ORANGE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

2026 BENCH BAR CONFERENCE

REGISTER NOW

THE ULTIMATE PLAYBOOK

WINNING TECHNIQUES FROM THE BENCH

May 1, 2026

SCHEDULE:

07:45 AM - 08:30 AM	Breakfast/Tailgate/Registration and Networking
08:30 AM - 08:45 AM	Welcome message from OCBA President Keshara Cowans
08:55 AM - 09:55 AM	Session 1: General Assembly
10:05 AM - 11:05 AM	Session 2
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM	Session 3
12:30 PM - 01:45 PM	Lunch and Session 4: General Assembly
02:15 PM - 03:15 PM	Session 5
03:25 PM - 04:25 PM	Session 6
04:30 PM	Reception

DETAILED SESSION DESCRIPTIONS:

Session 1 (8:55 AM – 9:55 AM) – General Assembly

Beyond the Hype: Practical AI Ethics for Legal Practitioners, Presented by Title Sponsor Thomson Reuters

This session will explain how existing professional ethics rules apply to the use of artificial intelligence in legal practice. The presenter will review core duties such as competence, diligence, confidentiality, candor, and supervision, explains how the ABA Model Rules apply to AI, and demonstrate real-world examples to illustrate risks and judicial responses. The session will address state bar guidance, informed consent, billing transparency, and practical risk-mitigation steps, and provide strategies for developing responsible AI use policies, vendor vetting, and internal oversight, while looking ahead to emerging AI developments and their implications for legal practice.

Session 2 (10:05 AM – 11:05 AM)

Civil Litigation	**From Kickoff to Touchdown: Civil Case Management in the New Era** Civil litigation has entered a new era—faster timelines, stricter compliance, and greater accountability. From initial pleadings to final judgment, the rules of engagement have changed, and successful attorneys must adapt quickly to stay ahead. This timely CLE, inspired by the structure and strategy of a winning football drive, will walk participants through the full lifecycle of a civil case under Florida's revised case management rules. Learn how to take your case from kickoff to touchdown with precision, efficiency, and strategic foresight. Our panel of experienced litigators and judges will provide practical guidance on early case assessment, proposed case management orders, setting realistic deadlines, and navigating the judicial expectations now driving modern litigation. Attendees will leave with a clear game plan for thriving in the post-reform legal field. Moderator: **Tony Sos** Panelists: **The Honorable Luis Calderon** **The Honorable Tina Caraballo**

	The Honorable A. James Craner **The Honorable Margaret Schreiber**
Criminal Law	**Flag on the Play – Tips for Laying the Proper Foundation for Review on Appeal** What are common mistakes made by new/young practitioners when handling their own criminal appeals focusing on brief writing and oral arguments?Additionally, the judges will discuss best practices for preserving issues for appeal. Moderator: **Jamie Billotte Moses** Panelists: **The Honorable Eric Netcher** **The Honorable F. Rand Wallis**
Family Law	**Making the Cut: Evidence that Scores** From authentication to hearsay to relevance—get coaching from the bench on how to build a winning evidentiary offense. Moderator: **The Honorable LaShawnda Jackson** Panelists: **The Honorable Hal Epperson** **The Honorable Daniel Traver** **The Honorable Wayne Wooten**
General Legal	**Official Review: Reviewing the Rules of Evidence** In the legal arena, evidentiary calls can be as pivotal as a fourth-quarter decision on the field. Often, attorneys and judges see the rules of evidence from different vantage points—what looks like a clear completion to counsel may be ruled incomplete from the bench. To stay at the top of our game, it's crucial to revisit the fundamentals, avoid common penalties, and explore the strategic arguments that can turn the case. In this session, a panel of four judges will step into the huddle to break down key evidentiary issues, offering insights and real-world guidance from the bench. Topics include: 1. Character Evidence and Impeachment – Understanding how to run these plays without drawing a flag. 2. Recollection Recorded vs. Refreshing Recollection – Plus how to handle prior inconsistent statements, spontaneous statements, and excited utterances like a pro. 3. Witness Unavailability and Hearsay – Clarifying when evidence is actually being offered for the truth and how to keep it in bounds. 4. Judicial Notice and the Best Evidence Rule – Recognizing when to let the play stand and when a replay (or better proof) is required. Join us for this interactive session designed to sharpen your evidentiary skills and help you better anticipate the calls that matter. Moderator: **Melissa Vickers** Panelists: **The Honorable Cherish Adams** **The Honorable Doug Walker** **The Honorable Carrie Ann Wozniak**

Session 3 (11:15 AM – 12:15 PM)

