

SLA MONTHLY

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SPORTS LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Highlight Reel



Panelists Discuss the Evolution of Commissioner Authority in Professional Sports at SLA Conference

By Drew Schott

Kenesaw Mountain Landis served as the first commissioner of Major League Baseball (MLB) from 1920 to 1944. During his leadership of MLB, Landis exercised extreme authority over the professional baseball league, including his power to act in the best interests of baseball to justify lifetime bans for the players involved in the 1919 Black Sox Scandal.

See COMMISSIONER on Page 13

Dancing Through the Raindrops: Navigating the Future of College Athletics

By Anna Giambelluca, Esq.

The 2026 Sports Lawyers Association conference ended on a timely note with a panel examining the unpredictable future of college athletics.

The panel, titled “*The Future of College Athletics: Law, Labor, and the Next Era*” was moderated by Warren Zola of the Carroll School of Management at Boston College, and featured Jon Duncan, Vice President of Enforcement at the NCAA, Sean Frazier, Vice President and Director of Athletics and Recreation at Northern Illinois University, and Anil Gollahalli, Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel of the Big Ten Conference.

See NAVIGATING on Page 13

Register for the Upcoming Fall Symposium

The SLA will hold its 2026 Fall Symposium, “The Sports Law Frontier: Business, Tech, Globalization, and Change,” Nov. 5-6 at the Sheraton Boston. The symposium will bring together sports industry leaders to examine emerging technologies, evolving business models and the growing international reach of leagues, athletes and markets. Sessions will address legal, commercial and regulatory challenges while providing opportunities for problem-solving and networking among attorneys and other sports industry professionals. To register, visit here: https://portal.sportslaw.org/Portal/Events/Event_Display.aspx?EventKey=FALL26

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Maya Mendoza-Exstrom Receives University of Puget Sound Professional Achievement Award

University of Puget Sound has recognized Maya Mendoza-Exstrom, chief business officer and a 2003 graduate, with its 2026 Professional Achievement (Mid-Career) Award.

The university cited Mendoza-Exstrom's career in soccer, which has included leadership roles with Seattle Reign FC and the Seattle Sounders, as well as her contributions to expanding opportunities for athletes and communities.

In a LinkedIn post, Mendoza-Exstrom said it was "an incredibly humbling honor" to return to campus to receive the award. She also reflected on sharing the moment with her parents, husband and daughters while revisiting the university's women's soccer championship banners.

Soccer was the first love of Mendoza-Exstrom, and it never let her go. It carried her from childhood teams in western Washington to championship squads at the University of Puget Sound, then into coaching roles after graduation and ultimately into a career dedicated to advancing the game.

After earning her law degree and spending seven years in private

practice, Mendoza-Exstrom went on to work 11 seasons with the Seattle Sounders — three as the club's chief operating officer. She is now the chief business officer for Seattle Reign FC. She also chaired the successful bid for Seattle to host the World Cup and is a member of the city's 2026 FIFA World Cup Host Committee City Board (see story on p. 18). In addition, Mendoza-Exstrom contributes her expertise to a number of boards and nonprofits, including the RAVE Foundation, the Reign's and Sounders' charitable arm, which works to build small and innovative soccer fields designed for free community play.

"I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up," says Mendoza-Exstrom with a laugh. But professors like Mott Green and Nancy Bristow, who supported her development as both a committed student and an All-American athlete at Puget Sound, "meant the world to me," she explains, and that is "probably why I am still working in this game. I can't quite quit this game, because it's as much academic and intellectual to me as it is a physical sport."

Shelby Klose Promoted to General Counsel at Chicago Fire FC

Chicago Fire FC has promoted Shelby Klose to general counsel, the club announced as part of a series of leadership promotions.

Klose, who shared the news in a LinkedIn post, said she was "excited and incredibly grateful" to take on the role.

"I'm excited and incredibly grateful to announce that I have been promoted to General Counsel at Chicago Fire FC," Klose wrote.

She reflected on her longtime interest in soccer, noting that as a child she participated in Park District soccer and used the screen name "SoccerChik."

"It's an honor to take on this role with a Club that I have seen grow and evolve into the changemaker it is today," Klose wrote.

Klose also thanked several colleagues and mentors for their support, including Laura Warren, David Baldwin, Adam Klein, Daniel Render, Sarah Horvitz and Rachel Cohn. She also congratulated fellow Chicago Fire FC executives Nate Engel and Goyo Perez on their promotions.

Chicago Fire FC announced that Perez has been promoted to

chief partnership officer and Engel has been promoted to senior vice president of business operations and general manager of McDonald's Park.

The club said the promotions come during a period of organizational growth. According to Chicago Fire FC, the organization has broken ground on McDonald's Park, opened the Dear Chicago Experience Center and the Endeavor Health Performance Center, relocated its headquarters to the Wrigley Building, welcomed Robert Lewandowski to Chicago, recorded a third consecutive season of record attendance, increased partnership revenue more than fourfold since 2022, and currently sits third in the Eastern Conference.

"None of this happens without great people," the club said in its announcement. "Goyo, Shelby, and Nate have each played an important role in our growth and success, and these promotions reflect the impact they've made across the organization."

Attorneys Address Olympic Disputes and Betting Integrity Challenges at Conference

By Kaylah Dove

During the 2026 Sports Lawyers Association Conference in Chicago, I covered two insightful panels examining evolving issues in sports law: Major Olympic Disputes and Recent CAS Case Law in Anti-Doping and Best Practices to Prevent Sports Betting and Anti-corruption Violations.

Major Olympic Disputes and Recent CAS Case Law in Anti-Doping

The first panel, Major Olympic Disputes and Recent CAS Case Law in Anti-Doping, featured Michael Lenard, President of the International Council of Arbitration for Sport (ICAS); Matthieu Reeb, Director General of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS); and William Sternhemier, Manager of Education at CAS. The discussion provided insight into the evolving role of CAS in resolving high-profile Olympic disputes and shaping global anti-doping jurisprudence.

