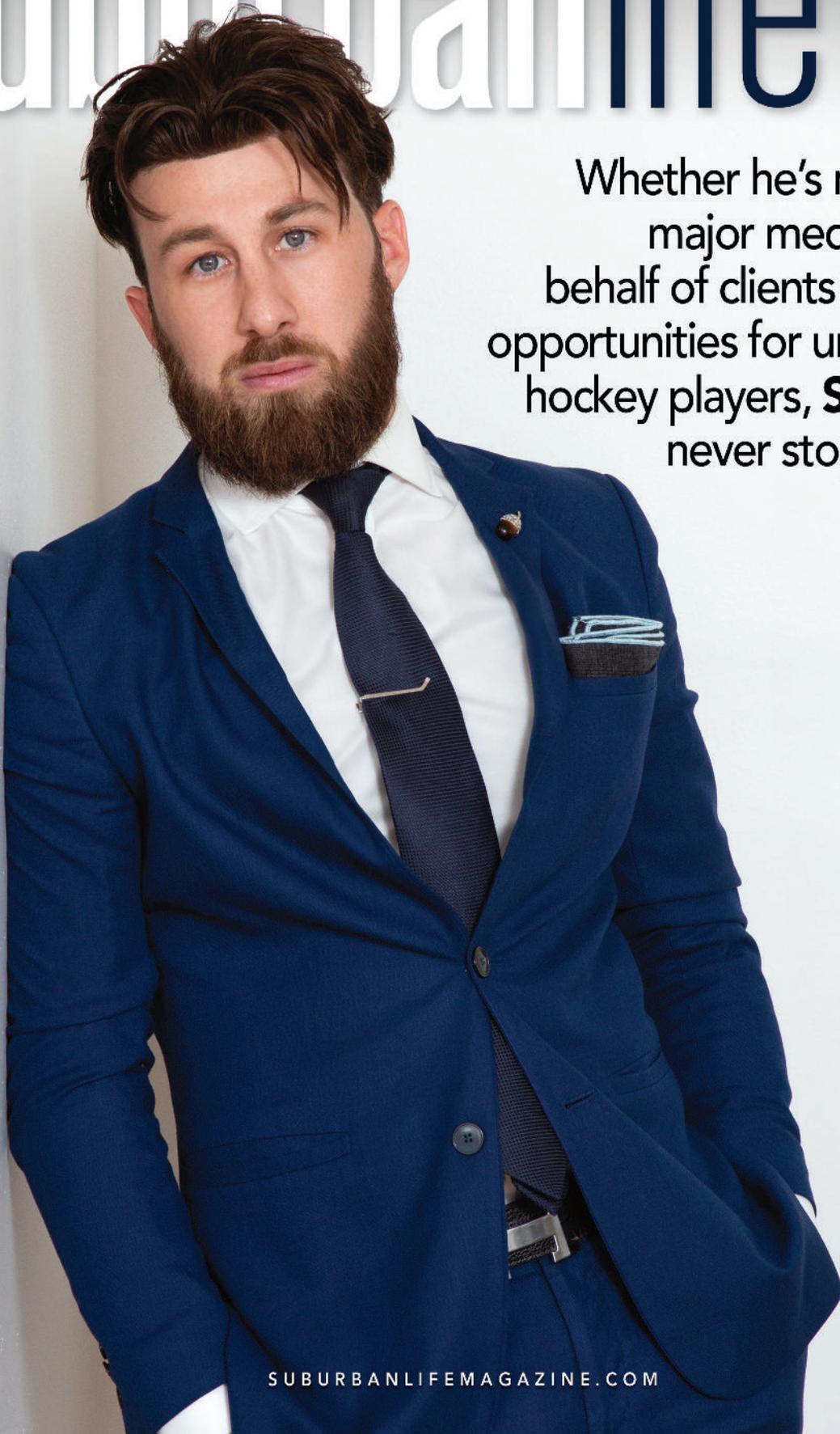


suburbanlife



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Whether he's negotiating major media deals on behalf of clients or creating opportunities for underserved hockey players, **Sean Grevy** never stops fighting.

IN THE ZONE

by **BILL DONAHUE** | photography by **ALISON DUNLAP**

Talk to Sean G. Grevy Jr. for five minutes, and several words will likely spring to mind: driven, loyal, hardworking, and, above all, *fighter*. The last descriptor applies to his competitive nature, the scrappiness he used to build his business from the ground up, and his eagerness to protect those closest to him—namely, his family, his clients, and the underprivileged individuals served by the nonprofit foundation he brought to life.

"I come from humble beginnings, and I've never forgotten that," says Grevy, 32, who traces his roots to Philadelphia's East Oak Lane neighborhood. "I've also been humbled a few times along the way, and those lessons of humility help me focus on what's important."

Grevy has also been guided by his lifelong love of ice hockey. His parents had him in skates by the time he turned 2 years old, and

playing on hockey teams by age 5. The sport proved to be "a good fit" for his energetic personality.

Grevy never forgot the sacrifices his parents made to keep him on the ice—the early morning practices, the long road trips, the pennies they scraped together to fund his passion. His sole mission became to compete at the highest level. Although not the biggest player on the ice, his blend of skill, hard work, and abrasive playing style placed him in an elite class.

