

THOUGHTS THAT STICK

LAW, LIFE & EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

THIS MONTH

NEWSLETTER

Insights from the courtroom to the coastline

Winners and Hoosiers

For most of college football history, the Indiana Hoosiers have been the punchline. Not just bad, but reliably bad. A program people barely bothered to check on, let alone fear. Decades of losing seasons turned "Indiana football" into something fans tolerated rather than believed in.

That's what made this season so jarring. Indiana didn't just have a good year. They won the Big Ten. They knocked off an undefeated Ohio State team. And they didn't sneak into the playoff either. They earned the number one seed.

Even now, some people are struggling to accept it. Analysts look for excuses. Commentators talk about "down years" for other teams. Old narratives are hard to let go of. When you've been counted out long enough, people don't update their beliefs just because you win. They assume it's a fluke.

That part feels familiar.

I see it with small firms all the time. You do good work. You grind. You get better quietly. But because you don't look like the biggest shop in the room, people underestimate you. I see it with clients too. One mistake, one bad chapter, and the world decides that's who you are. Even when you show up differently, the label sticks.

Indiana didn't ask anyone to rewrite the story for them. They just kept winning until ignoring them became impossible. That's usually how it works. Progress rarely announces itself. It just keeps stacking results until the old assumptions collapse under their own weight.

Underdog stories aren't inspiring because they're rare. They're inspiring because they're recognizable.

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!



Happy holidays from all of us at the firm. Wishing you peace, health, and time well spent with the people who matter most. The photo here was taken at the Christmas tree lighting in North Straub Park, a reminder of how special this community is during the season. Thank you for being part of our year.



I'm grateful to share that our firm was awarded **Silver** in the **Tampa's Best 2025 Awards** for criminal defense lawyers. Being recognized alongside so many strong businesses and professionals in our community means a lot. Thank you to our clients, referral partners, and everyone who continues to place their confidence in us.



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(cont.) Many folks and most businesses start off overlooked. Most of the time, the work happens long before the respect does.

The lesson isn't that everyone gets a fairy tale ending. It's that being underestimated is not a verdict. It's just noise. And if you stay focused on doing the work well, long enough, the scoreboard eventually speaks louder than the reputation ever did.



A Wicked Good Idea

You do not need to have seen Wicked to feel its cultural pull. The first film generated more than \$750 million worldwide, putting it among the highest-grossing movies ever made and cementing its place in the broader pop culture conversation. Even people who have never set foot in a theater know the songs, the characters, and the basic story. That kind of saturation creates a rare opportunity to talk about serious ideas through a familiar lens.



(cont.) At its heart, Wicked is a story about perspective and mislabeling. It asks the audience to reconsider a villain they thought they understood and to question whether the official story was ever complete. The Wicked Witch of the West is portrayed not as evil, but as misunderstood, politically inconvenient, and condemned by those with power before she is given a fair chance to be heard. It is a reminder of how easily narratives can harden into "truth" once they are repeated often enough.

For criminal defense and DUI lawyers, those themes are not abstract. Clients are often defined by a charge, a police report, or a short body-camera clip that captures only a fragment of what actually happened. Once that version of events takes hold, it can be difficult to dislodge, even when important facts are missing or misinterpreted. Defense work exists to slow that process down and force a deeper look.

The story also touches on bias and fear.

When someone does not fit the expected mold, it becomes easier to cast them as the problem.

In the legal system, that instinct shows up in assumptions about intoxication, intent, credibility, and guilt. Wicked reminds us how dangerous it is to confuse familiarity with accuracy, or confidence with correctness.

There is also a quiet warning about power. Institutions are very good at telling stories that protect themselves. Governments, like the Wizard, often prefer a clean narrative over a complicated one. Criminal defense exists to test those narratives and to ask whether the story being told actually matches the evidence.

So yes, Wicked is entertainment. People will be singing along and debating their favorite characters. But beneath the spectacle is a lesson that feels uncomfortably familiar. Justice depends on perspective, context, and the courage to question the version of events that everyone else seems ready to accept.