The Evolution of CAS Ad Hoc Jurisdiction

Michael Lenard opened the session by discussing the historical development of CAS's Ad Hoc Division and its role in resolving disputes during the Olympic Games. Lenard explained that the expedited arbitration framework emerged, in part, from controversies involving American sprinter Butch Reynolds in the early 1990s, which highlighted the need for athletes to have immediate access to independent dispute resolution during Olympic competition.

Lenard emphasized that the Ad Hoc Division's purpose is twofold: to preserve the orderly operation of the Olympic Games while ensuring athletes are not deprived of meaningful procedural protections. He noted that the system's expanded standing and jurisdictional principles were intentionally designed to prevent athletes from being left without an effective forum during the Games.

Olympic Disputes from Milan-Cortina and Paris 2024

Matthieu Reeb reviewed several notable disputes arising from recent Olympic competitions.

One case involved the British Bobsleigh & Skeleton Association's attempt to introduce a redesigned aerodynamic helmet during the Milan-Cortina Winter Games. CAS ultimately upheld the International Bobsleigh & Skeleton Federation's determination that the helmet violated applicable equipment regulations because of its altered aerodynamic features.

Reeb also discussed the widely publicized case involving Ukrainian athlete Vladyslav Heraskevych, who sought to wear a helmet honoring Ukrainian athletes killed during Russia's invasion of

Ukraine. CAS upheld restrictions prohibiting political demonstrations during Olympic competition, concluding that while athletes maintain freedom of expression, the field of play must remain politically neutral under Olympic regulations.

Additional disputes addressed during the panel included athlete selection controversies, procedural challenges involving Olympic scoring protests, and disciplinary matters arising from coach misconduct allegations.

The panel also revisited the ongoing controversy surrounding the women's floor exercise final at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games involving Jordan Chiles and Romanian gymnast Ana Bărbosu. Reeb explained the procedural issues concerning the timeliness of scoring protests and noted that aspects of the dispute remain under continued review following subsequent proceedings before Swiss authorities.

CAS Anti-Doping Jurisprudence

William Sternhemier then focused on recent developments in CAS anti-doping case law, emphasizing the stringent burden athletes face when attempting to establish contamination defenses or demonstrate a lack of intent.

The presentation analyzed several high-profile matters, including the Kamila Valieva contamination defense, Paul Pogba's appeal involving prohibited substances, and Simona Halep's contaminated supplement case.

Sternhemier explained that CAS jurisprudence consistently requires athletes to identify the source of a prohibited substance before sanctions may be meaningfully reduced. Even where contamination theories appear plausible, CAS panels continue to apply strict evidentiary standards in evaluating whether athletes have met their burden of proof.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of procedural compliance by anti-doping organizations themselves. Sternhemier noted that CAS panels have increasingly scrutinized whether governing bodies properly followed notification, testing, and adjudicatory requirements before imposing sanctions.

Collectively, the panel illustrated how CAS continues to balance athlete rights, procedural fairness, and the integrity of international sport in an increasingly complex global sports environment.

Best Practices to Prevent Sports Betting and Anti-corruption Violations.

A second panel, Best Practices to Prevent Sports Betting and Anti-Corruption Violations, focused on the rapidly evolving integrity risks associated with legalized sports wagering and the growing need for proactive compliance systems across professional and Olympic sport.

The panel featured Scott Lerner, Partner at Dechert LLP; Michael McGinnis, Senior Director of Integrity and Investigations for the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC); Dan Trolaro, Managing Director of Education and Fair Play at IC360; and moderator Marcus Fruchter, Administrator of the Illinois Gaming Control Board.

Building Preventative Integrity Frameworks

Scott Lerner emphasized that organizations must prioritize preventative compliance measures before integrity failures occur. Drawing comparisons to securities regulation and insider information controls, Lerner argued that sports organizations increasingly possess valuable nonpublic information that may impact betting markets, including injury reports, roster decisions, and internal disciplinary matters.

According to Lerner, sports entities should proactively implement policies governing information access, internal reporting procedures, investigative protocols, and crisis response planning rather than waiting for integrity violations to emerge.

Monitoring, Education, and Risk Mitigation

Michael McGinnis discussed the USOPC's expanding integrity initiatives in response to the rapid growth of legalized sports betting markets. He explained that Olympic sports organizations face unique challenges because of the wide disparity in resources among governing bodies and athletes.

McGinnis described the USOPC's efforts to centralize integrity training, monitoring systems, and investigative resources across Olympic sports while also coordinating with regulators and third-party monitoring entities.

Dan Trolaro focused on the intersection between gambling addiction, athlete vulnerability, and sports integrity enforcement. Speaking from both professional and personal experience, Trolaro emphasized that effective compliance programs must account for the human dimensions of gambling-related misconduct, including financial pressure, mental health concerns, and exploitation risks faced by athletes.

The panelists repeatedly stressed that education alone is insufficient without meaningful monitoring systems, investigative infrastructure, and clear enforcement mechanisms.

The Future of Sports Integrity Enforcement

Throughout the discussion, speakers acknowledged that legalized sports wagering has fundamentally altered the modern

sports landscape. As betting markets expand globally, sports organizations, regulators, and legal professionals increasingly face complex questions involving athlete conduct, insider information, corruption risks, and public trust in competition outcomes.

The panel concluded with a consensus that integrity protection now requires a collaborative framework involving leagues, governing bodies, regulators, integrity monitors, compliance professionals, and legal counsel working together proactively rather than reactively.

The 2026 Sports Lawyers Association Conference highlighted the increasingly complex legal and regulatory challenges facing the sports industry. From the Court of Arbitration for Sport's role in resolving Olympic disputes and shaping anti-doping jurisprudence to the growing importance of integrity frameworks in the age of legalized sports betting, both panels underscored the need for proactive governance, procedural fairness, and collaboration among stakeholders. As international competition, technology, and wagering markets continue to evolve, sports lawyers will play a critical role in protecting athlete rights, preserving the integrity of competition, and navigating the rapidly changing legal landscape of global sport.



