

TALK

# A-Rod's Defender Knows How to Tap Dance

Interview by Mark Leibovich

Sept. 20, 2013

**As a criminal-defense lawyer, you've represented a notorious roster of clients. You'll take pretty much anyone except for mobsters.**

I wouldn't say I'd take any client. If I had a client I believed were guilty of pedophilia, for instance, it's just not the right case for me. It doesn't mean that person is not entitled to representation. That being said, I don't take organized-crime cases. My parents were Italian immigrants, and my dad's parents had run-ins with organized crime in Red Hook.

**Wasn't your first legal job transcribing the Gotti trial?**

Yes, I worked for lawyers involved in the Gotti trial, and I got hired to do the transcription of these tapes. That was my first foray into the criminal arena.

**Now you represent Alex Rodriguez in his dispute with Major League Baseball over his suspected use of performance-enhancing drugs. As a Yankees fan, what did you think of him before you represented him?**

Just reading the papers, it was pretty easy to get a pretty unfavorable impression.

**What do you think of him now?**

He's very easy to talk to, very intelligent and also very — I don't know if the right word is "humble," but maybe "humble" is the right word. My first impression was: My god, this guy's getting such a bum rap.

**But you're obviously going to say Rodriguez is a good guy.**

If I didn't think so, I would skirt that question skillfully. I can tap dance pretty well.

**Sign up for The Interview** Hosts David Marchese and Lulu Garcia-Navarro talk to the world's most fascinating people. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

## **You were a Yankees fan growing up.**

The first time my dad took me out to Yankee Stadium was the George Brett pine-tar-incident game.



Joseph Tacopina  
Robyn Twomey/Redux, for The New York  
Times

**Is it possible to be a die-hard Yankees fan and call the Yankees' G.M. Brian Cashman and the Yankees' president Randy Levine thugs?**

I didn't characterize them as thugs. I said it was a thuglike culture. I'm not rooting for the front office. I'm rooting for the pinstripes.

**During a “Today” show interview, Matt Lauer produced a release letter from Major League Baseball that would’ve allowed you to make Rodriguez’s medical records public. On air, you refused to sign it.**

A little surprising because it was the “Today” show. Had I agreed to go on Jerry Springer, I would have said, “O.K., fair.” Two high-ranking members of the “Today” show staff called me after to say they were very surprised and disappointed by that.

**Were they apologetic?**

Very much so. It was a cheap P.R. stunt by Major League Baseball.

**I read an article in The New York Post that said you might be the most hated lawyer in New York City. The headline was “The Devils’ Advocate.”**

When you reach a certain level of either success or notoriety, people take shots at you. It was actually a flattering article. It came out after I won the rape-cops case — it was about how I win cases that people say I can’t win.

**You have a T-shirt suggesting that David Ortiz used performance-enhancing drugs.**

Instead of saying “Big Papi,” it says, “Big PEDi.”

**You grew up in Sheepshead Bay, and yet you went to Yeshiva of Flatbush for elementary school.**

My mother and father quickly determined that the best education I was going to get as a young child was at Yeshiva, instead of getting beat up at P.S. 12. I still have my yarmulke.

**You played hockey at Skidmore College and had 355 penalty minutes in one year — not what you would expect from a Yeshiva guy.**

I hold that record, but I was not just an enforcer. Our team was so small, so I took the role of a protector — sort of what I do now, right?

**Were most of those penalty minutes fight-related?**

I didn’t get a lot of two-minute tripping penalties.

**When was the last time you actually were in a real fight?**

I'm going to decline to answer that.

**You've said that you're still very much a street kid from Sheepshead Bay, but you live in Connecticut now and own a 49-foot yacht.**

It's a boat, it's not a yacht.

INTERVIEW HAS BEEN CONDENSED AND EDITED.

---

A version of this article appears in print on , Page 14 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: 'I Win Cases That People Say I Can't'