A Goofy Deal With Serious Consequences for the Justice System

This week brought a headline that sounds whimsical on the surface but carries real weight underneath. Disney announced a massive deal with OpenAI, reportedly investing \$1 billion and licensing more than 200 characters for use in AI-generated video content. Users will be able to create short videos featuring some of the most recognizable characters in the world, under a set of contractual “guardrails” meant to protect Disney’s brand and intellectual property.

It is a big deal for entertainment. But it is also a big deal for the legal system.



Because once AI can convincingly generate video featuring trusted, familiar characters, voices, and likenesses, the question stops being “Is this cool?” and becomes “How do we know what is real?”

That question sits at the heart of criminal defense.

Criminal cases increasingly rely on video. Body cameras. Dash cameras. Store surveillance. Ring doorbells. Cell phone footage. Jails and interrogation rooms are wired with cameras that juries instinctively trust. We have spent decades training jurors to believe video does not lie.

AI challenges that assumption.

If AI can generate a believable video of Aladdin saying or doing something he never did, it is not a stretch to imagine the same technology being used to create realistic footage of a person appearing intoxicated, belligerent, or confessing to something they never said. The technology does not have to be perfect. It only has to be convincing enough to plant doubt or influence perception.

In DUI cases, video evidence already carries outsized influence. Jurors often make up their minds before a breath or blood number is ever discussed, based on how someone “looks” on bodycam. Slurred speech. Balance. Tone of voice. Confusion. AI introduces the uncomfortable possibility that video could be altered, selectively generated, or contextually manipulated in ways that are difficult to detect without expert analysis.



This is not hypothetical fear-mongering. We already see deepfake audio used in scams, impersonations, and fraud. Law enforcement agencies are increasingly aware of this risk, but awareness does not equal preparedness. Courts move slowly. Technology moves fast.

There is also a secondary issue that matters deeply in criminal defense: trust. The justice system depends on public trust in evidence. If defendants begin challenging whether video is authentic, and prosecutors cannot definitively prove it is, the system faces a credibility problem. Conversely, if courts refuse to meaningfully entertain authenticity challenges, defendants risk being convicted based on evidence that feels real but may not be.

DUI defense already sits at the crossroads of science and perception. Lawyers routinely challenge calibration records, chain of custody, and how officers interpret “impairment.” AI raises the stakes. Questions like who created a video, where it was stored, what software touched it, and whether it can be authenticated will matter more than ever.

That is not new to criminal defense. We have always said evidence does not speak for itself. It has to be tested. Deals like this one rely on strict controls and safeguards, which makes sense. But outside Hollywood, AI is moving faster than regulation or enforcement. Courts will soon face difficult questions about what proof can be trusted.

So yes, it is a goofy headline. Olaf probably is involved. But beneath the spectacle is a serious point. The future of justice will depend not just on what we see, but on whether we can trust it.



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A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER TO
INFORM AND ENTERTAIN

Holiday Hot Takes: Grinches Unite

Let's get this out of the way. Not everything about the holidays is magical. Some of it is just loud, repetitive, and oddly stressful for no good reason.

For example, there is no reason any one song should play that often in public places. And yet here we are, hearing the same three tracks on a loop until mid-January. If you love them, great. If you don't, you start questioning your sanity somewhere between the fourth chorus and the eighth shopping trip.

Also, we need to talk about gifts you can smell before you unwrap them.

Bath and Body Works boxed sets are not a surprise. They announce themselves from across the room like a scented fog machine. If I can identify the exact fragrance while standing in the kitchen, the element of mystery is gone.



This is not about being a Grinch. It is about honesty. Everyone has at least one holiday tradition or seasonal staple they secretly think is overrated, but nobody wants to be the first to say it out loud.

So consider this permission. You do not have to love every part of the season to enjoy it. Sometimes bonding over what makes us roll our eyes is just as festive as pretending everything is perfect.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

New Year's Eve at St. Pete Pier

Live music, food vendors, and a midnight fireworks show over Tampa Bay. A classic waterfront way to ring in the new year.

New Year's Eve Fireworks at North Straub Park

Great views of the bay, open space, and an easy spot to watch the city's fireworks without a packed venue.

