

SPORTS

Sports figures hope to win with Orlando

By MICHELLE LaROCHE
Times staff

Gloucester attorney Joseph Orlando simply hates to lose — a quality he shares with his new clients.

A year and a half ago, Orlando began representing athletes as part of his law practice. So far, he has contracts to represent 40 sports figures, including three probable National Football League draftees, four probable Olympic stars — many of whom are already national champions — and a racquetball world champion turned tennis professional.

To see some of these athletes in action you need only lend an eye to the Olympics.

Sprinter Michael Bates, one of Orlando's clients, will be going head-to-head against gold-medal winning track and field star Carl Lewis in the Olympic trials, and possibly the Olympic games, in the 100-meter sprint.

Kennedy Ryan, Canadian women's freestyle skiing champion and another Orlando client, is also getting ready for her Olympic moment, in the Winter Games in Albertville, France.

Orlando says he finds the life led by the athletes far different from the experiences of his local clients, local fishermen and blue-collar workers who come to him with personal injury claims.

The personal injury clients, Orlando said, "have taken a lot of jolts that life deals out." Athletes like Bates and Kennedy, he said, "are treated very well" throughout their lives, from their stints as stars on high school teams to college recruiting incentives.

Despite their differences, both sports and personal injury clients understand what it feels like to work hard at something all their life, Orlando said.

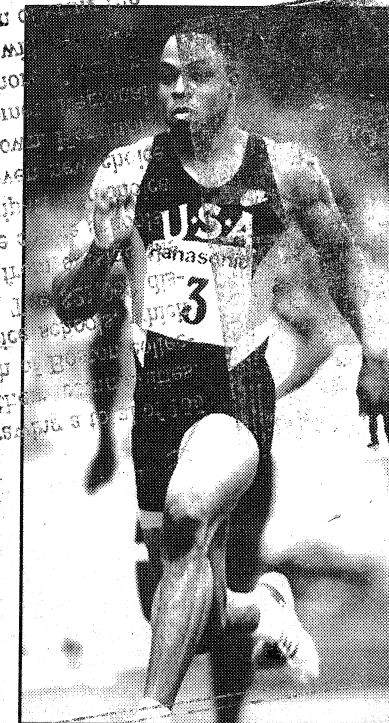
"Both put a great deal of effort in their lives," Orlando said.

Orlando said the transition between personal injury work and sports representation was easier than expected.



Cristin Gisler photo

Gloucester personal injury lawyer Joseph Orlando has now dipped into the world of sports. Two of his clients are U.S. sprinter Michael Bates (top right) and Canadian freestyle skier Kennedy Ryan (lower right).



"The two practices," he said, "complement one another well."

Orlando said that, with the sports division, his negotiation skills have improved, which can only help his litigation practice.

He also said he would give up the new division of his firm if it began to interrupt the quality of the representation he offers to his

personal injury clients.

"Personal injury litigation is, and always will be, my first love," Orlando said. "The sports division will not take time or focus from my litigation practice."

Though he is up against some of the "giants" in the sports and entertainment law field, Orlando said, "I know I can offer things

that they don't."

His new sports and entertainment division, on the third floor of his Western Avenue office, employs a full-time sports director and a full-time marketing consultant.

In addition, a full-time attorney in Arizona, a Boston-based financial planning and investment firm,

and tax accountants service the 40 sports clients. According to Orlando, a contract with a full-time lawyer in Florida is under negotiation.

These employees cover everything from training to endorsements and investments to contracts for the athletes.

The little extras that Orlando offers include special trainers and

programs to enhance the players' abilities.

When the three college football players he represents were going to "The Combine," a series of events watched by all the NFL scouting clubs, Orlando hired a sports trainer who had previously worked with Celtic Dee Brown, Bruin Cam Neely, and the Boston University football team.

The athletes' performance in these events was going to help determine their placement in the NFL Draft, Orlando said, and set their value to teams negotiating salaries.

"I'm working to make them better, to talk about attitude and focus, not just physical performance," Orlando said.

Orlando's broad program has attracted athletes from all over the world, including a former member of the Soviet Union's Red Army hockey team.

Jeygeni Gusin arrived in the United States last year hoping to play professional hockey. After contacting several New England college hockey coaches, Gusin was given Orlando's name.

