest. "The fact that my daughter was a skater was part of it. Another part was that I'm a big fan of skating in general. My interest in Sky Rink, however, really focused on figure skating because historically the rink, and it's predecessor rink (Iceland), was the rink of champions - Dick Button, Carol Heiss, Dorothy Hamill, Elaine Zayak, Ina and Dungen...

"I wanted to keep the rink alive, to carry on that tradition. And I believed a full-size indoor rink should be available for the people of Manhattan. Here was the world's greatest city, and it wouldn't have had a year-round rink! That would have been just awful."

Goodale became savior of the rink, coming in as a trustee for the noteholders, putting together a new board, converting Sky Rink into a tax-exempt organization and, in the words of Palmer Baker, "presided over keeping the rink alive for the balance of the lease."

"I did it as a public-spirited thing," reflects Goodale. "I ran the rink for the benefit of the people of the city of New York. It was my contribution to the city."

It was no easy task. "I was at the New York Times when I became involved, and at the New York Times you can't go on other boards unless they're neutral, pro bono boards that don't

have any conflict of interests (a firm tries to do good things for the city, and we call those things pro bono)."

Sky Rink met the requirement. Goodale subsequently orchestrated a major career move of his own. He left The Times in 1980 and joined the law firm of Debevoise and Plimpton, where he launched a hugely successful media practice (clients today include CBS, NBC, The New York Times, Newsday, all the cablevision companies).

"I brought the rink into the law firm. We ran the rink out of Debevoise and Plimpton, where it cost us about \$1 million in lawyers' time. It was a great contribution by the law firm to the city of New York. We ran it as a pro bono client. But it went on forever and ever! There are not many law firms that have run a rink. I'll tell you that!"

Goodale remembers, "There was a crisis a day."

In the nineties, when Sky Rink's lease on the 33rd Street location was about to run out, "the timing was perfect for Chelsea Piers," explains Palmer Baker. The not-for-profit corporation Goodale had created was converted into the Sky Rink Youth Scholarship Fund, with Goodale as chairman. His involvement remains active to the present day.

"Jim is knowledgeable and curious about everything," notes Baker. Long acknowledged as one of the country's most powerful attorneys, Goodale not only specializes in the field of Communications Law, Libel and Slander Law, and Corporate Law, but among other accomplishments, he's author of over 120 articles on the First Amendment, and two books, *The New York Times vs. The United States* and *All About Cable*. He's a Media Law Reporter, lecturer, adjunct Professor of Law at New York University Law School and Fordham Law School. He is host/co-producer of *The Telecommunications and Information Revolution*, a weekly cable television program.

"I've always loved skating, newspapers, the media. I've had good breaks - landing near the top at The New York Times Company - and also it was a good break to own Sky Rink..." He pauses thoughtfully. "That," he adds "was tough."

Skaters gratefully acknowledge Jim Goodale for his successful efforts to sustain Sky Rink. Legendary figure skating champion Sonja Henie once commented on the particular difficulties facing ice enthusiasts: "Fred Astaire can dance on any floor, Judy Garland can sing in any room, but a skater needs a well-equipped rink!"

Thanks to Jim Goodale, New Yorkers have enjoyed that luxury for almost two decades.

Edward Z. Epstein's latest book is BORN TO SKATE: The MICHELLE KWAN Story (Ballantine). A skating devotee since childhood, Epstein is a former Middle-Atlantic States Novice champion.

To Jim and Moi,

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