“THE PELÉ OF BRAZIL’S LEGAL PROFESSION”

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“Being one of Paulo Aragão’s partners is like being on a team with the best soccer player in the world. He’s the Pelé of Brazil’s legal profession.” With this comparison, Amir Bocayuva, BMA Advogados’ Managing Partner, starts the conversation about his relationship with Paulo and the insights he has gained from someone who many consider to be one of Brazil’s most exceptional lawyers.

Luiz Antonio de Sampaio Campos, partner in BMA’s Corporate and M&A practice area, notes that the recent Lifetime Achievement award given to Paulo is yet more evidence of the dimensions of his contribution to Brazilian law. “When I learned of this well-deserved recognition, I had mixed feelings. On one hand, it was almost past time for the award, given all that Paulo has done for the legal profession. On the other hand, it seemed to be too early, considering the energy, drive, and curiosity he still shows. I wouldn’t be surprised if he receives similar awards in the future for the remarkable work he has yet to do.”

Over the course of his career, Paulo Aragão has amassed a record of noteworthy achievements, from his early years in law alongside his father to his work with the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Garantia Group, and the law firm Gouvea Vieira, until arriving at Barbosa & Müssnich (now BMA Advogados) – the culmination of a journey that has left an indelible mark on Brazilian law.

“Chico (Müssnich) and I united in 1995 to establish B&M, and Paulo was one of our biggest supporters. He encouraged us to create something modern that could reshape the legal market. It’s no surprise that less than two years later, Paulo Aragão moved to the other side of the counter, and joined us to help realize our dream of building a strong, reputable, and enduring law firm,” says Plínio Barbosa, founding partner of BMA Advogados.

“Paulo was part of the Garantia Group, and when he expressed his desire to return to legal practice, we knew he was the missing piece that would raise the firm to the level of excellence and permanence we aimed for. Precisely because of the weight that he brought on joining the firm, we agreed that our names would be set out in reverse order, reflecting a balanced and equal recognition for all three of us,” reveals Chico Müssnich, another of BMA Advogados’ founding partners.

In this way, an equilateral triangle was formed, bringing to life one of the country’s leading law firms, which is admired and respected for the significant domestic and international transactions it has been involved in over its 28-year history. Notably, the symbolism of a geometric shape is evident in these accounts of the firm’s history. The reports of those who’ve had the privilege of working with and learning from the founding partners make that clear, highlighting how each member of the trio complements the

others, both in their skills and expertise, and in their personalities.

“Chico is more outgoing, Plínio is more thoughtful. Paulo is the balancing factor among the personalities that began this success story. He’s a knowledge enthusiast who inspires us daily with his ability to analyze and connect events occurring worldwide. I joined BMA at a young age, thrown into the middle of a complex M&A transaction, and from day one, Paulo was incredibly generous with his guidance. He belongs to a generation of unique talents. I take great pride in being part of the team of the best in the world,” says Amir.

“This multiplicity in people is crucial because it allows clients to choose the ideal fit for their transaction or business. Paulo was pivotal not only in defining the firm’s character through his universally-recognized market presence, but also because, with true altruistic spirit, he volunteered to relocate to São Paulo FOR BMA and WITH BMA. This crucial step positioned the firm where it stands today,” reflects Plínio.

“Paulo has always been an exemplary lawyer, consistently attentive to details, refining strategies swiftly and creatively, with impressive persuasive powers. He’s a profound individual who set the tone for BMA to become a model that many firms would later seek to emulate and adopt. Undoubtedly, he’s the best lawyer in Brazil; second place comes after the Treaty of Tordesillas,” jests Chico.

“More than just an example or inspiration, Paulo, as a lawyer and legal scholar, is a subject of my ongoing and renewed admiration since my youth. Not only because of his dazzling intelligence, education and experience, but also due to his colossal intellectual curiosity, fascinating creativity, and astounding commitment to staying abreast of developments, not only in the law, but in the world at large,” states Luiz Antonio.

The success of the trio’s alliance is built upon a friendship cultivated over time. Plínio and Chico have known each other since they were five years old. Chico secured Plínio’s first internship. Chico stood up with Paulo at his wedding. Paulo even helped choose the spelling of one of Chico’s daughter’s names. Like the seamless passes made by a dream team, the play exhibited by these players – with the “Pelé of Law” as one of their stars – extends beyond the borders of their field.

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