

## The Slam-Dunker

Cary McGehee plays above the rim

**Cary McGehee ranks among** Michigan's legal elite, but she has a confession: Her first love was basketball.

It started in sixth grade, when she played on a YMCA coed youth league.

At Bowling Green University, McGehee landed a scholarship to play basketball; she was voted MVP her senior year. Before law school, she played professionally with the Dallas Diamonds, helping her team nail the Women's American Basketball Association's national championship in 1985.

At 5-foot-6, McGehee is short for a basketball player by today's standards, but the position of guard suits her—in her employee litigation practice, she guards worker's rights when companies are accused of harassing or discriminating against them. "I'm very passionate about the fights I take," she says. "I'm pretty tough, and I'm not going to back down."

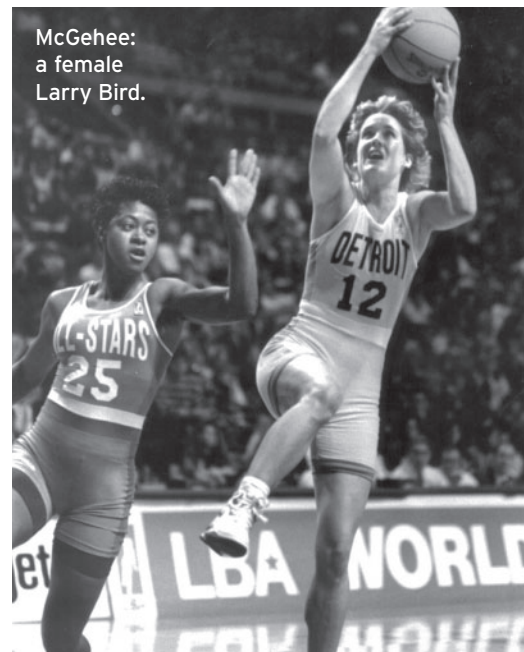
Tenacity runs in her blood. Before her dad became an Episcopal bishop, he too was a lawyer, and he and McGehee's mother once marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. "My parents instilled in me the importance of individual rights and the importance of fighting against discrimination," says McGehee.

On the walls of her office at Pitt, McGehee, Palmer, Rivers & Golden, an employee litigation firm she co-founded three years out of law school, hang pictures from her basketball triumphs. The inspiration seeps into her legal work. "There's absolutely a mental toughness that goes into being a lawyer," she says. "There's the teamwork concept when you're trying a case."

McGehee, 47, also fights for prisoners' rights. She is among the attorneys representing 500 women prisoners suing the Michigan Department of Corrections over allegations of sexual assault by prison guards. Two cases have been tried, rendering verdicts of \$15 million and \$8 million for the women.

"The facts are an embarrassment to the state of Michigan," McGehee says. "The juries were just appalled."

Though McGehee doesn't play ball much anymore, she does officiate Division I NCAA women's basketball games. That's how she met her sports-administrator husband, Mike Smith. In 2002, she was selected to



McGehee:  
a female  
Larry Bird.

COURTESY CARY MCGEHEE

the NCAA National Tournament as an alternate official.

When McGehee speaks of defending civil rights, she can expound in great detail. When it comes to her favorite sport, she gets to the point. "What I love about basketball is the competitiveness, the team, and shooting balls and making baskets," she says. "As my husband would say, I never saw a shot I didn't like."

For her legal clients, it's usually a slam dunk.

—Adrienne Schofhauser