
A CAREER BEYOND HIS WILDEST EXPECTATIONS

BY JORDAN POLL

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For years, Fred Nance, '78, has been a key player in Cleveland's renaissance. "I have worked most of my career to develop this region, and now I'm in a position to promote it throughout the world," says Nance, a highly regarded legal and business counselor and nationally recognized sports and entertainment practitioner. Nance is the new global managing partner of Squire Patton Boggs (U.S.) LLP, which includes 36 offices in 16 countries. "It is a 24/7 endeavor, but one that is instinctive to me and professionally fulfilling."

Nance has taken the helm following a merger between Squire, Sanders & Dempsey and Patton Boggs in 2014. "Patton Boggs had a preeminent public policy practice with relationships reaching the highest levels of government around the world, but it lacked the global platform Squire Sanders had been building for over 20 years," he says. "You can see how two-and-two are making 10." Squire Patton Boggs now is one of the most global law firms in terms of international offices, with more lawyers outside of the United States than within. "As the firm continues to grow and evolve, it is important to maintain the values that made it successful," says Nance. "I take my experiences and the firm culture that has become so much a part of who I am, and I make certain that is how we continue to operate wherever we practice."

Nance's global shift in focus is not limited to his practice. His long track record of civic leadership includes serving as chair of the Greater Cleveland Partnership and trustee of the Cleveland Foundation. However, his role as a fiduciary director of the Cleveland Clinic has Nance thinking internationally. "The export of our brand of health care is something that the marketplace seems to be clamoring for," he says. "The institution has so much impact. It is the largest employer in our region by far, and a pioneer and thought leader in the rapidly evolving economics of delivering high-quality health care around the world."

Nance's move from regional to global managing partner makes him the first African American to sit on Squire Patton Boggs's global board and executive group. "I've had so many marvelous adventures during my career," says Nance. "One leading to another and resulting in a career representing celebrities, reshaping my hometown, and holding pioneering leadership roles in a mega law firm."

These "adventures" began when Nance was a year out of Michigan Law, practicing in Cleveland. A partner, Charles Clarke, '40, asked the associate seated next to Nance if he had time for a new project. He did not, so Clarke left. Nance chased after him, calling, "Mr. Clarke! I have time." Clarke turned to a young Nance and invited him into his office. Clarke, head of the trial department, presented Nance with a set of facts. "I want you to tell me what you would indict on if you were the prosecutor," said Clarke. Nance successfully

predicted four counts of an indictment that came down a month later against the president of the Cleveland City Council, George Forbes. "It was a highly celebrated trial that exposed me to the public and political arenas early on in my career," Nance says. "Charlie, the man who opened so many doors for me, was a Michigan guy. I have no doubt that one of the ways he and I, who otherwise had so little in common, became close was because of our common alma mater."

Clarke opened yet another door for Nance after a brief phone call with the mayor of Cleveland, Michael White. "Fred," Clarke told Nance, "I'm the past. You're the future." So Clarke scheduled meetings with the mayor, but sent Nance in his stead. "My relationship with Mayor White was rocky at first," says Nance, "but then we clicked." Nance served as the mayor's primary outside counsel for the next 10 years.

"Working with the mayor took me beyond straight litigation," says Nance. In fall 1995, Mayor White asked Nance to negotiate a lease with Art Modell (then the owner of the Cleveland Browns) for Cleveland Municipal Stadium. It was the period of "franchise free agency" where National Football League (NFL) teams were insisting on single-purpose football stadiums. This required the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars for each new stadium, or face your team leaving town. "When it happened in Cleveland, it struck a chord nationally," says Nance. "We had to convince NFL owners that, despite the desire of one of their own to move, Cleveland could support the Browns under the new economic model." Nance and his team picketed, held candlelight vigils and conferences, and jammed NFL fax machines to "get under the tent" for negotiations. When the city got an injunction requiring the Browns to continue to play in Cleveland for three more years (the unexpired term of the lease), that helped provide the leverage Cleveland needed to secure a seat at the negotiating table with the NFL. The preliminary agreement awarding Cleveland a new NFL franchise, which retained the intellectual property of the Browns, was finalized in 1996. Never before had a new professional sports franchise been awarded to a city before the old one left.

Returning the Browns to Cleveland thrust Nance into the national spotlight. Ten years later, a recruiter called Nance to inform him that Paul Tagliabue was stepping down as NFL commissioner, and they wanted him to compete for the position. Stunned, Nance agreed. Several hundred candidates narrowed to five finalists, including him. "I ultimately didn't make it, but the whole experience was yet another wonderful adventure," says Nance, who expresses deep respect for his friend, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. A few years



later, Cleveland Browns owner Randy Lerner asked Nance to join his team's front office, and he served for three years as the organization's general counsel, while remaining a partner at Squire, Sanders & Dempsey.

Years later, another unexpected phone call made Nance the representative of comedian and Ohio resident Dave Chappelle (pictured above). "He called me out of the blue, based on seeing my name in the news," says Nance, who has advised Chappelle for 12 years. "I was with him when he hosted the first *Saturday Night Live* after the 2016 presidential election," says Nance. "I was in his dressing room getting him to sign the Netflix deal." Nance has played a key role in negotiating contracts related to Chappelle's comeback tour and his \$60 million deal with Netflix Inc.

Earlier, Nance's prominence resulted in another big name coming his way. While hosting a nonprofit scholarship event in the early 2000s, he was approached with a proposition. "There is a young man in high school that needs your help," said an attendee. His name? LeBron James. "When I met LeBron, he was 17 and living in public housing on food stamps. By the end of that first year, LeBron had \$100 million in contract rights. We were just getting started," says Nance. James now is a global icon with forays into a variety of business, entertainment, and new media ventures. "LeBron is lightning in a bottle," says Nance. "His impact off the court is as substantial as it is on. I am honored to be on his team."

Nance has led a career of adventures off the beaten path, and it all began with a single Michigan connection. "How you handle yourself leads inexorably to the opportunities you experience years later," says Nance. "Being able to establish myself at a law firm where 'big things' happen—recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities as they arose—resulted in a career beyond my wildest expectations."