"I was a good hockey player, but I also looked for other ways to stand out," he says. "I did what I had to do to make an impression on my coaches and teammates."

The sport gave him a lot, but its rough-and-tumble nature also took a toll on his body. He suffered nine concussions. He lost five teeth. He severed an Achilles tendon.

In a bit of serendipity, his penchant for hard work had pushed him to begin a career in advertising—as a 16-year-old—giving him something else at which to excel. At one point he had to make a difficult choice between a roster spot on a professional ECHL team, or a potentially lucrative marketing position with Z100 in New York. He chose the latter, thereby sending him down a long and winding road filled with success mixed with a fair dose of struggle and hardship.

Today, as the founder and CEO of 43 OAK, Grevy uses the qualities that made him a leader on the ice—assertiveness, resourcefulness, and tenacity—to help a growing list of clients build their businesses. Billed as "a disruptive agency," 43 OAK specializes in media planning and buying, including TV, radio, billboard, print, and streaming services, as well as consumer outreach through social media, public relations, and guerilla marketing.



A blend of skill, hard work, and tenacity placed Grevy in an elite class among hockey players. His competitive nature helped him excel as a business leader, too.

“Our niche is working with clients who are invested emotionally in the businesses they operate—people who care enough to want the advocacy we provide,” Grevy says. “The other common thread that connects our clients is that we work with a lot of inspiring people. They’re all very family oriented, loyal, and focused people. For me, those things mean a lot.”

The firm’s name speaks to Grevy’s roots—43 being his hockey number, OAK referring to the Philadelphia neighborhood that shaped him. His client list includes companies with a purely local footprint, as well as brands with a regional or even national presence. Anyone who has driven some of the most heavily trafficked corridors between Philadelphia and New York has likely seen evidence of Grevy’s work, with prominent billboards for the likes of Eat Clean Bro, Pond Lehockey, and Dello Russo Laser Vision.

At 43 OAK, Grevy and his team use a combination of buying power, national reach, and relationships with key media outlets, all of which have made the agency a force to be reckoned with. Growth aside, Grevy has no plans to take his hands off the helm anytime soon.

“At the end of the day, when we’re working on a deal, it’s always me negotiating,” he says. “If I send someone else in the room, they’re not going to get the same deal done. There are some things I don’t have to be part of, but I will never let go of the negotiations to ensure that our clients’ spots or billboards are always front and center.”

Removing Obstacles

Although Grevy has relinquished his dreams of playing professional hockey, the game remains close to his heart. He still plays at least twice a week, despite his frenetic schedule, and his friends include several current and former National Hockey League players. Furthermore, he’s constantly on the ice with the 43 OAK Foundation, the nonprofit group he created in 2017 to remove the obstacles that often prevent minorities and underprivileged youths from playing the game they love.

The foundation grew out of a lifechanging on-ice experience. Grevy collided with an opponent during an adult-league game, resulting

in a pinched nerve in his neck that paralyzed the right side of his face.

“When I was recovering from the paralysis, I was also coaching travel hockey in New York City,” he says. “I realized very quickly what an elitist sport ice hockey is. There are two travel hockey teams in Manhattan, meaning less than 100 players in the borough of Manhattan get to play travel hockey. Meanwhile, I know there are kids in Harlem playing rec hockey with 200 other kids. It’s also ridiculously expensive, so a lot of families [with limited means] can’t afford it.”

Grevy sees the 43 OAK Foundation’s mission with crystal clarity: to help hockey players of color or from underprivileged backgrounds hone their skills and embrace opportunities they might not otherwise have. The organization achieves this goal through mentorship, advocacy, and financial assistance, as well as ready access to ice time and other vital resources.

“We’re doing this not to send kids to the NHL, but to help them get an education,” he adds. “If a kid is good enough, regardless of where he comes from, that kid should have the opportunity to get looked at by junior teams, and then by college teams. The goal is to get these kids out of their neighborhoods and into college, because an education is going to take you places that even hockey won’t.”

Sky Silverstein, a defenseman for the UMass Dartmouth Corsairs, and Romeo Torain, a defenseman for the Castleton University Spartans, are two recent examples of the program’s success.

The foundation has enjoyed exponential growth in the four years since its founding. For example, UBS and the NHL’s New York Islanders recently entered into a partnership with the foundation that will devote \$1 million to increasing diversity in hockey over the next five years.

As Grevy looks ahead, he would like to see the foundation become national, even global, in its quest to make hockey more inclusive. He also wants to see his firm “continue doing what it’s doing”—using advocacy, creativity, and old-fashioned sweat equity to help clients achieve their goals.

His desire to make a lasting, positive difference took on greater significance two years ago, with the birth of his daughter.

“There’s a mission behind all this,” he says. “There’s nothing wrong with making money and having nice things, but I want to make sure I’m helping other people. I want to leave behind a legacy, where my daughter can grow up and say, ‘My daddy made this, and he helped so many people.’ I now know what my purpose is. I have never been more focused and motivated than at this moment in time. I know I’ll say the same thing tomorrow and the day after that.” ■



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For more information on 43 OAK, visit www.43oak.com.

For more information on the 43 OAK Foundation, visit www.43oakfoundation.org.