

SLA MONTHLY

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SPORTS LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Highlight Reel



Annual SLA Conference Goes Beyond the Traditional Content with a Broader Focus on ‘a Wide Variety of Sports’ and the ‘Globalization’ of the Industry

The Sports Lawyers Association (SLA) will be celebrating 50th year when its annual conference takes place May 15-17 in Nashville.

But the organization is hardly stuck in its ways, relying on its reputation as the premier organization for sports lawyers.

The upcoming conference is a great example of that. Proactively, the members organizing the conference this year, led by conference committee chair Arthur McAfee – Vice President of Football Operations at the NFL, are embracing a theme of enhancing the appeal of the conference – by presenting thought leaders from a wide variety of sports, a focus on globalization, and broader C-level representation.

Prospective attendees can now register for the event [here](#). Reservations at the early bird rate must be made by 4/21.

The schedule begins Wednesday, May 14, at 3 p.m. with the Academic Research Paper Session and wraps up with a mid-day session on Saturday, May 17, with a panel addressing The Broad Impact of the Evolution in College Athletics.

In between are a host of worthwhile sessions, fitting the theme above:

For a global perspective, there is “How Antitrust and Competition Law Have Shaped U.S. and European Pro Sports,” on the afternoon May 15. Moderated by SLA Past President Matt Mitten, a Professor of Law and Executive Director, National Sports Law Institute, Marquette University Law School and an Arbitrator for the Court of

See CONFERENCE on page 7

IN THIS ISSUE

RealResponse Brings Accountability to the Sports Industry	2
Jill Ingels, VP of Legal and BO for Bucks, Featured in Professional Sports and the Law	3
Hackney Publications Publishes Fifth Annual ‘100 Law Firms with Sports Law Practices You Need to Know About’	4
Spencer Fane Attorney Peter Goplerud Publishes Sports Law Sports Management Textbook	6
Sports Law Expert Podcast Features Michael Viverito, an Attorney at Power & Cronin	6
Sports Agency Legend Jim Solano Dies at 81	7

Brought to you by the Tulane Sports Law Program

Responses Filed in Fox Harassment Case	8
“Last Chance U” Stars Sue Over False Portrayal in Netflix	8
Sinner’s Mild Punishment from WADA after Doping Violation	9
Federal Investigation Examines NBA Betting Allegations	10
NASL Loses Antitrust Lawsuit Against USSF and MLS	11
Three Ivy League Swimmers File Lawsuit Challenging Transgender Participation Policies	11
Mizuhara Sentenced to 57 Months in Prison	12
Fans Sue NFL Over BlueSky Ban	13

2025 Annual Conference

50 Years
Impacting the Future of Sports

May 15 – 17, 2025
JW Marriott Nashville

RealResponse Brings Accountability to the Sports Industry

Founded in 2015, RealResponse provides a secure, confidential platform for individuals to provide feedback on difficult or sensitive issues within an organization.

The company ensures voices are heard and people are empowered – with real-time, two-way anonymous communications. These insights enhance communication between participants and their respective organizations and provide valuable opportunities to turn feedback into action.

Not surprisingly, RealResponse has made great strides in the sports industry, where the need for its products and solutions is especially acute.

To learn more about the company, we reached out to Blake Davidson, RealResponse's Chief Revenue Officer, for the following interview.

Question: How did the idea for RealResponse come about?

Answer: As a basketball student-athlete at Valparaiso and Rice Universities, David Chadwick discovered that a truly positive athletics experience wasn't defined by external factors like facilities, equipment, or fans—it was shaped by the intangibles: teammates, coaches, culture, and personal relationships.

This realization sparked an idea. In an entrepreneurship class, Chadwick envisioned a digital solution to address a critical gap he had observed—the need for a safe, confidential way to provide feedback to those in positions of power. That vision became RealResponse, a platform that has grown to serve over 200 clients worldwide, including colleges, universities, youth organizations, sanctioning bodies, and integrity units, reaching more than two million people. Today, RealResponse is backed by a team of world-class professionals, all driven by the same mission: to foster safer, more transparent environments for athletes and organizations.

Q: Who benefits from the company's products and solutions and why?



Blake Davidson

A: Organizations using RealResponse empower their stakeholders with a secure, anonymous, and two-way communication platform to report misconduct. This innovative system incorporates surveys and multiple communication channels, ensuring accessibility and ease of use.

Athletes, coaches, staff, and other personnel can confidentially report issues related to mental health, hazing, illegal sports betting, doping, and other sensitive matters via text messaging, WhatsApp, QR codes, and email. The platform's anonymity feature is especially valuable for addressing difficult topics, providing a safe space for individuals to speak up without fear of retaliation.

RealResponse users benefit from rapid response times and access to expert support, ensuring they receive the specialized resources they need. At the same time, organizational leaders can proactively address concerns, mitigate risks, and foster a safer environment for all.

