

## Sports MVP: Latham & Watkins' Christopher Brearton

By Natalie Rodriguez

*Law360, New York (November 23, 2015, 5:46 PM ET)* -- Latham & Watkins LLP's Christopher D. Brearton rode a winding path from college athlete to being one of the go-to legal advisers for sports organizations and their content providers, but the experience has ultimately placed him at the forefront of some of the industry's biggest deals and landed him among Law360's Sports MVPs for 2015.

Among the highlights of Brearton's blockbuster portfolio of recent work is guiding the International Olympic Committee on a \$7.75 billion broadcast and media rights license with NBCUniversal and representing Chinese media giant Tencent Holdings Ltd. in a landmark digital distribution rights deal for NBA games. And the former University of Georgia swimmer has a run of deals waiting in the pipeline.

"I feel like I'm an airport just after a fog with planes all over the runways [set to take off]," Brearton said.

But Brearton doesn't mind having this problem as his sports and media work is driven in part by a passion that has developed since childhood.

Though he started his after-college life in California as an accountant, happenstance landed him MGM as his first client. Within a few years, Brearton earned a law degree and decided to develop a sports and entertainment-focused practice, building on some of the contacts he had made at his original job.

Now, the experience he has developed at the various levels in the sports and entertainment deals world gives him an edge with many clients.

"They want someone who gives them advice, rather than just a myriad of options," Brearton said, noting that clients really want an "educated counselor" who understands the business.

The attorney has worked deals from both sides of the table when it comes to sports and broadcasters, giving him the insight to address the various concerns each side has during negotiations.

On the broadcast side, he advised Univision Networks this past summer on its acquisition of exclusive Spanish language broadcast and media rights for the U.S. national soccer team and Major League Soccer. The new deal extended Univision's relationship with the MLS to 20 seasons.



Christopher Brearton  
Latham & Watkins

And then there was the Tencent deal, which marked the first time the NBA had granted such rights to a foreign-based partner on an exclusive basis.

“China is an enormous market, and the level of interest the Chinese consumer has in basketball and the NBA is very high,” Brearton said.

But his portfolio of experience covers a cross-section of sports and deal makers. Late last year, Brearton guided the Dallas Stars on a multiyear broadcast and media rights deal to have Fox Sports Southwest be the exclusive regional television partner of the ice hockey team.

And Brearton, who joined Latham late last year as part of the launch of the firm's Century City, California, office, was also tapped by long-time client the International Olympic Committee to negotiate its Olympic Games deal with NBCUniversal. The long-term deal gives the broadcaster rights through 2032.

“The world is changing very fast, and it's hard to know what the media landscape is going to look like in 2032, or even 2018, so it's very revealing of the long-term nature of the relationship between the IOC and NBCUniversal,” Brearton said.

For Brearton, strong relationships with clients and the various parties those clients deal with is of paramount importance in pushing through the high-level spate of deals he has found on his table.

“The best way to negotiate is to really understand your counterparty,” he said.

--Editing by Christine Chun.

All Content © 2003-2015, Portfolio Media, Inc.

---