Civil Litigation	**Calling in the Special Teams: Arbitration & Private Judging in the Legal Playbook** In the fast-paced game of litigation, knowing when to call in your "special teams" can be the key to strategic success. This dynamic and engaging CLE will explore how arbitration and private judging are being used as powerful tools to resolve disputes more efficiently, creatively, and cost-effectively. Participants will gain insight into the tactical advantages of these alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, including how and when to incorporate them into their legal strategy. Seasoned practitioners will break down best practices, common pitfalls, and recent trends in the use of arbitration clauses, the selection of private judges, and the enforcement of awards and judgments. Whether you're new to ADR or a veteran seeking to expand your toolkit, this session will equip you with the knowledge to confidently navigate outside the traditional courtroom — and make the winning call when it counts. Moderator: **Eloisa Pino** Panelists: **The Honorable Alice Blackwell (Ret.)** **Lawrence Kolin** **The Honorable Heather Pinder Rodriguez**
Criminal Law	**Calling the Right Play at Sentencing: Advocacy that Moves the Chains** Insight from both county and circuit court judges as to what arguments have been effective (or not) is causing them to use their discretion in sentencing. Specifically, are judges listening for sentencing. Moreover, what parts of a defendant's story have tugged most at a judge's heartstrings? What types of media have been most useful in mitigation? On the other hand, what victim impact statements have had the most impact? Moderator: **David Varet** Panelists: **The Honorable Amanda Bova** **The Honorable Vincent Falcone** **The Honorable Barbara Leach**
Family Law	**50/50 Formation: Breaking Down the Presumption** Just like running the option, time-sharing post-presumption isn't one-size-fits-all. Judges review play-calling when equal time doesn't work. Moderator: **The Honorable Diana Tennis** Panelists: **The Honorable Holly Derenthal** **Christie Lou Mitchell** **The Honorable Marcus Steverson**
General Legal	**Immigration Playbook 2026: New Rules, New Plays** Immigration law is moving fast—don't get caught offside! This CLE will bring you up to speed on the latest rule changes, federal policy shifts, and key court decisions that are reshaping the field. From visa updates to enforcement priorities and DACA developments, we'll break down the new playbook so you can stay in the game and confidently advise your clients. Whether you're a seasoned player in immigration law or a legal professional who occasionally faces immigration issues in other practice areas, this session will ensure you're ready to tackle whatever comes your way.

	Moderator: **Melissa Bryan** Panelists: **Nayef Mubarak** **Sasha Watson Sankey** **Francisco "Frank" Symphorien-Saavedra**

Session 4 (12:30 PM – 1:45 PM) **– General Assembly**
Halftime – A Word from Our Chiefs

This discussion will feature chief judges from the 5th and 6th DCAs, and the 9th and 18th Circuits, sharing insights on their experiences as chief judges, the challenges of balancing leadership roles, and advice for both new attorneys and judges. The panel will also address current trends in their courts, the impact of new rules, and professional conduct.

Moderator: **Jamie Billotte Moses**
Mary Walter

Panelists: **The Honorable Melanie Chase, Chief Judge, 18th Circuit**
The Honorable Harvey Jay, Chief Judge, 5th DCA
The Honorable Lisa Munyon, Chief Judge, 9th Circuit
The Honorable Daniel Traver, Chief Judge, 6th DCA

Session 5 (2:15 PM – 3:15 PM)

Civil Litigation	**Don't Drop the Ball: Avoiding Common Pitfalls in Civil Litigation** Even the most experienced litigators can fumble when navigating the complexities of civil litigation. From procedural missteps to strategic oversights, small errors can lead to big consequences for clients—and your case. This practical, high-impact CLE will focus on identifying and avoiding the most common pitfalls that arise throughout the civil litigation process. Drawing on real-world examples, judicial insight, and war stories from the trenches, our panel of seasoned attorneys and judges will help you sharpen your instincts, tighten your practice, and reduce risk at every stage of a case. Designed for litigators at all levels, this session will offer valuable takeaways on pretrial strategy, discovery compliance, motion practice, ethical landmines, and trial preparation missteps that can jeopardize even the strongest claims or defenses. Moderator: **Brandon Sapp** Panelists: **The Honorable Chad Alvaro** **The Honorable Jeramy Beasley** **The Honorable Brian Sandor** **The Honorable F. Rand Wallis**
Criminal Law	**4th Amendment and Long: Winning Cases Under the Most Dire Facts DUI Law Update and Tips for Effective Advocacy** We will focus on several changes in the law / circuit splits, such as the issue of going out of jurisdiction to conduct breath tests. We will also hear from Judge Johnson as to what he has found to be effective and ineffective advocacy in motion practice. Moderator: **Quanejha "Q" Erwin** Panelists: **The Honorable David P. Johnson**

