

# Devin Anderson



Kirkland & Ellis LLP partner Devin Anderson led a former high school football coach to victory at the U.S. Supreme Court after he was not rehired by the district, which took issue with his practice of praying publicly on the field after games, earning him a spot among appellate attorneys under age 40 honored as Law360 as Rising Stars.

## The biggest case:

Anderson served as the lead attorney for former Bremerton High School football coach Joe Kennedy, who accused the Washington state school district of infringing his constitutional rights to freely practice his faith.

Anderson said representing Kennedy, which he did pro bono, was both “highly rewarding” and “extremely interesting” due to the First Amendment issues implicated in the case.

Kennedy had been praying publicly on the field following games for about seven years when the local school board found out and took issue with it. Over time, he was joined by his own players and occasionally those of the opposing team, and the board was concerned that the practice blurred the line between church and state and could violate students’ rights, should they feel pressure to participate.

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The district argued that Kennedy was acting as a school official at the time and that his behavior was inappropriate, while he maintained that the act was one of private devotion. Ultimately, a 6-3 Supreme Court agreed with the former coach.

“We were able to achieve a good victory, a good result for our client, and in the process I think establish a pretty important First Amendment precedent concerning the right of public school teachers to engage in the free exercise of religion,” Anderson said.

## His proudest moment:

There’s no big shining moment that stands out in Anderson’s mind, but that’s likely because the thing he takes the most pride in is a recurring event. It happens every time an associate he has mentored has their first oral arguments, he said.

Those arguments are always “a particularly proud moment for me,” Anderson said.

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continue that tradition,” he said. “I feel [like] part of a tradition of passing on and helping to build up a very skilled base of attorneys — some stay at Kirkland, some move on — but I feel like that’s an important part of professional development.”

#### **What motivates him:**

There’s something about the satisfaction of finishing a job and finishing it well that really appeals to Anderson, he said.

“That is a good feeling, when you know you’ve given your very best and delivered the very best piece of product or the best argument — whatever the case may be,” he said. “I think I take pride in and am motivated by doing something well. I think it’s a good and rewarding feeling.”

There’s also the drive to not let anyone down — the client, whether big or small, and the legal team that Anderson is usually working beside. “Doing right” by them is a main motivator, he said.

There’s also something to be said for the rush of standing before a panel of judges, according to Anderson, who called the process “invigorating.”

“I do love preparing for and delivering oral arguments,” he said. “I think there’s a little bit of an energy rush that comes with the process in the sense that it’s game day and it’s time to go perform.”

#### **How he sees the legal industry changing over the next 10 years:**

As other industries grapple with the way artificial intelligence could reshape the workplace, so too must attorneys, Anderson said.

“How it’s incorporated, how it’s controlled — I think it will be used and the question is just how it’s used and what safeguards are in place,” he said. “I think that will be very important in the duration of this profession over the next 10 years.”

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