Q: Why is the company interested in the sports lawyer community?

A: At RealResponse, our mission is to foster a safe environment for all—a commitment that strongly aligns with the priorities of the sports law community.

We empower organizations to mitigate risk by providing athletes, students, and staff with a secure platform to report misconduct, threats, and concerns about physical well-being. Our two-way anonymous communication system guarantees confidentiality while empowering administrators to engage directly with reporting parties to gather crucial details for an investigation, addressing a key shortcoming in traditional tiplines. This fosters a culture of trust, encourages more individuals to speak up, and leads to more thorough investigations that might not otherwise be possible.

With a shared goal of creating safer environments and reducing risk, RealResponse and the sports law community are natural partners in protecting athletes and organizations alike.

See REALRESPONSE on page 13

Jill Ingels, Vice President of Legal and Business Operations for Bucks, Featured in Professional Sports and the Law

Very few of us can manifest our dream job right out of college. Count Jill Ingels one of the lucky ones.

While attending Marquette University Law School (MULS), where she graduated cum laude (2017), Ingels knew what she wanted – working the general counsel's office of the Milwaukee Bucks of the NBA.

Eight years later, Ingels, who was a recipient of a Sports Law Certificate from MULS' National Sports Law Institute, is the Vice President of Legal and Business Operations at Milwaukee Bucks and Fiserv Forum.

It wasn't a direct path to that lofty perch. Rather, she began her legal career in collegiate athletics as an Assistant Director of Athletic Compliance for the University of Southern California. Shortly thereafter, she became Staff Counsel for the Miami Marlins, before finding her home with the Bucks in December 2019 as Associate Counsel. Her mercurial rise to a leadership position followed.

A brief excerpt of the interview follows below. The full interview and others like it appear in **Professional Sports and the Law**.

Question: What was your big break in becoming a sports lawyer?

Answer: I was fortunate enough to have a few internships within the sports industry in law school and had supervisors who were incredible teachers and mentors to me, but my big break in becoming a sports lawyer has to be when I was hired by the Miami Marlins as Staff Counsel. Stephanie Galvin and Ashwin Krishnan, now with the Dallas Cowboys and Major League Soccer, respectively, believed in me and showed me what it means to be a truly effective, efficient, and overall successful in-house counsel. I cannot say enough good things about both of them – they have completely different personalities yet are both incredible lawyers and advisors. They were so well respected at the Marlins, and I am not sure they will ever truly appreciate how large of an impact they each had on me as a young lawyer.



Jill Ingels

Q: What is the most rewarding?

A: The most rewarding aspect of my job is seeing the finished product. The story is generally not about the process or time and effort involved in a deal or initiative but in the end result, which is okay! I have the utmost sense of pride when an agreement took weeks (or months) to negotiate or spent considerable time researching and working through legal issues relating to a new marketing initiative, and it's finally launched and available to the public. I can see my work in action every day – from signage in the arena,

giveaways provided to fans, concerts held, to the smile on Make-A-Wish childrens' faces when they sign their one-day contracts. It is such an honor to be part of something that truly feels larger than me!

Q: Has there been a guiding principle or two that have helped you build a successful sports law career?

A: One of the hardest skills – yet one of the most important – is to be able to tell someone, "I do not know. Let me look into it and get back to you." It can be scary to be in that position because your natural tendency is to view the response as a sign of weakness, when in my mind it is a sign of strength. When you respond that you are not sure and need to look into it, 99% of the time people completely understand and respect that you are willing to research the question and get back to them. You do not have to pretend to have the answer to every question because that is an impossible standard to set for yourself, and I set extremely high standards for myself. Spending the extra time to research the question, evaluate the risks, and provide a well thought out and accurate response will always be worth it.

Q: What advice would you give someone who wants to be a team GC?

A: Go for it and do not waver from your dreams. So many people will tell you there are so few opportunities available that it will be next to impossible to become a team GC,

or tell you there is a preferred path to getting such role. While it is true there are a finite number of professional sports teams, and generally only one team GC per team, that does not mean that you cannot land one of those positions. Also look at the professional sports leagues in the United States alone – there is a tremendous amount of growth happening in various leagues from the WNBA to NWSL in terms of expansion but also in the popularity of certain sports where the creation of additional professional sports leagues are happening, including Unrivaled (women's basketball), LOVB (women's volleyball), and Major League Volleyball (women's volleyball). All of those opportunities

will likely come with new in-house counsel positions, both at the league and team level. Further, if you look closely at the paths in-house counsel have taken to their current roles, there is no one “right path”. I have colleagues who have gone straight from law school into a role with a team, who have started with a law firm before transitioning into the team environment, and those like me who started in collegiate athletics and made the leap into professional sports. Every path comes with its own advantages and you have to find which path works best for you.