Sports Law Jobs, Courtesy of TeamWork Online

Entry Level

- Paralegal - PGA Tour
- Data Privacy Paralegal - Six Flags
- Contract Administrator, Pacific Northwest - AEG Presents
- Contract Administrator, Goldenvoice - AEG Presents
- Coordinator, Safeguarding & Compliance - US Club Soccer
- Associate Counsel - IMG

Manager

- Capital Improvements Coordinator - Legends Global
- Safe Sport Manager - USA Wrestling
- Legal Affairs Manager - USA Track and Field
- Legal Document Specialist, Temp - AEG Worldwide
- Trademark Paralegal - U.S. Polo Association Global (USPA Global)

Director

- Assistant General Counsel - Playfly Sports (Atlanta, GA)
- Assistant General Counsel - Playfly Sports (Berwyn, PA)
- Senior Paralegal - Seaport Entertainment
- Director, Strategic Sourcing - Playfly Sports

Senior

- Project Manager | Legends Global Owner's Representation
- VP, State Government Affairs - PrizePicks

Legal Hires on TeamWork Online since January 2026

- Alberto Diaz - Corporate Counsel, U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association
- Jacob Painter - Counsel, Generalist, FIFA World Cup 2026
- Noelle Klockner - Senior Counsel, IP, NHL Team Jobs
- Louis Brown III - Senior Counsel, Generalist, FIFA World Cup 2026
- Michael Weil - Counsel, Generalist, FIFA World Cup 2026
- Jessica Leigh Hawley - Assistant General Counsel, United Football League (UFL)
- Zachary Landow - Counsel, New York Yankees
- Mekbebe Hagos - Legal Counsel, Anaheim Ducks Hockey Club
- Kaitlin Ashner - Counsel, Business and Legal Affairs, OneTeam Partners

- Lee Baumgardner - Counsel, Sponsorship, NHL Team Jobs
- Luke Pacifici - Staff Counsel, Brand Consulting, Culinary & Experiences, Elevate
- Sarah Craig - General Counsel, Chicago Sports Network
- Daniel Jabe - Associate Counsel, Risk & Compliance, Columbus Blue Jackets
- Tyler Alsey - Legal Counsel, Houston Dynamo FC
- Janie Pierson - Associate Counsel - Events, NHL Team Jobs
- Ariel Risinger - Counsel - Technology, Data & AI, NHL Team Jobs
- Reilly Caldwell - Legal Assistant, NHL Team Jobs
- Zoe Meade - Senior Paralegal, Golden State Warriors
- Mark Hamilton - Paralegal, KC Current
- Chloe G. Mitchell - Legal, Intern, Jacksonville Jaguars
- Alexis Williams - Legal Executive Assistant, Detroit Lions
- Stacey Lager - VP, Legal (Technology, Data & AI), NHL Team Jobs
- Jaclyn White - Legal Intern (Summer 2026) , Elevate
- Meredith Mackay - Legal Intern (NYC Office), Playfly Sports
- Jacob Talbert - Legal Intern (Philadelphia Office), Playfly Sports
- Jesse Stern - Legal Intern (Philadelphia Office) , Playfly Sports
- Jared Barberio - Legal Intern (NYC Office), Playfly Sports
- Autumn Richards - Manager, Legal Admin & Operations, Golden State Warriors



Attorneys and Executives Provide Advice and Lessons to Aspiring Sports Lawyers at SLA Conference

By Drew Schott

Since 2011, George McCaskey has served as the fourth Chairman of the Chicago Bears. Ahead of joining the Bears in 1991, he earned his Juris Doctor from the law school of Arizona State University (ASU) and served as an Assistant State's Attorney in DeKalb County, Illinois and Lee County, Illinois.

Attending law school was not McCaskey's original plan after receiving his undergraduate degree, also from ASU. But today, he is "very grateful" for receiving a legal education.

"I'm so glad I went," McCaskey said. "I'm not actively involved in the legal department of the Bears, but there are so many instances where you've got to have that background, that critical thinking ability and even those writing and public speaking skills. It is all formed in law school and it's been very helpful."

McCaskey's comments came during a panel entitled, "Pathways to Sports Law," at the Sports Lawyers Association Annual Conference in Chicago on May 14. The panel also featured Logan Deeney – Senior Legal Counsel for Orlando City SC and Orlando Pride, Meghan Pirics, Senior Counsel for the Milwaukee Brewers and Kaleisha Stuart, Deputy General Counsel for the Dallas Cowboys. Their conversation was moderated by Aaron Hernandez, then the Assistant Dean and Executive Director of the Allan "Bud" Selig Sports Law and Business Program at ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. Hernandez will begin in August at Marquette University Law School as an Associate Professor of Practice and the Director of the National Sports Law Institute.

Stuart shared that while at Stanford Law School, she aspired to work for an organization that "connected with their consumers" and created a positive impact. She has been able to achieve that goal with the Cowboys, who hired her following a six-month secondment to the National Football League franchise from law firm Jones Day.

Deeney, a former soccer player at California Baptist University and graduate of Marquette University Law School, embraced accepting "any work that came in" during his internships, which gave him exposure to transactional matters, as well as legal and business affairs facing sports organizations and leagues. Meanwhile, Pirics – an alumna of Marquette University Law School – credited her curiosity and work ethic, as well as her ability to build relationships, with her more than decade-long tenure with the Brewers.

"There's never been a better time to want to enter the sports industry because it's growing so much," Stuart said. "... What's great is that there are so many different ways to contribute to the

sports industry as a lawyer, more than ever, from collegiate athletics to NIL to even the more traditional roles like working in-house for a team."

