



SLA UPDATE

*A monthly newsletter of the
Sports Lawyers Association*

Attorneys Discuss Changing Times Alongside the Rise of Social Media and Influencer Marketing

By Kate E. Ragusa

The Sports Lawyers Association's Fall Symposium: Tech and Sports: Data, Deals, and Decisions included a panel titled, "Sports Marketing: Influencers and Online Promotion." The discussion was moderated by Jeff Kotalik, Senior Vice President and Global Sports and Entertainment Director at Morgan Stanley, and the featured panelists were Kelly Jones, Sports & Entertainment Senior Counsel for Marketing at Under Armour; Alex Kelham, Partner at Lewis Silkin LLP; Kap Misir, Vice President of Business & Legal Affairs, Talent Development and Talent Relations at WWE; and Jordan Thompson, Legal Counsel for TikTok.

The panel explored the new realities of the sports landscape with the expansion of social media and online partnerships, and each panelist was able to give a personal insight on how these developments have impacted their

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SLA NextGen Committee Set to Begin Important Work in Early January

The SLA NextGen Committee, led by Co-Chairs Brandon Wurl and Maria Aiello, will kick off in early January with ambitious plans to build upon the success of past committees. Wurl and Aiello will be joined by 11 other members to be announced in January, who met the criteria of being "passionate about sports law and eager to make a mark in the legal field."

The purpose of the Committee is to support "innovative law students and new lawyers eager to become more involved with SLA by helping, engaging, and providing a voice for and growing the careers of SLA's newest members through various working groups."

Committee members are assigned to two working groups, including NextGen Influencers, Law School Liaisons, Mentorship, and Blog Writers.



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Sports Lawyer Aarij S. Wasti Appointed to the Sports Lawyers Association's 2025 International Committee

Aarij Wasti, a partner and member of Toronto-based Gowling WLG's Entertainment & Sports Law Group, has been appointed to SLA's 2025 International Committee.

Wasti brings more than a decade of experience providing legal support to mega sporting events from bid and host country planning, to operations and implementation, through to wind-up and dissolution. With an event focused legal practice including corporate and regulatory compliance and brand protection-related matters, he provides valuable assistance to bid teams, host nations/cities, event organizers, suppliers and service providers and sponsors alike.

Prior to joining Gowling WLG, Wasti spent more than 14 years working on the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022—the last four of which he spent as the Director of Legal & Compliance on the event's management team and as Company Secretary of FIFA Ticketing Qatar. Other roles on the WC project included external legal counsel to the Qatar 2022 Bid Committee and Senior Legal Counsel (Sports & Media) at Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (Qatar).



During his time at Supreme Committee, Wasti managed the legal functions of Qatar 2022 Local Organising Committee LLC (LOC) and legacy projects including Generation Amazing Foundation (CSR/ ESG), B4Development Foundation (Nudge Unit), Josoor Institute (Knowledge Excellence), Challenge 22 (Innovation Hub) and Worker's Welfare Program (Human Rights programme focused on migrant workers).

Wasti's extensive experience with FIFA Qatar spans a wide range of strategic issues including communications, crisis management and investigations. This breadth and depth of event focused experience provides him with unique perspectives and insights.

His other career highlights include serving as counsel on the Doha 2020 Olympic Bid, being elected to the Board of Directors of the American School of Doha and being appointed by the Ambassador of Pakistan in Doha as a Board Member of the Pakistan Business Council – Qatar. The Legal 500 Middle East named Aarij on its GC Powerlist in 2023, 2022 and 2019.

Qualified in Canada, England & Wales and Pakistan, Wasti possesses a rich global perspective to his work, helping clients forge strategic connections and make inroads into exciting new markets.



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Hernandez Discusses her Role as SLA Board Member and Successful Career as Sports Lawyer

As Executive Vice President, Business Affairs & Operations, Team Sports at Wasserman, Alanna Hernandez has a prime spot to watch the growth of the sports lawyer profession.

And while she is certainly affecting change from her post at Wasserman, where she has worked for more than a decade, Hernandez is having an even greater impact as part of the Sports Lawyers Association Board of Directors. It's there that her work has gotten the attention of other board members, such as Gregg Clifton, a partner at Lewis Brisbois.