Hackney Publications Publishes Fifth Annual ‘100 Law Firms with Sports Law Practices You Need to Know About’

100lawfirms.com is portal that recognizes excellence and serves as a resource for those in need of experienced and capable legal counsel in the sports law arena.

Hackney Publications announced today that it has published the fifth annual “**100 Law Firms with Sports Law Practices You Need to Know About**,” a portal that serves as a resource for those in the sports industry who need experienced and capable legal counsel.

The law firms are listed alphabetically, a testament to the difficulty in actually ranking such firms. Narrowing the list to just 100 law firms was also a challenge, according to Holt Hackney, the founder of Hackney Publications and editor of Sports Litigation Alert.

“We have had our finger on the pulse of the sports law industry for almost 25 years,” said Hackney, a recent recipient of the President’s Award from the Sports and Recreation Law Association. “Living and breathing in this space has given us a keen understanding of who should be included in 100lawfirms.com.”

TRENDS IN THE SPORTS LAW INDUSTRY

Hackney believes the list of firms that are worthy of consideration will only grow in the future.

“More and more firms are embracing the sports industry as a practice group,” said Hackney. “The growing movement around NIL and the concept of sports as an entertainment product are just two emerging catalysts for this trend.

“Another factor is how higher education is empowering

law students as well as undergraduates to embrace becoming a sports lawyer as a profession. You check out the top sports law programs here.”

NOTABLE LAW FIRMS ON THE LIST

Among the many firms included on the list are:

- Baker & Hostetler LLP
- Barnes & Thornburg
- Boies Schiller Flexner LLP
- Bryan Cave
- CCHA
- Cooley
- Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete LLP
- Dennie Firm, PLLC
- DLA Piper
- Fisher & Phillips LLP
- Frieser Legal
- Greenspoon Marder LLP
- Haynes Boone
- Herrick, Feinstein LLP
- Hogan Lovells
- Jenner & Block LLP
- Kroger, Gardis & Regas, LLP
- Lewis Brisbois
- Lightfoot Franklin & White, LLC
- Loeb & Loeb
- Maher Legal Group
- Munck Wilson Mandala

- Ricci Tyrrell Johnson & Grey, PLLC
- Ropes & Gray
- Segal McCambridge Singer & Mahoney
- Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP
- Spencer Fane LLP
- Stinson
- Thompson Coburn LLP
- Weil

The portal has synergy with **Sports Law Expert**, a blog that features regular content on a daily basis as well as a directory of legal experts and their particular specialty. “This directory has been around for a decade and has led to new business for many attorneys as well as expert witness engagements for the academic community,” said Hackney.

RECOGNITION CARRIES WEIGHT

Hackney Publications has become a reputable partner for many firms through the years, whether through its insightful journalism or a trusted analyst of the industry.

“I’ve known and worked with Holt for more than a decade,” said Gregg Clifton, who leads the sports group at Lewis Brisbois. “His publications always deliver insightful and original analysis that you can’t find anywhere else. It has become a must-read for me as a sports lawyer.”

Carla Varriale-Barker, the Chair of the Sports Recreation

and Entertainment practice at Segal McCambridge, concurs.

“Whether it is his periodicals, or portals like 100lawfirms.com, the sports lawyer profession is fortunate to have him as an advocate,” said Varriale-Barker, who has known Hackney for more than 20 years. “His creativity, when it comes to raising our profile as sports lawyers, is a benefit for all of us.”

Hackney Publications is the nation’s leading publisher of sports law periodicals. The company was founded by journalist Holt Hackney. Hackney began his career as a sportswriter, before taking on the then-nascent sports business beat at Financial World Magazine in the late 1980s. A few years later, Hackney started writing about the law, managing five legal newsletters for LRP Publications. In 1999, he founded Hackney Publications. Today, Hackney publishes or co-publishes 25 sports law periodicals, including **Sports Litigation Alert**.

The Alert, which publishes 24 times a year, offers subscribers a searchable archive of more than 5,000 case summaries and articles, the largest sports law-specific archive in the world. Not surprisingly, the Alert is used in more than 100 sports law classrooms any given semester, entraining students destined for a career in the sports industry, as well as the next generation of sports lawyers.

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.

**TIME TO
RENEW
YOUR 2025
Membership**

SLA MEMBERS in the News

Spencer Fane Attorney Peter Goplerud Publishes Sports Law for Sports Management Textbook

Peter Goplerud co-authored the recently released textbook *Sports Law for Sport Management*. Published by Carolina Academic Press, the book features the knowledge of five industry thought leaders and covers amateur sports, professional sports, and their common issues. The material is “designed to introduce sport management students to the structures of governance and regulation associated with high school, college, Olympic, and professional sports. It also provides an overview of the historical development of the governing bodies, conferences, federations, and leagues that adminis-



Peter Goplerud

ter and regulate amateur and professional athletics.”