Each of the panelists emphasized the importance of relationships in the sports law field. Stuart shared that strong connections were "at the heart" of earning her role with the Cowboys and cultivating relationships with colleagues, clients and opposing counsel will grow one's problem solving skills. Deeney discussed not only networking with both professional attorneys and law school classmates, but also being "a good person" since having a positive and strong reputation is important in the legal field. Additionally, Pirics echoed a comment from McCaskey to maintain connections and relationships for the long-term.

"I think you want to be persistent without being a pest and you want to try to find some natural connection with somebody in the industry," McCaskey said. "Don't just call somebody and say, 'Hey, I've decided to designate you as one of my mentors.' It's got to be more natural than that. Don't force a connection, but when you find a connection, seize on it and take advantage of it."

The panel later advised aspiring attorneys to familiarize themselves with emerging areas of sports law, including artificial intelligence (AI), trademark matters and stadium development. One of Pirics' roles with the Brewers is to maintain the Major League Baseball franchise's trademark portfolio both in the United States and across the globe.

"The Brewers just launched their latest City Connect jersey right at the start of the season and that was a project that was two years in the making, from the first time we got the initial designs from Nike to then searching and clearing... to ensure that we were not going to be infringing on anybody's existing rights," Pirics said. "If there were existing rights, it was working with those third parties to come up with a coexistence license agreement that was going to allow the Brewers to put certain marks on the jersey that maybe someone else had rights to."

According to Deeney, the growth of AI technology has led to the importance of human judgement in assessing its findings. Yet, he added that gaining experience with AI platforms can be a helpful asset.

"The biggest thing is don't have AI be the reviewer and you be the approver," Deeney said. "There has to be some sort of workflow as to when and how you're using it, as well as using it ethically. Also, there is responsibility to make sure the output matches your organization's risk tolerance."

Meanwhile, Stuart highlighted how teams' development of

of stadiums and practice facilities are projects that benefit both the franchise and the public. McCaskey added that various issues impact stadium development including eminent domain, liability insurance and the possibility of litigation.

The panel also addressed topics of diversity, equity and inclusion, as McCaskey shared that the Bears are “100% committed to diversity” and it is something that “makes the Bears better.” Pirics and Stuart also reflected on their experiences and perspectives as women working in sports law.

“Growing up as a child who loved baseball, you did not visibly see women working in baseball in the ‘90s,” Pirics said. “I didn’t even realize it was a possibility for my job because I wasn’t seeing it. I think we’ve come so far and seen women achieve incredible goals. I’ve been very fortunate that my boss, for my entire career, is a phenomenal woman who is a mother of four boys and does a whole lot of stuff outside of what she does in her office. Having her as a role model has been so instrumental in my growth. Very early on in my career, she taught me, ‘You can show up as your true, authentic self and be kind, be bubbly and be outgoing and you can still be good at your job. You don’t have to be a stereotypical lawyer.’”

“My experience working in sports over these past 10 years, particularly as a woman, really has been such a privilege,” Stuart added. “The reason why I’ve had such a good experience is because of the women that came before me and completely blazed the trail, established and made it clear to everyone that having women in the room – particularly women lawyers – is additive to any organization, but especially a sports organization... I don’t think that there’s many more powerful forces in the world than a group of women that care about each other and that are working together.”

Towards the end of the lecture, all four panelists reflected on ways in which aspiring sports lawyers could set themselves up for future success in the field. One of them, according to Deeney, is developing a strong support system.

“Having really good mentors during your law school journey can help you navigate how you want to see your career,” Deeney said.

Events, Pathways to Sports Law, (May 14, 2026),
<https://www.sportslaw.org/conferences/2026conf/agenda/index.cfm>.

Drew Schott is a J.D. Candidate at Tulane University Law School. He was a Staff Writer for The Sports Lawyer Monthly during the 2025-26 academic year.

Hackney Publications Introduces a Free Sports Law Textbook for Undergraduates

The move will disrupt a textbook publishing industry that has been charging students exorbitant fees without any checks and balances.

Hackney Publications announced today that it has published a free textbook for instructors who teach sports law at the undergraduate level.

The text, *Sports Law Basics*, is meant to accomplish two things, according to Holt Hackney, the CEO of Hackney Publications.

First, it is meant to give professors a current, comprehensive option that is created the same year as its release, and every year thereafter. *Sports Law Basics*, which is 120 pages and edited by Hackney Publications Legal Editor Anna Giambelluca, taps into the nation’s largest sports-law specific archive, which is housed by Hackney Publications, of more than 6,000 case summaries and articles.

Second, and perhaps most important, *Sports Law Basics* is free to professors, whose libraries already subscribe to *Sports Litigation Alert*, or who participate in the classroom program, where students pay only \$15 for semester subscriptions. For a limited time, HP will also provide the textbook for free to members of the Sports and Recreation Law Association, upon renewal of their membership, or the initiation of a new membership.

“We have been providing the Alert to higher education for more than 20 years,” said Hackney. “Professors are using the Alert in a myriad of creative ways with students. In combination with *Sports Law Basics*, we are providing everything a professor needs to cost-effectively teach sports law to college students.

“Importantly, we are also giving department heads a way to demonstrate to their superiors that they have the best interests of students at heart and that they are responding to concerns about the rising cost of textbooks.”

Hackney went on to note that the option for libraries to subscribe is less than \$500 annually, which is “far less expensive than other subscription options for sports-related periodicals. As for the other option of students subscribing for \$15, that is a modest sum next to what students are paying for textbooks.”