"Alanna has been an amazing asset for our board, making a real difference in the direction of the association," said Clifton. "Her future is bright and so is that of SLA with her leadership."

To learn more about Hernandez, we reached out for the following interview with her.

Question: How did you get your start in sports law? What was your big break?

Answer: My start in sports law was a bit unconventional. Unlike many students and young lawyers today, I did not set out to work in sports. I wasn't aware that this was a path for lawyers to take, and I wasn't exposed to the possibilities for lawyers within the sports industry until a couple of years into my practice as a litigator. The firm that I worked for directly out of law school did a fair amount of work representing the players' unions during collective bargaining negotiations and in lock-outs. Once I learned this, I was immediately interested in this type of work and what other opportunities there could be for me as a lawyer in or around sports. I happened to be working closely with Bruce Meyer (current head of collective bargaining with the MLBPA) on a completely unrelated matter and started to pick his brain about the work he had done and was doing in sports. When the job at Wasserman became available,



Alanna Hernandez

he happened to find out about it and asked if I was interested in applying. I said I was, Bruce put me in touch with the person hiring and, without any prior work experience in sports, I was eventually offered the position.

Q: How would you describe your role at Wasserman?

A: It's tough to describe my role at Wasserman. As the Executive Vice President, Business Affairs and Operations of Wasserman's Team Sports division, I manage the legal and day-to-day operations of the sports talent group. This includes negotiating and finalizing a variety of agreements, including employment,

endorsement, sponsorship, content development and appearance contracts for Wasserman's various sports talent practices, including women's sports, baseball, basketball, hockey, soccer, coaches and executives, media, Olympic, creator and NIL clients. I also stay up to date on important legal issues and industry trends so I'm able to advise our agents and other employees on how these matters have affected or will affect our business. My role also includes managing Wasserman's M&A transactions relating to the sports representation practice. Among other things.

Q: How long have you been involved with SLA?

A: I have been involved with SLA since 2015.

Q: What are the best aspects of the SLA?

A: The networking and learning opportunities are the best aspects of the SLA. It's been great to stay connected with people on a personal level that I have done or may do business with. I've also found that there is always something new for me to learn from other members. This industry is so fluid and ever-changing, and it feels like it's necessary to stay involved in an organization like SLA, so you don't fall behind.

Q: Why did you decide to join the board?

A: I can offer unique insight and perspective on some of the most pressing issues impacting the sports industry today given my role on the athlete agent side of the business; specifically, with respect to NIL, the evolution and growth of women's sports and how best in general to represent player interests in light of new technologies and opportunities (for example, AI and investing in sports properties). I don't think many other board members are dealing with all of those issues directly from an athlete's point of view and I believe I

can offer an important lens as we look forward to the next 50 years.

I also want to more directly influence the outreach and opportunities for young lawyers in this industry, particularly for women and people of color. As I mentioned, this kind of role was nowhere on my radar when I was starting out, and I think I can be helpful in making sure others who look like me or have a similar lived experience have more access.

Time To Renew for 2025

SLA membership connects you with a dynamic network filled with essential knowledge, resources, and opportunities that foster both personal and professional growth. As a member, you'll enjoy exclusive access to:

- Monthly electronic newsletter
- Access to the yearly Sports Lawyers Journal
- A subscription to Sports Business Daily
- Discounts for both the 2025 Annual Conference in **Nashville**, TN and the 2025 Fall Symposium in **London**, England
- Continuing Legal Education credits
- Exclusive members-only programming

Don't let this opportunity pass by—renew or join today and start leveraging all the incredible advantages that come with SLA membership.



Nona Lee Joins Advisory Board of New Women's Pro Baseball League



Nona Lee, the founder and CEO of Truth DEI Consulting and former President of the Arizona Diamondbacks, has joined the advisory board of the new [Women's Pro Baseball League](#) (WPBL).

Lee spent 22 seasons with the Arizona Diamondbacks as their Executive Vice President & Chief Legal Officer where she oversaw all legal issues for the organization. In addition to Truth DEI Consulting, she is the co-founder of Truth Retreats.