At Spencer Fane, Peter serves as of counsel in the Higher Education practice. With a focus on higher education and sports law, he is a frequent lecturer and is widely published in the sports law area, including serving as co-author of another leading textbook on the subject, *Sports Law: Case and Materials*, 9th edition. Peter also has extensive accreditation experience, particularly within legal education, having served as chair of numerous ABA Site Evaluation teams. [Learn more about the book here.](#)

Sports Law Expert Podcast Features Michael Viverito, an Attorney at Power & Cronin

Hackney Publications (HP) has announced that Michael Viverito, a sports lawyer at Power & Cronin, has been interviewed on the Sports Law Expert Podcast. The segment can be heard [here](#).

Prior to joining the firm, Viverito gained experience in both NCAA athletic compliance and professional sports, having interned with Northern Illinois University and the Atlanta Braves.

“Michael is one of those young attorneys, who is rapidly emerging as a leader in the sports industry” said Holt Hackney, the CEO of Hackney Publications. “Under the wing of sports lawyer Jared P. Vasiliauskas, a partner at the firm, the sky is the limit for Michael.”

Besides sports law, Viverito focuses his practice in the areas of Workers’ Compensation and Business Law. Prior to joining Power & Cronin, he practiced commercial litigation and transactional law. Viverito also has experience in handling



Michael Viverito

both commercial and residential real estate matters, intellectual property matters, and trust and estate drafting for clients.

He is known in the industry for having a unique ability to personally connect with clients and effectively counsel and represent them through all aspects of their case.

Viverito was born and raised in Schaumburg, Illinois, and attended Bradley University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sports Communication and Spanish Language, graduating magna cum laude as a member of the Dean’s List. He

is bilingual, having studied at the Universidad de Granada in Granada, Spain. He earned his Juris Doctor from Marquette University Law School in 2020, where he authored an article on unfair and deceptive trade practices, which was published in the *Marquette Sports Law Review*. Viverito is licensed to practice law in both Illinois and Wisconsin.

CONFERENCE continued from page 1

Arbitration for Sport, the session features a powerhouse group of panelists:

- Jodi Balsam, Professor of Clinical Law; Director; Externship Programs, Brooklyn Law School
 - Nick DeMarco, Barrister, Blackstone Chambers
 - Jeffrey Kessler, Partner, Co-Executive Chairman, Winston & Strawn
 - Gary Roberts, Former President, Bradley University; Former Dean Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law and Gerald L. Bepko Professor of Law
- Staying with the global theme, a session entitled “Evolution of Global Sponsorships and Brand Protection” follows later that afternoon.

A session that exemplifies a “wide variety of sports” is set for that afternoon. Normally, the General Counsel Forum represents a time slot for the top lawyer at the four major professional sports. This time, however, Mike Tannenbaum, an NFL Analyst for ESPN, moderates a session featuring lawyers from different areas of sports, including:

- Scott Bearby, General Counsel, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
- Curtis Franks, General Counsel, FIFA World Cup at FIFA
- Karena Vleck, Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel, World Athletics

Finally, SLA’s shift toward including other C-level executives, not just Chief Legal Officers, is exemplified by a session on Saturday, which addresses “Women Leaders Impacting the Future of Sports.” Moderated by Allison Rich, Director of Athletics, University of New Hampshire, the session features the following panelists, who will provide an executive’s perspective:

- Renee Chube Washington, Chief Operating Officer, USATF
- Michelle Kennedy, President and Chief Operating Officer, Nashville Predators
- Lisa Lazarus, Chief Executive Officer, Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority

“The conference is recognized globally as a premier gathering for sports lawyers, offering an unparalleled forum for legal professionals to connect and collaborate,” said Layth Gafoor, SLA President. “It’s a unique chance to immerse yourself in inspiring discussions and engage with industry experts and trailblazers who share your passion for sports and law.

“This is not just an event; it’s an opportunity. Seize this chance to forge valuable connections, gain cutting-edge insights, and grow alongside fellow enthusiasts dedicated to shaping the future of sports law.”

Jim Solano, a Legend in the Sports Agency Industry, Dies at 81

Jim Solano, a legend in the sports agency industry, a philanthropist in the community, professor and loving family man died peacefully at his home on January 26 surrounded by family. He was 81 years old. Jim received his BS, MBA and MS in Taxation degrees from Temple University.

After graduate school Jim began a five-decade career as an Associate Professor teaching accounting and taxation, initially at Temple University and later at Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science (now Thomas Jefferson University). Jim earned his CPA license in 1966 and started a CPA practice serving individuals and small businesses. Jim grew his practice steadily to include physician groups and professional athletes. Jim leveraged his

relationships with professional athletes to launch a sports agency business specializing in NFL contracts for players and coaches and later to include PGA golf professionals. Jim has represented over 800 players and coaches, including 500 from the Eagles as an NFL Player Agent and was highly respected by players, coaches and front office management for his professionalism, knowledge, and experience with the game. He represented 18 of the 40 players on the Eagles 1980 Super Bowl team and 30 players and coaches on Buddy Ryan’s Eagles teams from 1986 through 1990.

