

Sports

For the past forty years, Williams & Connolly has represented clients involved in virtually every aspect of the business of sports. The firm's sports legacy reaches back to the late 1960s, when firm-founder Edward Bennett Williams took over the running of the Washington Redskins and, a decade later, became owner of the Baltimore Orioles. Clients have come to the firm for general business advice and representation, for assistance in negotiating contracts, leases, and league structures, and for specific advice on setting up businesses. The primary reason those in the sports industry have come to the firm in recent years has been for representation in major litigation and arbitration disputes. We also handle radio, television, and cable broadcast agreements, stadium leases and stadium construction agreements, advertising and sponsorship agreements, collective bargaining agreements and player arbitration.

Our partners are also active in the field outside the firm. Senior partner Mark Levinstein is co-author of one of the leading sports law casebooks, has taught sports law classes as an adjunct professor at the Catholic University, George Washington, and Georgetown law schools, and is a regular speaker on sports law issues at conferences and symposiums on a nationwide basis.

Today, the firm's practice covers a number of different areas of sports law.

Sports Controversies

We focus on an array of legal areas and business issues involving athletes and sports-related businesses in a variety of sports. Our controversy-related representation involves everything from major litigation ending in trials to contested arbitrations, to negotiation to avoid litigation, to strikes and lockouts and unfair labor practice charges in labor disputes.

This firm's multi-dimensional representation includes amateur, Olympic, and professional athletes, players' associations and unions, sports teams, their owners, leagues and organizations of league properties, sports associations, national governing bodies, sport sponsors, universities, college and professional coaches, sports agents, sports management companies and sporting event producers, owners of sports facilities and boxing managers and promoters. We have been involved in matters concerning professional baseball, basketball, boxing, fast pitch softball, football, golf, hockey, lacrosse, soccer, tennis and volleyball, and several amateur, collegiate, and Olympic sports, such as bobsled, boxing, cycling, equestrian sports, martial arts, skiing, swimming and track and field.

Sports Business Planning and Transactions

As a result of our sports industry experience, start-up leagues and circuits, teams, team owners, sponsors and others sports organizations and businesses have come to the firm for business counseling, contract negotiations, collective bargaining and deals that have included substantial corporate transactions. Please also refer to a description of the firm's representation of sports organizations in transactional sports matters under Transactions and Business Counseling.

Diverse Legal Subject Matter as Applied to the Business of Sports

Our firm-wide experience includes many areas that are applicable to its sports practice, including antitrust, contracts, corporate law, the law of partnerships and limited liability companies, real estate, estate planning and tax law, franchise law, intellectual property, internet issues, labor law, constitutional law, criminal law, RICO, unfair competition and other common law torts. In addition, our lawyers also provide guidance and counsel on the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act, the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 and 1966, federal laws concerning gambling, sports gambling and sports lotteries, and state laws governing sports agent registration.

Representative Experience

The types of sports-related matters for which individuals and businesses come to the firm include:

- Disputes between owners of major and minor league professional teams and their leagues or owners of facilities where the teams play their games.
- Disputes between owners of sports facilities and the teams, leagues and event producers that hold events in their facilities.
- Disputes between event producers and circuits of events, such as the ATP World Tennis Tour or PGA Golf Tour.
- Disputes between athletes and their teams, sponsors, licensees, leagues, circuits of events and international and national governing bodies, such as the United States Olympic Committee.
- Disputes concerning the rights of athletes to participate in international competitions.
- The launch of a new professional sports league or a circuit of events.
- Efforts by groups of athletes to promote themselves collectively or to further their position as a group in disputes or cooperative activity with the teams and sports businesses that employ them.
- Arbitration of contractual disputes involving coaches, general managers, team presidents, scouts and other front office personnel in major league sports.
- Contract negotiations and other business matters for professional, collegiate and Olympic coaches and sports broadcasters.
- Advice concerning sponsorship and licensing having to do with athletes, sports organizations, and other businesses involved in sports.
- Negotiation of agreements with college coaches and other sports personnel related to the rules and regulations of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.
- The sale or acquisition of major league and minor league sports teams and franchises.
- Negotiation of radio, television and cable contracts for professional and collegiate sports teams.
- Stadium and arena development, planning, construction and leasing.
- Advice to universities about coaching contracts, conference agreements and conference realignment, compliance with NCAA rules and policies and other issues related to their sports programs.