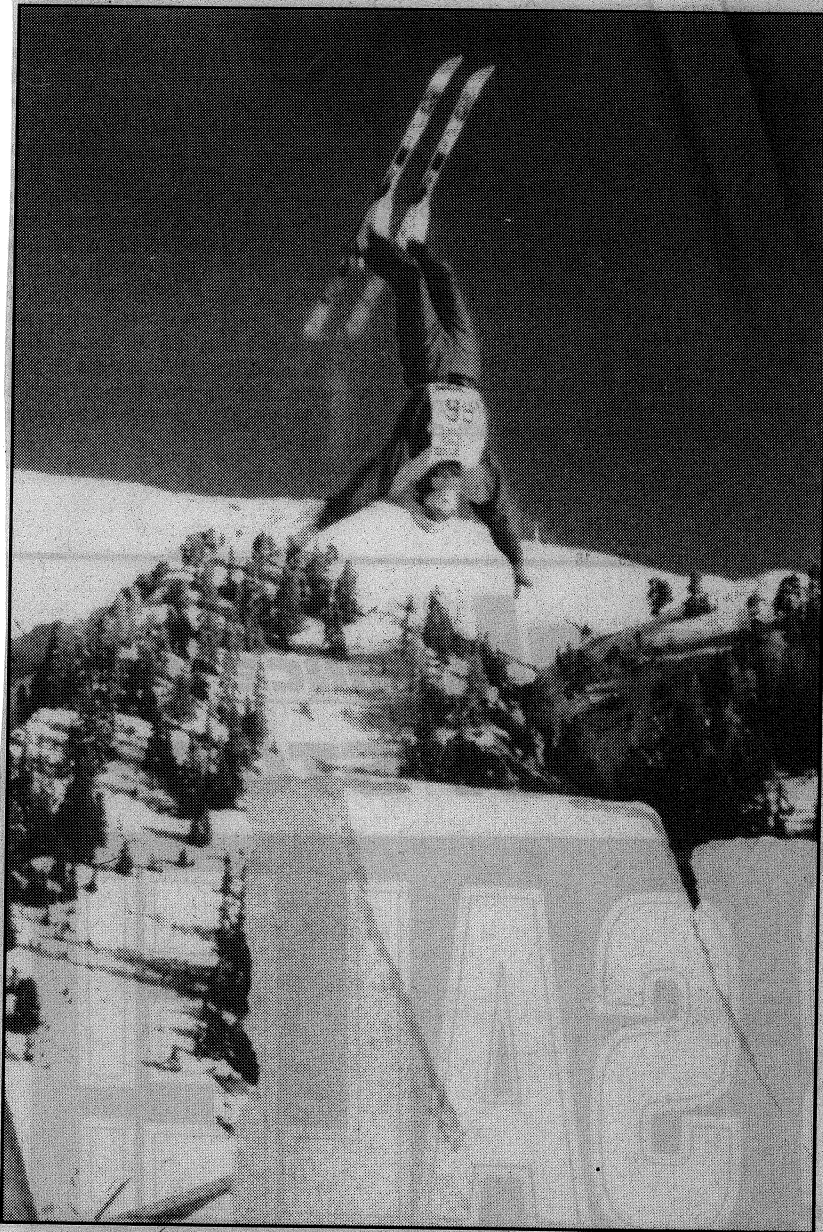
Now he's playing for the Toledo Storms in the Eastern Hockey League waiting for the NHL draft in June.

"My goal is to be one of the biggest names in sports and entertainment law in the country," Orlando said. "I want athletes from all over the country to know I offer first-class representation."

Despite these high aspirations, Orlando has no intentions of leaving his current practice or the Cape Ann area behind.

"I can't imagine living anywhere else," Orlando said. "It would make no sense for me to move to a bigger city. My clients here would suffer and I will not give up representing them."

His connection to the area and sports comes from his youth. Orlando grew up in Gloucester and played baseball through school,



Canadian freestyle skier Kennedy Ryan is a Joseph Orlando client.

● Orlando into sports

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hoping to be the next Mickey Mantle, a great center fielder for the New York Yankees.

In order to go to college, Orlando gave up his dream to play professional ball. Instead of training on the baseball diamond, Orlando spent his free time working on fishing boats and waiting tables at the Gloucester House Restaurant to earn the tuition for Boston University.

The hours he once dedicated to

sports, however, helped him reach his goals and made him a better attorney, he said.

"I think athletics is an essential aspect of a well-rounded person," Orlando said.

To keep this balance and sense of competition fresh, the 38-year-old father of three and Manchester resident still keeps active playing tennis three times a week.

According to Orlando, he has yet to lose one of these matches either.