In 2021, he was selected by client and longtime friend, Harold Carmichael to present him for his enshrinement into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

Responses Filed in Fox Harassment Case

By Trey Shwalb, Everett Honour, Vicente Perez, Tulane Sports Law

On February 4, 2025, Defendants, Fox Sports, Skip Bayless, and Joy Taylor, filed separate motions to dismiss a sexual harassment lawsuit filed against them by former Fox Sports hairstylist Noushin Faraji. In their filings, they invoked the “unclean hands” doctrine, arguing that Faraji’s own actions contributed to the alleged misconduct, thereby barring her claims.

The original complaint, filed by Faraji, alleged that Bayless and Taylor both exhibited inappropriate behavior towards Faraji and other employees at Fox Sports. It also alleged that Fox Sports knowingly allowed and promoted the behaviors of Bayless, Taylor, and others. In response to the complaint, Fox Sports suggested that Faraji did not take advantage of any of Fox’s preventative or corrective opportunities provided by Human Resources. Fox Sports noted that, if any employees had committed the actions that Faraji implicated, they would not have taken place within the scope of employment. Fox alleges that because of this, they would not be liable for any harm suffered.

Both Bayless and Taylor denied all allegations made against them by Faraji. Bayless’s response argues that Faraji consented to the conduct alleged. Bayless states that the form of conduct he is accused of engaging in was a by-product of pre-existing psychological or medical conditions. Faraji alleges that Taylor consistently used her sexuality to get work on different shows and that her relationship with Fox executive Charlie Dixon ultimately led to Faraji’s departure from the studio. Taylor’s defense of Faraji’s allegations simply stated that there were outside factors at play that were not



related to Faraji. Both Bayless and Taylor, like Fox, argue that Faraji failed to address her complaints through internal means, such as Human Resources, and that should result in the dismissal of her lawsuit. Faraji’s complaint states that she contacted Human Resources multiple times and never received any acknowledgment from them.

Defendant Fox Sports stated that “any alleged actions that might be “legally attributable” to the network was “not unlawful inasmuch as the conduct was reasonably and properly based on legitimate business reasons and non-retaliatory factors.” Noushin Faraji is represented by Rana Ayazi and Devin Abney of Ayazi Abney, APC in Los Angeles. Fox Sports is represented by Tracey A. Kennedy, Robert Mussig, Ryan J. Krueger, Tyler J. Johnson, and Michaela R. Goldstein of Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton, LLP in Los Angeles. Skip Bayless is represented by Robert H. Platt of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP in Los Angeles. Joy Taylor is represented by Laurie DeYoung and Angelika Avagian of Jackson Lewis P.C. in Los Angeles. Charles Dixon is represented by John Ly of Liang Ly, LLP in Los Angeles.

“Last Chance U” Stars Sue Over False Portrayal in Netflix Docuseries

By Min Kim & Ryan Sarafa, Tulane Sports Law

In February 2024, six former Mississippi junior college football players filed a \$30 million lawsuit against Netflix, East Mississippi Community College (EMCC), the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), Condé Nast, and the show’s director/executive producer over their portrayal in the first two seasons of the Netflix

docuseries “Last Chance U.” The players claim they were misrepresented in a misleading and offensive manner and received no compensation, despite the series’ commercial success. According to the lawsuit, the players were pressured into signing contracts without full awareness of the show’s potential commercial value.

The lawsuit highlights how Last Chance U brought significant financial gains to multiple organizations, including

NJCAA, EMCC, and Condé Nast, while the players themselves received nothing in return. EMCC allegedly profited by selling player merchandise, and the NJCAA saw increased revenue and visibility due to the show's popularity. The lead plaintiff in this case is John Franklin III, one of those highlighted in the show, who had an NFL career and was on the 2020 Super Bowl champion team, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The complaint also emphasizes the negative impact on certain players, such as Ronald Ollie, who claimed that his portrayal as "lazy" and "unmotivated" harmed his professional football career. The Baltimore Ravens reportedly declined to sign him, and the Oakland Raiders released him during the 2019 preseason, after seeing his depiction in the series. The complaint alleges that these depictions of the players as "villains" followed them throughout their lives and damaged their reputations in order to boost viewership and give the audience individuals to hate.

"Make no mistake, each of the defendants have been unjustly enriched by intruding upon the private lives of the plaintiffs," attorney John Pierce stated in the complaint, accusing the producers of exploiting the players for financial gain. The lawsuit asserts that Netflix and the other defen-



dants manipulated the players' characters and sacrificed their reputations to create a profitable show. Netflix declined to comment on the lawsuit, while NJCAA, EMCC, and Condé Nast had not responded at the time of publication. The Plaintiffs are represented by Andrew Green and John Pierce of John Pierce Law P.C. in Woodland Hills. The case is currently pending in Los Angeles court, with the players seeking damages and potential changes in how student-athletes are represented in media productions.