Family Law	**Instant Replay: Lessons from Recent Appellate Decisions** A review of the most impactful recent appellate rulings in Florida family law—and how they're affecting trial court practice and client advising (retroactive alimony, retroactive child support custody, temporary atty fees). Moderator: **The Honorable Deborah S.F. Korleski** Panelists: **Jennifer Lawson** **Shannon McLin** **Andrew Nickolaou** **Mary Zogg**
General Legal	**End Zone Essentials: Scoring with Probate, Guardianship and Estate Planning** 1. Know Your Rulebook: Local Rules and Procedures in the Probate and Guardianship Arena; 2. Touchdown v. Field Goal: the key differences between Formal and Summary Administrations; 3. Avoid the Flags: Key Mistakes that Judges are seeing in Estate Plan Documents that delay estate administration; 4. Penalty on the Play: Best Practices in Guardianship Administration to keep the auditors happy. Moderator: **Pamela Martini** Panelists: **The Honorable Christy Collins** **Cooper Powell** **Alyse Verner**

Session 6 (3:25 PM – 4:25 PM)

Civil Litigation	**First and Federal: Moving the Chains in U.S. District Court** Success in federal court requires more than just knowing the rules—it demands precision, preparation, and the ability to strategically advance your case down the field. This engaging CLE session will guide practitioners through the unique procedures, expectations, and unwritten rules of practicing in U.S. District Court. Using a football-themed framework, this program will help attorneys move the chains toward victory by breaking down the key stages of a federal case—from filing to final judgment. Our panel of federal judges, seasoned litigators, and court staff will provide practical insights on motion practice, discovery management, trial preparation, and courtroom advocacy that aligns with federal standards and judicial preferences. Whether you're making your debut in federal court or looking to refine your approach, this session will give you the playbook to elevate your practice and avoid penalties. Moderator: **Lauren Millcarek** Panelists: **The Honorable Vincent Chiu** **The Honorable Roy "Skip" Dalton, Jr.** **The Honorable Daniel Irick**

Criminal Law	**Tightening Your Laces: Avoiding Rookie Mistakes in Juvenile Court** Insight from judges on common mistakes lawyers that practice adult criminal law make when they come down to juvenile court (and how to avoid them). In short, what to know when taking a juvenile case to not look like a novice and to not anger the judge. There will be a quick overview of basic procedures. But also, insight from judges into common pitfalls attorneys make in trying to execute and abide by said procedure. Also, and most importantly, what does and does not translate from adult to juvenile court. Moderator: **Bree Lawrenson** Panelists: **The Honorable Leticia Marques** **The Honorable Wayne Wooten**
Family Law	**Huddle Up: Judicial Panel** This panel will explore a range of substantive procedural topics in family law, including the court's use of Case Management Conferences (CMCs), effective discovery tools and common issues, circumstances under which mental health discovery may be authorized, recent rule changes, and noteworthy appellate decisions impacting practice. Moderator: **Michele Lebron** Panelists: **The Honorable LaShawnda Jackson** **The Honorable Gisela Laurent** **The Honorable Deborah S.F. Korleski** **The Honorable Diana Tennis**
General Legal	**Avoid the Penalty: Unsportsmanlike Conduct and other Ethical Violations** Practicing winning courtroom etiquette isn't just a part of pre-game warmup—it's essential to staying in the game and practicing at a professional level. A lawyer's demeanor, conduct, and respect for courtroom procedures as well as opposing counsel can make or break a performance before the bench. In this presentation, we will review the core principles of that etiquette as a coach reviews their playbook—highlighting the fundamentals needed to keep you in bounds. We will explore real-life highlight reels of both winning behavior and costly fouls, showing how even a minor fumble can have long-lasting consequences. 1. First Impressions Matter: Dressing & Speaking Like a Pro – Learn the importance of courtroom attire, body language, and tone so you can show up game day ready. 2. Staying in Bounds: Professionalism with Opposing Counsel – A reminder to always maintain civil communication and find that line between advocacy and unprofessional aggression. 3. Study Your Arena: The Importance of Following Procedures and Protocol – Avoid procedural penalties by reviewing judicial preferences and rules beforehand. 4. Fouls & Flags: What Not to Do! – Here we will review real-life courtroom missteps and common mistakes, and more importantly how to recover. Moderator: **Brooke Tharpe** **David Varet** Panelists: **The Honorable Jeramy Beasley** **The Honorable Heather Guarch** **The Honorable Alicia Peyton-Robinson** **The Honorable Kevin Weiss**