The textbook includes the following chapters:

- **Part I: Foundations of Sports Law**
 - Introduction to Sports Law
 - Foundations of Law
 - Governance of Sports Organizations
- **Part II: Core Legal Principles**
 - Contracts in Sports
 - Torts and Athlete Injuries
 - Labor and Employment in Sports
- **Part III: The Business of Sports**
 - Athlete Representation and Agents
 - Name, Image, and Likeness
 - Intellectual Property in Sports
 - Media Rights and Broadcasting
 - Antitrust and the Business of Sports
- **Part IV: Competition and Integrity**
 - Drug Testing and Performance Enhancements
 - Gambling and Sports Integrity
- **Part V: Equality in Sports**
 - Race and Discrimination in Sports
 - Title IX and Gender Equity

Existing subscribers that want to access the textbook should reach out to HP at hhackney@hackneypublications.com.

Those who want to take a library subscriptions can email HP at the above address or work through their subscription service partner. Typically, HP has a partnership with major subscription service partners.

Professors can sign up for the classroom program here: <https://sportslitigationalert.com/free-subscription-for-sports-law-professors/>

The textbook has been a year in the making, already earning praise in the industry, including the following:

“I will adopt this. Combined with Sports Litigation Alert, my course notes and PowerPoints, it paints the full picture without a cumbersome text, which frankly students aren’t reading,” said Emily M. Must, Faculty and Director of Internships at the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management and Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

“Having used the Sports Litigation Alert in my courses for several years, this textbook is a perfect complement for teaching the fundamentals of sport law. The focused format allows students to quickly grasp a foundational understanding of topics relevant to any career path in sport, and then examine how those legal principles have been interpreted and applied in case studies of both

landmark and recent cases. Hackney Publications and its team have given professors yet another excellent tool to make concepts come alive in our sport law courses,” said Mike Ross, Ed.D., Associate Dean / College of Education, Associate Professor / Dept. of Sport & Leadership Studies, at Wichita State University.

— “The textbook is laid out well and the writing is concise. It is definitely something undergrads would be expected to cover in a semester,” said Bobby Bramwell, University of Tennessee Law School Professor.

From Two-a-Days and Dirt to Deion Sanders: The Teddy Bridgewater Act and the Legal Transformation of High School Athletics

By Ivan Parron, Esq.

Growing up in South Florida, high school athletics were more than just games. They were a pathway to opportunity, community identity, and, in many cases, a bridge to higher education and professional careers.

I attended Hialeah-Miami Lakes High School during one of the most remarkable eras in the school’s athletic history. Our baseball program won a national championship during my sophomore year, and our basketball team captured a national championship during my senior year. I played football myself, although our team did not enjoy the same level of success.

In the 1980s, however, “grit” was an understatement when it came to high school football. We endured two-a-day summer practices in the scorching South Florida heat, often with little more than occasional breaks to drink from a water hose. If you got hurt during a play, the trainers’ famous prescription was frequently, “rub some dirt on it.” The concepts of concussion protocols, hydration monitoring, heat acclimatization, and sports medicine specialists were not nearly as prevalent as they are today.

Like many young athletes chasing a dream, I eventually walked on at Florida State University in 1987. At the time, Florida State was a national powerhouse loaded with elite talent, including a young Deion Sanders. My collegiate football career lasted exactly one practice. The first hit convinced me that perhaps my future would be better served in a classroom than on a football field.

What remained with me, however, was a firsthand understanding of the profound role coaches play in the lives of young athletes. Coaches are often mentors, counselors, disciplinarians, role models, and, in some cases, surrogate parental

figures. That reality sits at the heart of Florida's recently enacted "Teddy Bridgewater Act," legislation that may prove to be one of the most significant developments in the legal regulation of high school athletics in recent years.

More importantly, the Act serves as a useful lens through which to examine the rapidly evolving legal issues confronting high school athletics throughout the United States.

The Origin of the Teddy Bridgewater Act

The legislation emerged following a highly publicized controversy involving former NFL quarterback Teddy Bridgewater.

After retiring from professional football, where he played quarterback for eight NFL franchises, including the Miami Dolphins, Teddy Bridgewater returned to his alma mater, Miami Northwestern Senior High School, as head football coach. During his tenure, Bridgewater publicly acknowledged that he had personally covered various expenses benefiting student-athletes, including meals, transportation, recovery treatments, and other forms of support.

Under existing Florida High School Athletic Association ("FHSAA") rules, such assistance could potentially be characterized as an impermissible benefit provided to student-athletes. The resulting scrutiny led to disciplinary action and reignited a statewide debate regarding the appropriate role of coaches in supporting student-athletes, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

In response, Florida lawmakers enacted Senate Bill 178, commonly referred to as the Teddy Bridgewater Act.

The legislation amends Section 1006.20, Florida Statutes, and requires the FHSAA to adopt bylaws authorizing a head coach to use personal funds to support student-athlete welfare. The law permits head coaches of Florida middle school and high school athletic programs to spend up to \$15,000 annually per athletic team from their own personal resources to assist student-athletes with expenses such as food, transportation, physical therapy, rehabilitation services, and similar support.

The Act also incorporates reporting requirements, parental consent provisions, transparency safeguards, and anti-recruiting protections designed to prevent abuse. Significantly, the legislation creates a rebuttable presumption that expenditures within the statutory cap are not impermissible benefits if made in compliance with the law and not for recruiting purposes.

Governor Ron DeSantis and legislative supporters emphasized that coaches frequently serve roles extending far beyond athletic instruction. Particularly in underserved communities, coaches often become trusted mentors who help bridge economic and social gaps confronting student-athletes and their families.

A Legal Tension: Amateurism Versus Student Welfare

At its core, the Teddy Bridgewater Act highlights a longstanding tension within scholastic athletics: the conflict between amateurism rules and student welfare.

Historically, state athletic associations have adopted strict eligibility and amateurism regulations designed to preserve competitive balance and deter recruiting abuses. Such rules generally prohibit athletes from receiving benefits that might influence school selection decisions or provide a competitive advantage.

The rationale behind these regulations is understandable. If schools or coaches are permitted to provide substantial benefits to athletes, the concern is that athletic competition becomes distorted by financial inducements rather than educational opportunities.