Jannik Sinner's Mild Punishment from WADA after Doping Violation

By Julia Balot, Ke'Lynn Enalls, Kate Ragusa, Tulane Sports Law

On February 15, 2025, Jannik Sinner, a 23-year-old world champion tennis player, accepted a three-month ban proposed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), after he violated the anti-doping policy by testing positive for clostebol on two occasions in March 2024.

Skinner claimed his two positive tests were from an "over-the-counter healing spray" purchased by his trainer. The three-time Grand Slam champion stated that the banned anabolic steroid found in his test results was transferred into his system



through a massage from his trainer, who was using clostebol to treat an injury. The ITIA ruled that Sinner's positive doping tests were due to accidental contamination and therefore, did not warrant suspension. ITIA also revoked his prize money and ranking points from the tournament at which he tested positive. In September 2024, WADA responded by appealing ITIA's ruling to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, Switzerland, seeking a ban of at least one year. A hearing was set for April 2025. However, WADA withdrew its appeal and settled with Sinner for an 84-day

ban from February 9, 2025, until May 4, 2025. This three-month ban allows him to return in time to compete in the French Open, which starts May 25, 2025.

“While we acknowledge that Mr. Sinner bore no significant fault in this matter, the principle of strict liability must be upheld,” a WADA spokesperson stated. “Athletes are ultimately responsible for what enters their bodies, and even in cases of accidental contamination, a proportional sanction is necessary to maintain the integrity of sport.” Despite WADA’s insistence that the three-month suspension was fair, many in the tennis world have expressed outrage over the perceived leniency

of the punishment. Critics argue that the ruling sets a precedent and highlights inconsistencies in how doping violations are handled, particularly when compared to harsher penalties given to other players in similar cases. Some have pointed out that lower-ranked players and athletes from less influential backgrounds have received significantly longer suspensions for similar infractions, fueling accusations of favoritism. The decision has sparked widespread debate among fans and analysts, with some defending Sinner’s case as an unfortunate accident while others argue that the punishment undermines anti-doping efforts.

Federal Investigation Examines NBA Betting Allegations Involving Terry Rozier

By Leilany Rodriguez & Katharina Mente, Tulane Sports Law

The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York launched an investigation to determine whether Rozier’s performance as a Charlotte Hornets player in the May 23, 2023 game against the New Orleans Pelicans was manipulated as part of a broader gambling conspiracy. This investigation into Rozier is part of a broader government probe into an extensive network of gamblers and poker players accused of rigging games across various sports.

In March 2023, the NBA was made aware of suspicious betting activity by U.S. Integrity, a firm that monitors betting markets for irregularities. On the night of the Hornets’ March 23, 2023, game against the Pelicans, sportsbooks noticed an unusual volume of wagers against Rozier meeting certain statistical benchmarks, prompting some to halt betting on his performance. That night, Rozier—who averaged 35 minutes and 21 points per game—played only nine minutes before exiting with a foot injury. The NBA conducted an investigation but found no violation of NBA rules.

Recently, federal authorities have since expanded their inquiry into Rozier’s game and potential ties to a larger gambling ring. Authorities believe individuals linked to Jontay Porter’s betting scheme may have placed large

wagers against Rozier based on inside information. The probe has also extended into college basketball, with officials investigating suspicious wagers placed on a Temple University game flagged by U.S. Integrity. While Rozier has not been charged or formally accused of wrongdoing, the investigation highlights concern over game integrity amid the rise of legalized sports gambling. Federal authorities continue their inquiry, and Rozier remains an active player for the Miami Heat.

“We are aware of the NBA’s 2023 investigation, which determined there was absolutely no wrongdoing by Mr. Rozier, and we are confident that the ongoing government investigation will arrive at the exact same conclusion,” said Jim Trusty, Rozier’s attorney and Partner at Ifrah Law in D.C. NBA spokesperson Mike Bass confirmed the league’s position, stating, “the NBA was alerted to unusual betting activity related to Terry Rozier’s performance. The league conducted an investigation and did not find a violation of NBA rules. We are now aware of an investigation by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York related to this matter and have been cooperating with that investigation.”

NASL Loses Antitrust Lawsuit Against USSF and MLS

By Sydney Marshall & Isabella Scarselli, Tulane Sports Law

On February 3, 2025, Judge Hector Gonzalez ruled in the case of the North American Soccer League (“NASL”) versus the U.S. Soccer Federation (“USSF”) and Major League Soccer (“MLS”). The jury gave a decision in favor of the defendants, finding that the NASL failed to prove their antitrust claims against the USSF and MLS.

