

Rising Star: Latham's Kirsten Jackson

By Riley Murdock

Law360 (June 22, 2023, 4:57 PM EDT) -- Kirsten Jackson of Latham & Watkins LLP has secured multimillion-dollar settlements in a wide range of insurance cases and is fighting to secure billions in COVID-19 business interruption coverage for her clients, earning her a place as one of the insurance attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 Rising Stars.

THE BIGGEST CASE OF HER CAREER:

Jackson was co-lead counsel for LA Terminals Inc., a Berkshire Hathaway affiliate, and Soco West Inc. in a bad faith suit against United National Insurance Co. for failing to defend the companies against environmental lawsuits from the city of Los Angeles, which sought more than \$60 million from the former city-owned port operators.

Latham won summary judgment for its clients in June 2022, with a California federal court affirming that United National was obligated to defend the companies in the underlying suits. In December, the court ordered the insurer to pay the companies' past and future defense costs in full after it had continued to refuse coverage, according to Latham. The firm was also able to negotiate a settlement of the companies' bad faith claims against United National, Jackson said.

"We [not only] won on every issue, but we really got a recognition from the court that this was unusual behavior on behalf of the insurer, and they really went out of their way to reprimand the other side about it," she said, taking pride in convincing U.S. District Judge Otis D. Wright II, who she said was formerly an insurance attorney, to side with her client.

THE MOST INTERESTING CASE SHE'S WORKED ON RECENTLY:

Some of the most challenging and rewarding cases Jackson is working on involve COVID-19 business interruption claims, she said. She is the lead counsel for one of California's largest hospital systems in its bid to recover up to \$100 million in pandemic-related losses under an environmental pollution policy that explicitly provides coverage for viruses, she said.



Kirsten Jackson
Latham & Watkins

Age: 37
Home base: Los Angeles
Position: Partner
Law school: Columbia Law School
First job after law school: Associate at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan LLP

Jackson is part of a team representing Caesars Entertainment in a \$2.5 billion suit targeting more than 50 insurers in Nevada state court. That case, unlike many other COVID-19-related suits, has survived motions to dismiss and is proceeding to discovery, she said. She's also working on an appeal in Endeavor Operating Co.'s \$600 million business interruption suit, as well as a Florida state court suit on behalf of luxury hotel operator Westbrook Partners, according to the firm.

"I'm at a pretty exciting point in my career where I'm working on many of my biggest cases right now," Jackson said. "Latham is at the very forefront of this issue, nationwide. I've had a lot of opportunities to help shape what's turning out to be a very cutting-edge area of the law."

Jackson is also working on insurance-related matters for Latham in the firm's representation of Tom Brady, Gisele Bündchen and Larry David in class action lawsuits concerning the promotion of now-defunct cryptocurrency exchange FTX, according to the firm.

WHY SHE'S AN INSURANCE ATTORNEY:

In Jackson's second year as a lawyer, her auto insurer denied a minor claim, prompting her outrage. The cost was small, but she had paid more than \$10,000 in premiums to the company at that point, she said. She sued in small claims court and found she really enjoyed doing so.

Jackson's previous firm had an insurance recovery practice, so she asked one of the partners for work and again found she enjoyed the field. She now exclusively takes the side of policyholders when working insurance cases, she said.

"I believe that suing insurance companies that wrongfully deny claims is the morally correct thing to do," Jackson said. "All these years later I'm still pretty thrilled that this is something that I can actually get paid to do full time."

HER PROUDEST MOMENT:

Advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in the legal profession is one of Jackson's greatest passions, she said. Making partner at Latham at age 31 was her proudest moment because of what it represented, the example it provides, and the influence it allowed her to have on recruiting and hiring at the firm, she said.

Jackson is proud to serve as vice chair of Latham's Diversity Leadership Committee, which she said is doing amazing work. While there are "very few" Black female partners at big law firms, she said that number is growing, and she is pleased with the progress that's been made in the years since she became a partner.

"While we certainly have a long way to go; when I made partner six years ago, I never could have imagined that I would be currently leading an all-Black female litigation team at a firm like Latham for a client like Chevron," Jackson said.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

As a diehard tennis fan, Jackson's all-time favorite player is Serena Williams. She even attended Williams' final match at the U.S. Open last year, an experience she said was "terribly emotional for me."

Williams is driven by a hatred of losing, which she is even more passionate about than winning, Jackson said. She finds herself motivated by a similar sentiment.

"That drives her to be the best that she can be," she said. "I'm not Serena Williams, but I think that that mentality resonates with me as well."

— *As told to Riley Murdock. Editing by Adam LoBelia.*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2023 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,350 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of May 1, 2023, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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