Yet the realities confronting many student-athletes often present a more complicated picture.

For some athletes, transportation to practice, access to nutritious meals, rehabilitation services, athletic equipment, or basic recovery resources are not luxuries. They are necessities. The same assistance that may be characterized as an impermissible benefit under a strict compliance framework may simultaneously be essential to a student's health, safety, and ability to participate in school athletics.

The Teddy Bridgewater controversy exposed how rigid regulatory structures can sometimes collide with well-intentioned mentorship. The new legislation represents Florida's attempt to strike a balance by permitting limited support while maintaining safeguards against recruiting misconduct.

Whether that balance can be maintained in practice remains an open question.

Recruiting and Competitive Advantage Concerns

One of the most significant legal concerns raised by the Act involves recruiting.

Although the legislation expressly prohibits expenditures made for recruiting purposes, distinguishing between legitimate welfare assistance and indirect recruiting inducements may prove challenging.

Consider two competing programs. One coach has the financial ability to contribute the full \$15,000 permitted under the statute. Another coach lacks the personal resources to do so. Even if both coaches act in complete good faith, student-athletes and their families may naturally gravitate toward programs capable of providing greater support.

The issue becomes even more complicated in an era characterized by increasing athlete mobility. Florida, like many states, has experienced growing scrutiny regarding transfers, school

choice programs, and athlete movement between districts and schools.

As a result, FHSAA administrators and school districts may face heightened enforcement responsibilities as they attempt to monitor compliance while preventing the appearance of recruiting-related conduct.

Future disputes may test where courts and regulators draw the line between mentorship and inducement.

Equal Protection and Competitive Equity Concerns

The Act also raises broader concerns regarding equity.

Not all schools possess equal resources. Likewise, not all coaches possess equal financial means.

A coach in an affluent community may have greater personal resources or access to booster-supported networks capable of providing assistance to student-athletes. Coaches in lower-income districts may not have similar opportunities.

While the Act imposes annual spending limits, disparities in available resources may nonetheless create practical competitive advantages.

Although constitutional Equal Protection challenges appear unlikely, policymakers may continue to grapple with whether such disparities undermine the principles of competitive fairness that athletic associations traditionally seek to protect.

These concerns mirror broader debates already occurring within collegiate athletics regarding NIL opportunities, donor collectives, and resource disparities among institutions.

Liability and Expanded Duties of Care

Another important legal issue involves potential liability exposure.

When coaches begin directly funding transportation, rehabilitation services, recovery treatments, or other forms of athlete support, questions inevitably arise regarding responsibility if something goes wrong.

For example:

- What liability may arise if transportation arranged or funded by a coach results in an accident?
- What standards apply when coaches recommend rehabilitation providers or recovery programs?
- Could a coach's direct involvement in providing welfare support be cited as evidence of expanded duties of care?

The Act authorizes certain expenditures, but it does not immunize coaches or schools from traditional negligence claims.

Plaintiffs' attorneys may argue that a coach who voluntarily assumes responsibility for aspects of an athlete's welfare also



assumes corresponding legal obligations. Whether courts ultimately adopt such arguments remains uncertain, but the possibility should not be overlooked.

School districts and insurers will likely monitor these developments closely.

Concussion Liability and Athlete Safety

The legal responsibilities of schools and coaches extend well beyond recruiting and eligibility concerns.

Over the past two decades, concussion-related litigation has fundamentally altered the legal landscape of amateur athletics. High-profile lawsuits involving professional leagues, collegiate athletic programs, and educational institutions have increased public awareness regarding athlete safety obligations.

Florida law already requires the FHSAA to maintain concussion management protocols, educational requirements, medical clearance procedures, and return-to-play standards.

The contrast between today's environment and the era of "rub some dirt on it" could not be more dramatic.

Modern coaches operate within a far more sophisticated regulatory framework governing athlete health and safety. The Teddy Bridgewater Act intersects with this reality because many of the expenditures authorized under the legislation involve rehabilitation, recovery services, and athlete welfare initiatives.

Although the Act does not create new causes of action, future litigation may explore whether coaches who become more directly involved in athlete support services assume heightened responsibilities regarding health and safety decisions.

NIL, Social Media, and the Professionalization of High School Athletics

The Teddy Bridgewater Act cannot be viewed in isolation. It arrives during a period of unprecedented transformation in amateur sports.

The emergence of NIL rights, social media monetization, private training academies, transfer liberalization, year-round recruiting exposure, and youth sports commercialization has fundamentally altered the landscape facing student-athletes.

While NIL legislation initially focused on collegiate athletes, high school athletes in several jurisdictions have already begun securing endorsement opportunities and building substantial personal brands through social media platforms.

As a result, legal issues once associated primarily with colleges and professional sports increasingly appear at the high school level.

These issues include:

- Eligibility disputes;
- Athlete transfers;
- Privacy rights;
- Intellectual property ownership;
- Social media conduct;
- Sponsorship relationships;
- Concussion management;
- Title IX compliance;
- Employment issues involving coaches; and
- Institutional risk management.

The distinctions between scholastic, collegiate, and professional athletics continue to narrow.

The modern high school athletic director increasingly resembles a compliance officer. The modern coach increasingly resembles a mentor, recruiter, risk manager, and public relations representative all at once.

Title IX and Gender Equity Considerations

Any discussion of high school athletics would be incomplete without acknowledging Title IX.

Although the Teddy Bridgewater Act is facially neutral and applies equally to boys' and girls' athletic programs, schools must remain mindful of federal gender equity obligations when implementing policies related to athlete support and resource allocation.

If financial assistance or welfare benefits are disproportionately concentrated within certain sports or demo-

graphic groups, questions may arise regarding whether comparable opportunities are being provided across athletic programs.

While Title IX analysis remains highly fact-specific, administrators should remain attentive to ensuring that implementation of the Act does not inadvertently create inequitable treatment among student-athletes.