The plaintiff in this case, NASL, was a lower-tier professional soccer league in the United States and Canada from 2011-2017. This lawsuit stemmed from the defendant’s decision not to renew the NASL’s Division II status, which led to the plaintiff league’s end. In September of 2017, the NASL sued the USSF and MLS in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, alleging that the two organizations colluded to block the NASL’s success and put a monopoly on professional soccer in the United States. The defense argued that the NASL’s downfall should be attributed to poor business decisions rather than anticompetitive behavior within the league.

In his opinion, Judge Gonzalez ruled that the NASL failed to provide sufficient evidence of collusion. The jury deliberated for only two hours before rejecting the NASL’s claims. During discovery, former NASL chairman Rocco Commisso was found to have used a burner Twitter account to disparage MLS commissioner Don Garber and USSF president Sunil Gulati, comparing them to Harvey Weinstein and Bernie Madoff. Also, former NBA star Carmelo Anthony, owner of the NASL’s Puerto Rico FC from 2015 to 2017, testified for the plaintiffs. However, Judge Gonzalez questioned the relevance of Anthony’s testimony because

the lawsuit was brought by the league, not its owners. The NASL had sued for \$170 million in damages, which could have tripled to over \$500 million under antitrust law. The decision reinforces the USSF’s authority to set league standards, while also maintaining MLS’s position as the top-tier league and upholding the current professional soccer structure within the United States.

“We are pleased the jury has recognized the lack of merit in NASL’s claims and ruled in our favor, bringing this unfounded litigation to a close,” the USSF stated. “This decision validates U.S. Soccer’s commitment to fostering a broad and healthy ecosystem of professional soccer leagues across all divisions.” Jeffrey Kessler of Winston & Strawn in New York, who represented the NASL, said that the league expects to appeal the decision. In addition to Kessler, the NASL was represented by Winston & Strawn’s Adam Dale, Eva Cole, Johanna Hudgens, Sarah Viebrock, David Feher, and Mark Rizik, Jr. in New York, along with Clifford Pearson, Daniel Warshaw, Bruce Simon, and Michael Pearson of Pearson Warshaw in Sherman Oaks and San Francisco, California. The USSF was represented by Aaron Chiu and Christopher Yates of Latham & Watkins in San Francisco, Joseph Axelrad of Latham’s Los Angeles, California office, Lawrence Buterman of Latham’s New York office, and Scott Eggers of Proskauer Rose in New York. MLS was represented by Adam Farbiarz, Bradley Ruskin, Genesis Sanchez Tavaréz, Keisha-Ann Gray, and Kevin Perra of Proskauer Rose in New York and Colin Kass and Stephen Chuk of Proskauer’s Washington, D.C. office.

Three Ivy League Swimmers File Lawsuit Challenging Transgender Participation Policies

By Alexandra Stone & Sophie Weeter, Tulane Sports Law

On February 4, 2025, former University of Pennsylvania swimmers Grace Estabrook and Margot Kaczorowski, and current swimmer Ellen Holmquist, filed a lawsuit against the Ivy League, National Collegiate Athletic Association, Harvard University, and the University of Pennsylvania alleging Title IX violations. The suit alleges that the defendants violated federal law by allowing their transgender

teammate, Lia Thomas, to compete against them.

The three swimmers from the University of Pennsylvania women’s swimming team are alleging Title IX discrimination stemming from the 2022 Ivy League Championship, hosted by Harvard, where Thomas won four first place medals and set several records. The plaintiffs claim that Thomas’ participation created an unfair advantage, violating Title IX principles of equality. Title IX has historically protected transgender rights and allowed for equal opportunity



amongst men and women's sports. The lawsuit's plaintiffs are requesting class-action status in addition to damages and for Lia Thomas's swimming records at the University of Pennsylvania to be vacated.

Ippei Mizuhara Sentenced to 57 Months in Prison for Stealing Millions from Ohtani

By Matthew Cohen, Samuel King, Joseph Garofalo, Tulane Sports Law

On February 6, 2025, the former interpreter for MLB superstar Shohei Ohtani, Ippei Mizuhara, was sentenced to fifty-seven months in prison after appearing in federal court. Over the course of more than two years, Ohtani's perceived friend and ally defrauded the superstar to the tune of \$17 million, while gambling through an illegal bookmaker, and incurred more than \$40 million in total debt.

