



Nic Couchman

Founder and Chairman at Couchmans LLP

In this interview, Nic talks about an intense 2016, leadership, overseas expansion and more

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Nic, how was 2016 for the firm?

Overall I would describe it as intense. We work in a very competitive and dynamic space, and so 2016 was no different in that respect – we have had to work hard to stay front of mind for our clients. Some transactions slowed down a bit around the time of the Brexit vote but overall it was a very strong year for us. We picked up some fantastic new clients in football, worked on big name player transfers in the summer window, won a landmark case for Burnley FC with the highest compensation award given for an out of contract player, built our dispute resolution team, picked up exciting new work in motor racing and mass participation sports, helped to push the frontiers of data rights in sports still further, and made up a new partner and our first ‘home grown’ solicitor.

We were pleased to win the “Who’s Who Legal” Award for firm of the year in sport, and to secure a top ranking in the Legal 500. We have more recognised sports law experts than any other firm. Some of our clients have admittedly done even better than us, especially Usain Bolt, Mo Farah and Chris Froome!

What are your expectations/ hopes for 2017?

I have big expectations for 2017, which I think will see another leap forward for us after a period of consolidation. The current climate of flux, disruption and change, both generally and within our sector of sports, is ideal for an entrepreneurial and

knowledge centered firm like Couchmans to continue to thrive. We are particularly close to many of our clients, and can work very proactively in times of change to help them manage and adapt to new conditions, challenges and opportunities, of which there are many in sport.

What's your vision/ strategy for the firm moving forward?

Constant adaptation. Sport is relentlessly dynamic, always changing, and the impact of globalisation and new technology is accelerating and disrupting that process. We want to stay at the cutting edge of the sports business, always adding genuine value to our clients. We will also be officially broadening our reach into areas already overlapping with sport in which we have developed strong experience and capabilities, including Tech, Media and Lifestyle. These areas will continue to grow strongly for us and fit perfectly with our commercial, practical approach and culture.

What will be your biggest challenges?

Executing the new plan in a timely way – running a business involves constant reappraisal of priorities and existing client work always comes first. And ensuring that people in sport who don't currently know about or use us get to know what it is that we do that's different.

You have a strong presence in London but would you ever look to open in another country?

We occasionally explore the idea of overseas offices, but haven't done so as yet. Sport is a genuinely global industry and about 50% of our clients are outside of the UK, but they are spread over many countries, not focused in one market. The overall cost/benefit/risk analysis of opening new branches hasn't made sense for us so far. We have focused our investment efforts on our excellent specialist team who travel regularly to international markets as required. We have many relationships with overseas firms, none of them formal. We will probably look at formalising links with firms in particular, unique growth markets, such as China.

London-based law firms operating under the English law system are respected worldwide for their integrity and expertise. This, along with technological advances, has enabled us effectively to be an international firm without needing to have costly offices around the world, as our increasingly international client base demonstrates. We see much of our growth coming from outside the UK.

What do you most enjoy about your role?

The sports sector is endlessly fascinating. Launching and building a business is undoubtedly hard work, but very rewarding when things work out. If it wasn't for the fact that we work in sport, however, I don't think I would have stuck at being a lawyer. When I started out, sport wasn't really a proper business. The Premier League didn't exist. Neither did 20/20 Cricket. It has grown and developed into a global phenomenon in the last 25 years, and as a business and IP lawyer working in the sector I and my colleagues have had the chance to help in shaping and guiding that growth, and privileged insight into the way that sports events, athletes, TV and sponsors really work.

How would people describe your leadership style?

I don't really know. I would say I am driven and passionate – I don't think you can

step out of the mainstream of corporate life to help build a business from scratch over 15 years, getting through three recessions along the way, unless you are. I would hope that drive and belief still comes across to our team. I like to think that I am also caring. One of the client testimonials to a professional directory we have that I am most proud of was “it’s much more human than many law firms”.

What drives you personally?

Creating something of value in business; giving a solution to a client’s problem; developing an environment where people can thrive; working in the company of smart, decent colleagues; and the excitement of new frontiers.

Can you sum up Couchmans in five words?

Expert. Passionate. Innovative. Different. Visionary.

Where do you want Couchmans to be in five years time?

To be recognised internationally as a leader in the sports, tech, media and lifestyle sectors.

www.couchmansllp.com