

## Rising Star: Latham & Watkins' Kendall Johnson

By Rachel Scharf

*Law360 (June 15, 2021, 2:02 PM EDT)* -- Kendall Johnson of Latham & Watkins LLP has inked billion-dollar deals for sports and media giants including the National Collegiate Athletic Association, International Olympic Committee and Sinclair Broadcast Group, earning her a spot among the sports and betting law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

### **HER BIGGEST RECENT DEALS:**

Johnson practices at the unique intersection of sports and media, and she's helped some of the largest names in amateur sports negotiate massive broadcasting deals.

Over the years, she's guided both the IOC and NCAA in extending their media rights deals through 2032. She advised the IOC on its \$7.7 billion extension of NBC Olympic broadcasts in 2014, and the NCAA on its own \$8.8 billion deal with CBS and Turner to keep March Madness on their networks in 2016.

"Both of those deals were really organization-defining," Johnson said. "And they're also challenging deals as the media landscape is changing, as the way people view content is changing, and as the way people view amateur sports is changing."

Johnson also played a role when both the IOC and NCAA's broadcast deals were upended by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. She advised the NCAA as it was forced to cancel March Madness for the first time in the tournament's history, as well as the IOC in postponing the Tokyo Summer Olympics to 2021.

In both of these cases, Johnson said, the challenge was to negotiate the one-time cancellation of media rights deals while keeping these ongoing broadcast relationships intact for the future.

"Navigating these issues while maintaining long-term partnerships with broadcast partners was a really interesting challenge over the last year,"



**Kendall Johnson**  
Latham & Watkins

Age: 37  
Home base: Los Angeles  
Position: Partner  
Law school: UCLA School of Law  
First job after law school: Associate at O'Melveny & Myers LLP

she said.

#### ***WHAT SHE'S PROUDEST OF:***

As Latham helped these sporting giants work through the novel challenge of canceling major media events due to the pandemic, Johnson was proud to see that her team had written the right safeguards into the broadcast deals for their clients.

"The last year has demonstrated how important our work is," she said. "I think one of the things that is really fulfilling about being a lawyer is when you go back and look at the things you did in the past and how you've protected clients."

Johnson said it was gratifying to see that these contract protections, which often go unnoticed by those outside law, could actually be invoked to help clients through a challenging time.

"This last year has shown that what lawyers do really does matter," Johnson said. "It's our job to see around corners and think about things that no one is predicting, so it is always fun when something unexpected happens and you've done a good job on the front end of doing that for your clients."

#### ***OTHER NOTABLE DEALS:***

Johnson advised media and sports company Endeavor in its \$660 million acquisition of a majority stake in On Location Experiences in 2020, which included a licensing deal with the National Football League.

Johnson said it was exciting to be involved in the industry's new interest in On Location, which is now the NFL's official hospitality partner that specializes in the "experiential hospitality" model, which includes events like field access and pregame parties.

"There's so much more [to do] as high-value VIP experiences become a much bigger part of the sports world," she said.

Johnson has also guided Sinclair in some of its biggest deals, including the company's \$10.6 billion purchase of 21 regional sports networks from Fox in 2019 and its \$3.5 billion joint venture to take over YES Network the same year.

#### ***WHY SHE'S A SPORTS ATTORNEY:***

Johnson specifically became a lawyer with the goal of working in the sports world. She served on the athletic media relations team for Stanford University before law school, and she said the opportunity to work on high-powered deals for clients like the IOC and NCAA has been a dream come true.

"Amateur sports in particular has always been of personal interest and focus to me, so to get the opportunity to do that while being a lawyer has been incredible," Johnson said. "Thinking about those issues throughout the world really has been one of the [most fun] things in my career."

#### ***WHAT MOTIVATES HER:***

Sports and media are constantly changing, Johnson said, and this keeps her excited and engaged in her work.

"Three years ago, the most interesting, novel thing was virtual reality and distribution on streaming platforms, and today it's sports betting, and non-fungible token and antitrust issues around amateur sports," Johnson explained. "And three years from now it's going to be three totally different things that

none of us are even thinking about right now."

While some might be daunted by not knowing what is to come in their field, Johnson said that this uncertainty is what drives her passion for the sports and media landscape.

"There are always going to be new issues, and there are always going to be new challenges," Johnson explained. "It's fun to think about novel ways to apply concepts that we've used in the past to deal with new issues."

— *As told to Rachel Scharf*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,400 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2021, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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