In March of 2024, reports surfaced claiming Ohtani had paid \$4.5 million to bookie Mathew Bowyer's illegal gambling operation. Mizuhara was quickly tied to this activity, but the exact proportional responsibility of each was in dispute. However, Mizuhara eventually admitted that he was responsible for all the gambling activity at issue, which was all done behind Ohtani's back. A month later, federal authorities escalated the purported amount stolen to a number exceeding \$16 million. Mizuhara eventually agreed to a plea deal in May and pleaded guilty a month later. While Mizuhara initially faced a staggering thirty-three years in federal prison, his cooperation with the investigation was a key factor in his sentence being reduced. Instead, along with his fifty-seven-month prison sentence, Mizuhara has been ordered to pay back the nearly \$17 million he

"Women swimmers throughout the Ivy League were left shattered by the disregard of their rights and opportunities in order to create new rights and opportunities in women's sports for a man with biological advantages they could not hope to match," the 90-page complaint stated. Lead plaintiff attorney Bill Block of Kroger Gardis & Regas LLP resigned from the NCAA's Committee on Infractions, due to disagreements over the governing body's handling of issues regarding trans participation. He is prosecuting this lawsuit as well as two other related lawsuits, all of which are still ongoing and are funded by the Independent Council for Women's Sports ("ICONS"). Marshi Smith, "ICONS" co-founder, believes President Trump's executive order may be an indication the Department of Justice would also involve itself in these three lawsuits.

stole from Ohtani in restitution and \$1.1 million to the IRS. However, the judge characterized Mizuhara's ability to comply with the order as something that "remains to be seen." Ultimately, Mizuhara's attorneys have indicated that it is a "virtual certainty" that he will be deported back to Japan upon his release.

"Mr. Ohtani is a victim in this case... Mr. Mizuhara took advantage of Mr. Ohtani's vulnerability as a [non-English speaking] person trying to navigate the celebrity baseball world in the United States," said acting U.S. attorney for the Central District of California, Joe McNally. "Mr. Mizuhara is yet another example of how those in a position of trust can take advantage of a relationship and defraud the government," echoed HSI Los Angeles acting Special Agent in Charge, John Pasciusso. Family of Mizuhara and Mizuhara himself indicated in January that Mizuhara was "severely underpaid" while "on call 24/7" for Ohtani and requested an eighteen-month sentence. Mizuhara's attorneys continued to advocate on his behalf, citing a "longstanding... severe gambling addiction" that began when he was eighteen years old and only intensified while working for Ohtani. The orchestrator of the illegal gambling operation, Mathew Boyer, said "[i]t was very obvious after some time he was stealing money and not asking Ohtani for permission."

Fans Sue NFL Over BlueSky Ban

By Matthew Binder & Zach Morcate, Tulane Sports Law

On February 11, 2025, NFL fans Patrick Brown and Collin Vincent filed an antitrust lawsuit against the NFL in the Southern District of New York, alleging that the league's policy restricting teams from using Bluesky constitutes anticompetitive behavior. The lawsuit claims the NFL, its 32 teams, and X (formerly Twitter) have an exclusive content agreement that unlawfully prevents teams from engaging with fans on Bluesky, a competing social media platform. It is an emerging platform that has become increasingly popular in recent years due to its strict rules against harassment and hateful speech. Brown and Vincent seek an injunction preventing the NFL from enforcing the restriction, asserting that the league's control over social media use among its teams is unlawful.

In April 2024, The NFL renewed its partnership with X, YouTube, and TikTok, keeping official league and team content on those platforms. In early 2024, when the New England Patriots briefly created a Bluesky account, the NFL ordered its removal, reinforcing its policy that teams cannot independently use social media platforms outside of league-approved agreements. Fred Kirsch, the vice president of content for the Patriots' umbrella company Kraft Sports & Entertainment, stated that whenever the league approves Bluesky, they will resume using it. Brown and Vincent claim the NFL's refusal to allow teams on Bluesky

constitutes an illegal group boycott under Section 1 of the Sherman Act, arguing that fans should have the right to follow teams on any platform of their choosing, and that the league's actions harm both consumers and individual teams. There are reports that the league may argue it has the right to control its content distribution and partnerships and may seek dismissal or move the case to arbitration, as its terms require most disputes to be resolved outside of court. However, the plaintiffs filed in New York County, New York, where the NFL's arbitration clause could face scrutiny. If the case proceeds, a court could issue an injunction allowing teams to use Bluesky, or the NFL could negotiate a settlement or modify its policies.

Thomas H. Burt, of Wolf Haldenstein Adler Freeman & Herz in New York, represents Brown and Vincent and stated that "where the teams meet their fans on social media is between the teams and the fans. The NFL does not have the legal right to inject themselves into that decision." Brown and Vincent's suit also states, "the injunction would deprive the NFL of nothing, except the centralized power that it has unlawfully claimed and has not right to." They claim that adding additional social media outlets for teams would not harm the NFL's product. The NFL is expected to answer the complaint in the near future and move to have the case dismissed.

REALRESPONSE continued from page 2

Q: What trends is the company following closely in 2025?

A: RealResponse is not just keeping up with the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution—we're actively leveraging it to enhance the way our clients analyze and interpret vast amounts of data. By integrating AI-driven solutions, we help organizations streamline decision-making, optimize workflows, and drive greater efficiency. Our commitment to innovation ensures that AI is not just a trend but a powerful tool for delivering smarter, more effective outcomes for our clients.

