

# The Texas Lawbook

Free Speech, Due Process and Trial by Jury

## Cicis Trial Became an Opportunity to Train the Next Generation of Trial Lawyers

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Training and professional development for young attorneys can vary significantly among firms, but recently, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher and Winston & Strawn saw a trial involving Cicis Pizza as an opportunity for young associates to work alongside experienced partners.

Last week, Gibson Dunn attorneys saw a win in Dallas County in the Cicis trial, where the jury returned a \$46 million verdict for the plaintiff. The nearly two-week-long trial involved a dispute between two cousins who had bought Cicis Pizza for \$11 million in 2020.

It took jurors about five hours to decide Anand Gala and Gala Capital Partners Cici's were entitled to the damages. Gala had sued his cousin, Sunil Dharod, for \$10 million after their business partnership soured, and Dharod lodged counterclaims as well. The jury returned a \$46 million verdict, but the defense will argue Gala must choose which of the two \$23 million claims to recover damages on: breach of contract or breach of fiduciary duty. Final judgment will include an award of attorney fees.

Gibson Dunn partner *Trey Cox*, who graduated from the University of Virginia law school in 1995, said he was sitting second chair at a trial just three months into practicing law and doesn't see why young associates at the firm shouldn't do the same.

"If I was able to do that at three months into practice, then all of these folks that we have here at Gibson Dunn, they're so smart, they're so talented, they're much smarter than I am, they're much more talented than I am. If I could

do that, then they can absolutely do that," Cox said.

He said state court cases can provide opportunities for the young associates.

"That's a good place for them to get opportunities and reps and ability to do stuff," Cox said.

Gibson Dunn fourth- and fifth-year associates *Andrew Mitchell* and *Arjun Ogale* were involved with the Cicis case from its inception, took depositions of witnesses that were played for the jury at trial and argued pre-trial motions to the court.

"Learning how to run the case under the partners guidance, handling the day-to-day communications with the client, keeping the client apprised of case development and strategy that really gave us tremendous hands-on experience," Mitchell said.

Ogale echoed Mitchell and added that watching and working with Gibson Dunn partners *Betty Yang*, *Andrew LeGrand* and Cox was a valuable experience.

"Seeing how they took the case that had developed all the way up until trial and then shaped it into a winner at trial was really invaluable," Ogale said.

On the defendant's side, Winston & Strawn fourth- and sixth-year associates *Ashley Wright* and *William Fox* questioned witnesses on direct and cross-examination at trial.

Wright said it was "an unforgettable experience" to have stand-up opportunities throughout the trial, arguing exhibits and cross-examining witnesses with support behind the scenes.

Wright said her biggest takeaway from

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the experience is never to be afraid to adjust.

“You never know what the other side may throw at you. You never know what a witness may throw at you, and you just have to be ready to pivot at any given moment,” Wright said. “Seeing how effortlessly the seasoned lawyers on both sides were able to do that, and being able to watch that in real time, was also what really taught us how it really looks when you’re in a true live trial setting.”

Wright added that she has participated in Winston & Strawn’s internal mock trial program, but that it’s just not the same.

“...[T]hat experience it was great [but] it didn’t compare to being able to do it live with the judge, with the stakes being high, and that is when you truly learn,” Wright said. “I think you truly get your best training is really just first seeing it, but then also just being able to do it.”

Dallas County Judge Tonya Parker’s courtroom was packed nearly every day of the trial with attorneys of varying experience and interns present to observe proceedings.

“They knew you see a case like this, and you’re going to be able to see some great lawyering,” Wright said. “I think everybody learned from it.”

Fox, who has been practicing for almost a decade after graduating from Duke University School of Law in 2016, said it was an incredible experience to work with Winston & Strawn partners *Tom Melsheimer* and *LeElle Slifer*.

“There’s not another, really, good way to learn how to be a trial lawyer, other than trying cases with people like that,” Fox said.

Yang said when it comes to training for young trial lawyers, there is “no substitute for seeing it and doing it.”

“Having our associates directly involved in preparing witnesses and sitting there in the courtroom and able to sort of watch how their work actually was used in application,” Yang said. “That is always a fantastic way to get people ready for their own examinations, and to train up the next generation of trial lawyers.”

Gibson Dunn partner *Brad Hubbard* said, from his perspective, one doesn’t

become a good second chair until they argue their first case, which he said provides understanding of what the second chair needs to do to prepare the first chair.

“Once you get that experience, you become better at all of the other pieces,” Hubbard said.