Looking Ahead

As a former Florida high school athlete, I understand why so many coaches become deeply invested in the lives of their players.

Many young athletes depend on those relationships for guidance that extends far beyond the playing field. Coaches frequently become the adults who provide structure, accountability, encouragement, and opportunity during pivotal moments in a student's life.

The challenge for lawmakers, regulators, school administrators, and athletic associations is ensuring that compassion and mentorship can coexist with rules designed to preserve fairness, transparency, and competitive integrity.

The Teddy Bridgewater Act represents Florida's effort to navigate that balance.

Whether it ultimately becomes a model for other states or a source of future litigation remains to be seen. What is already clear, however, is that high school athletics have entered an era of increasing legal complexity. Questions involving athlete welfare, liability exposure, NIL rights, recruiting restrictions, Title IX compliance, and institutional governance will continue to shape the future of scholastic sports.

The days of drinking from a water hose between practices and rubbing dirt on injuries may be gone. In their place stands a far more sophisticated—and legally consequential—world of high school athletics.

The Teddy Bridgewater Act may simply be the latest chapter in that story.

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Commissioner continued from page 1

Today, commissioners of professional sports leagues hold significant influence within their sports. Yet, they are not able to exercise their power to the extent of Landis for multiple reasons. First, the powers of certain commissioners have been affected by developments in antitrust law that impact their sports. Meanwhile, professional baseball has held an antitrust exemption since 1922. Second, the formation of players' unions and the application of federal labor laws to professional sports have given players increased rights and the ability to collectively bargain with team owners and commissioners, who can no longer unilaterally impose employment terms and conditions on players. Third, the rise of television's financial influence in professional sports has created additional responsibilities for the role of a commissioner: negotiating large television contracts with networks and generating revenue to help increase the value of franchises and the overall league.

This evolution was one of the topics discussed during a panel entitled, "The Future of the Commissioner's Authority in Professional Sports," at the Sports Lawyers Association Annual Conference in Chicago on May 14. The panel featured Bill Daly, the Deputy Commissioner of the National Hockey League (NHL), Jeffrey Mishkin – a Mediator and Arbitrator with Phillips ADR Enterprises who previously served as the Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer of the National Basketball Association (NBA) – and Daniel Nash, a Shareholder at law firm Littler Mendelson P.C. and outside counsel for the National Football League (NFL) Management Counsel. Margaret Carlyle, the Chief Legal Officer of the Detroit Lions, moderated the conversation.

The panel shared that while commissioners' power to act in the best interests of their sports has changed since Landis exercised it in relation to the Black Sox Scandal, it still remains because the authority of commissioners is derived from the agreements, bylaws and constitutions of leagues. While collective bargaining agreements (CBA) have added procedural limitations to commissioners' power in this area, including hearing rights afforded to players, commissioners still have the ability to protect their sports through reviewing and punishing conduct found to be detrimental to their league.

This power allows the commissioner to act as an investigator into issues that may violate the integrity of their sport and make decisions regarding disciplinary measures. For example, Article 46 of the NFL's CBA enables the NFL commissioner to serve as both an appellate judge and disciplinarian regarding conduct detrimental to the league, which has been applied historically to conduct both on and off the field.

Previously, detrimental conduct was largely linked to cheating and gambling scandals, but has applied recently to activities including the actions of players, owners and team and league personnel.

Commissioners of professional sports leagues also address matters relating to ownership issues and potential relocation of franchises. Despite NHL commissioner Gary Bettman seeking to keep the Arizona Coyotes in the Phoenix metropolitan area, then-Coyotes owner Alex Meruelo failing to find a long-term stadium solution eventually led Bettman to support the team's relocation to Salt Lake City, Utah, where it currently competes as the Utah Mammoth. Since Bettman's powers do not contain the blanket authority to solely move an active franchise, it was necessary for him to meet with stakeholders involved with both the Coyotes and the NHL Board of Governors among other entities to help finalize and gain approval for the Coyotes' move in 2024.

Meanwhile, following the release of audio recordings in 2014 in which then-Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling made racist statements, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver banned Sterling from the league for life, fined him \$2.5 million and sought to have Sterling sell the team. The panel discussed how Silver did not have the authority to force a sale of an NBA franchise, which was held by the NBA Board of Governors. Additionally, he needed to find specific language in the NBA's Constitution and By-Laws to justify a lifetime ban, since that power was not expressly stated in the documents. Eventually, the Clippers were sold to current owner Steve Ballmer in 2014.

According to the panelists, commissioners of professional sports leagues have three main constituencies: team owners, players and fans. They added that commissioners understand the interests of the aforementioned constituents and ownership matters, as well as work as much as they can within league bylaws and constitutions to demonstrate that their actions are being done to serve the integrity of their sports. Overall, the panel found that commissioners taking actions to ensure the best interests of their sports involve a strong understanding of the sport, recognition that their decisions will not always receive unanimous approval and good judgment.

Events, The Future of the Commissioner's Authority in Professional Sports, (May 14, 2026),

<https://www.sportslaw.org/conferences/2026conf/agenda/index.cfm>

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Navigating

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Meredith Page, Chair of the NCAA Division I Student Athlete Advocacy Committee was unable to attend. While the student-athlete perspective was certainly missed, the remaining panelists provided incredible insight into an evolving future that still appears blurry even to those helping shape it.

The panelists joked early on that they intentionally avoided preparing together beforehand because anything discussed days earlier would change and be moot by the time the panel began. That sentiment became one of the defining themes of the discussion: college athletics has entered a period of constant recalibration.

Zola framed the discussion around a central question facing the industry: how can college athletics continue to evolve while still maintaining a meaningful connection to higher education? Much of the panel focused on the tension between commercialization and education. NIL compensation, revenue sharing, the transfer portal, and athlete mobility have changed the structure of college athletics, but the panelists repeatedly emphasized that long-term consequences of those changes remain unclear.

