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How sports figures transition to business

By Jim Stafford
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When Sean O'Grady was an up-and-coming Oklahoma City-based boxer, he barnstormed across the nation with his parents, traveling in a vehicle with a boxing ring in tow.

Promoting boxing matches was their business.

The example of the O'Gradys was one of the diverse sports-business stories that an audience at Oklahoma City University's Meinders School of Business heard Thursday in a Boardroom Briefings event.

"There are lots of ways to see business," said Vince Orza, dean of OCU's business school. "There are lots of businesses that people don't think of as a business. Sean's parents operated a business promoting boxing matches."

O'Grady told an audience largely composed of OCU business students about the distances he traveled with his parents to put on boxing events in far-flung communities.

"We were the largest non-subsidized boxing promotion company in the world," he said

Managed by his father, Pat, the younger O'Grady's career blossomed. He capped his career by winning the world lightweight championship in a 1981 bout in Madison Square Garden.

Eventually, O'Grady retired from the ring, became a network television sports analyst and then added commercial real estate broker to his resume.

It's that transition from sports-to-business part of O'Grady's story, as well as that of former Major League Baseball player Jim Traber, now a local sports radio personality, that Orza wanted the audience to hear.

O'Grady and Traber were on a podium that also included Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett; Doug Sauter, Oklahoma City Blazers coach; Dave Alberga, chief executive officer of Internet-based Active Network Inc.; and Kevin Dresser and Kara Slavonic, both of whom work for Reality Check Studios, which produces high tech graphics and special effects for the television and motion picture industries.

"I wanted to show the high-tech side of business along with the low-tech side of transitioning from sports into business," Orza said. "Given what's going on on Wall Street right now, there are going to be a lot of career changes."