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areas of work specifically. Discussing the importance of marketability of athletes at all levels, the discussion primarily covered topics relating to the increased online presence of athletes and the shift to building a personal brand alongside athletic performance. The panelists were presented with three guiding questions:

Is being an athlete enough? Or do you also need to be an influencer?

All four panelists noted, from experience in their specific niches of the industry, that while on the field, performance matters, it matters less than it used to. While a great game or match can drive fans to an athlete's social media account, consistent engagement and interaction with followers online is what fuels support for the athlete and makes them the most money. The real value of marketing is communication with the fanbase. If athletes aren't posting, they are not being active, and without being active, there will be a lack of engagement on the platforms. Nowadays, as good athletes are competing with good marketers for the same media attention and deals, talent on the field alone will not land and maintain the steady engagement on their socials required to be successful. It was recommended by the panelists that athletes become content creators outside the scope of their profession. Everyone is their own personal brand and it is just as important as daily training. If an athlete wishes to increase their revenue through brand deals, they must be aware of the time and dedication that being active online requires, as well as the maintenance and upkeep necessary to keep engagement rates high.

Specifically touching on NIL, what are companies looking for in brand deals with athletes? How are you instructing clients on how to market themselves to these companies?

When signing athletes for deals, companies are looking to those who would have a positive association with the brand. While talent on the field or court establishes an athlete's name, companies nowadays are looking to the social media presence of athletes as a way to engage how

adequately that athlete will represent its brand and products. By far, the most important quality mentioned by the panelists was the need for authenticity. Athletes' online conduct through filming videos and responding to comments establishes more of a connection between them and their fanbase, showing their followers their true personality and values off the court or field. Athletes are being instructed to choose their content and deals wisely, looking to companies that aligns with their true values and goals, as engagement and positive interaction is proven to be higher when followers feel as if the athletes are promoting products authentically.

The discussion turned then to the growing presence of collectives in the NIL sphere. All of the panelists believed there was a growing necessity for education on collectives for all student-athletes, as deals are extremely lucrative but can be problematic if not handled correctly. Universities are now becoming more like professional sports firm offices, as roles similar to general managers and recruiting staff are becoming more common. As the collectives become the marketing agencies themselves, the education for student-athletes is in higher demand in order to protect unseasoned athletes from the complexity of these deals. One panelist even recalled receiving a call from a university that was substantively similar to a call normally received from the NFL or an agency. As the shift to compensation in college athletics approaches, all four panelists discussed the need for proper education in order to protect student-athletes.

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How are new technology and the spread of platforms affecting the modernization of athletes' ability to make money?

Affiliate marketing has opened the doors to a plethora of ways to make money across a number of online platforms. Discount codes and commissions for influencers are the most prominent ways that athletes are earning money outside of their athletic performance, and athletes can easily link products to their posts, requiring little time or effort. On the other side of the deals, affiliate marketing was also said to be more cost-effective for companies in competitive industries, as online sales and commissions create a “win-win situation” for both parties. Rather than increasing spending on extravagant campaigns, companies are now preferring to contract with athletes directly, giving them the creative freedom to promote the product in their own manner. Companies are gaining more traction on their sites and athletes are simultaneously building their brand and increasing interaction with followers.

Subscriptions and tips on streaming services are ways that athletes can make money while showing more of their personalities to their subscribers using casual,

conversation-style communication. These options are far less risky than other investments that athletes pursue and create yet another opportunity for athletes to show fans and followers more of their personalities.

In conclusion, the “Sports Marketing: Influencers and Online Promotion” discussion focused heavily on the routes and opportunities that are available to athletes outside of their primary roles in sports, as well as strategies for athletes to monetize on their personal brand. The panelists each touched on their experiences to highlight the important aspects of staying ahead in the social game, as well as the proper education needed as the rise of athlete influencers persists. This discussion is especially important as the athletic sphere continues to develop in unprecedented ways, and the insights of each distinguished panelist will continue to hold value in this new realm of sports and entertainment.

Events, *Fall Symposium: Tech and Sports: Data, Deals and Decisions*, SLA, (November 7, 2024), <https://www.sportslaw.org/events/2024fallsymposium.cfm>.

Kate Ragusa is a 1L at Tulane University Law School. She is a current staff writer for the Sports Lawyer Monthly and hopes to obtain a certificate in Sports Law.