When asked what about college athletics' current model keeps him awake at night, Sean Frazier responded the lack of accountability while emphasizing his strong belief in the importance of college athletics being a pathway to higher education.

"For me, it's always been about access to education," Frazier said. "I would not be here if I did not have a college scholarship. So there's a balance. We cannot lose the essence of the graduation model, but we also have to recognize that intellectual property is now attached to athletics. Maybe this should have happened a long time ago, but now we need guardrails to preserve what we have. I am not saying amateurism is dead, but it's dead."

Frazier referred to college athletics as "quasi-professional" arguing that the industry can no longer pretend it operates under the same amateurism model that existed even a few years ago. He stressed that schools still have an obligation to preserve athletics as a pathway to higher education.

Frazier acknowledged that many of the current issues facing college athletics stem from how quickly the industry evolved. "We went down a road without having checks and balances in place," Frazier said. "I take full accountability for that. We recognize that those things are not working. Now it is our obligation to get it back on track for the future."

Duncan Highlights Challenges Around Sports Betting

Duncan echoed concerns about the unintended consequences of the modern NIL landscape, particularly in relation to enforcement

and integrity issues. He noted that the transfer portal and constant athlete movement can create opportunities for academic misconduct, while the introduction of significant NIL money has introduced entirely new compliance concerns.

One issue Duncan highlighted was sports betting. According to Duncan, some student-athletes who feel left out of the NIL economy may become vulnerable to compromising the integrity of competitions in an effort to "get theirs," whether through gambling, sharing insider information, or other misconduct.

The panel also spent significant time discussing the reality that there is no single "college athletics model" anymore. Gollahalli stressed that the industry often talks about college sports as though it is a "monolith," where every institution faces the same challenges, when in reality the needs and priorities of schools differ dramatically. What works for one conference or institution may be entirely unsustainable for another, particularly as schools continue trying to navigate NIL, revenue sharing, roster limits, and athlete mobility under rapidly changing legal and financial pressures.

Gollahalli emphasized the need for patience. "In the history of seismic change in any industry, it never goes smoothly. And it's not going smoothly here. We have fundamentally shifted the way we think about collegiate athletics at every level...We're trying to dance through raindrops."

The panel then moved to one of the most heavily debated issues in sports law today: whether student-athletes will (or should) eventually become employees of their institutions. While none of the panelists claimed to have definitive answers, the discussion highlighted just how complicated the issue has become.

Gollahalli explained that employment law frameworks often rely on "control tests" as opposed to distinctions between revenue-generating and non-revenue-generating athletes, creating uncertainty for schools attempting to prepare for what may come next. He also referenced the growing significance of the *Johnson v. NCAA* litigation, particularly the language within the concurrence that may eventually differentiate revenue-generating athletes from others.

Gollahalli stated that most student-athletes do not want to be employees due to the implications that come along with it. "Do we want a world where we're firing student-athletes for dropping passes or missing field goals?" Gollahalli asked.

The panelists emphasized that employment status would impact far more than compensation alone, potentially affecting workers' compensation systems, collective bargaining structures, roster management, and the long-term viability of Olympic and non-revenue sports programs.

The discussion also raised questions about whether increased compensation and contracting activity should change how student-athletes are treated in enforcement matters. Duncan explained that historically, the NCAA has been hesitant to charge student-athletes directly, focusing instead on adults such as coaches, boosters, and administrators. But in the current environment, where some athletes are contracting parties earning six or seven figures, he questioned whether that approach still makes sense.

“With newfound flexibility and freedom comes new responsibility,” Duncan said.

Zola then asked the million dollar question: what are the tangible solutions?

Frazier advocated for stronger guardrails and greater accountability across the industry while also expressing support for some form of collective bargaining and more uniform federal standards. He argued that the lack of agent certification and regulation has contributed to the perception that college athletics lacks control over its current landscape.

Duncan emphasized the challenge the NCAA faces in attempting to govern institutions with vastly different priorities, resources, and philosophies. Describing the NCAA as the “humble hired help of an HOA,” Duncan explained that the organization is ultimately tasked with trying to determine the collective will of more than 1,000 member institutions while simultaneously navigating litigation, political pressure, and rapidly changing rules.

When asked what he would change if given a “magic wand,” Gollahalli pointed to the growing tendency for disputes within college athletics to immediately jump to litigation. Gollahalli said he wished there was a greater recognition that institutions and athletes are voluntarily participating in a system with agreed-upon rules, even if those rules are imperfect.

Referencing the Southern Methodist University death penalty, Gollahalli noted that the university accepted the punishment rather than immediately filing a lawsuit challenging the NCAA’s authority.

The panelists also discussed potential paths forward, including federal legislation, collective bargaining, conference-based governance models, and clearer rules surrounding third-party NIL. Gollahalli cautioned that federal legislation could be either “very helpful or very hurtful” depending on how it is structured.

Still, despite the uncertainty surrounding the current system, the panelists consistently pushed back on the idea that college athletics is broken.

“To be clear, college sports is thriving,” Gollahalli stated. Viewership continues to increase. Revenue continues to grow. Opportunities for athletes continue to expand. According to the panelists, the issue is not whether college athletics can survive, but

whether the industry can build a sustainable structure around the realities of modern college sports.

Frazier quoted advice from his late father: “If you don’t adapt, you die.”

Toward the end of the discussion, the panel shifted toward the future generation of lawyers entering the industry. They encouraged attendees to view the current instability not as chaos, but as an opportunity to help shape what comes next. Duncan urged young lawyers to become “problem solvers” rather than “issue spotters,” emphasizing the industry needs innovative thinking even more than legal analysis.

The final question of the panel asked each speaker to describe the current state of college athletics in one word.

Evolving. Dynamic. Complicated.

The panel made clear that college athletics is no longer operating under the old model, even if we are still trying to determine what fully replaces it.