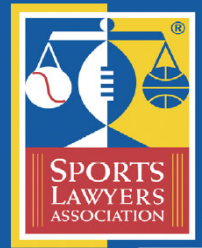


SLA MONTHLY

Highlight Reel



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SPORTS LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Sports Lawyers Association Sets 2026 Annual Conference In Chicago

The Sports Lawyers Association (SLA) is preparing to host its 51st Annual Conference from May 13–16, 2026, at the Sheraton Grand Chicago Riverwalk in Chicago, Illinois. The four-day event is expected to draw legal professionals, academics, industry executives and sports law students for a deep dive into the most pressing legal issues facing the sports world.

The conference provides an opportunity for attendees to engage with thought leaders on subjects such as governance, media rights, antitrust litigation, contract negotiations and regulatory compliance. Panels, keynote addresses and network-

Peter Carfagna Joins FAIR Sports

FAIR Sports, a newly established arbitration and resolution forum for college athletes, has announced that Peter Carfagna has been added to its team.

Carfagna, an SLA member, is Chairman & CEO of Magis, LLC, a privately owned sports marketing, management, and investment company. He serves on the boards of multiple sports organizations, including the LPGA.

From 1994–2005, he was Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel at IMG, overseeing major global sponsorship, media, and talent agreements. Before joining IMG, he was a Senior Partner at Jones Day LLP, serving as outside counsel to the ownership groups of the Cleveland Browns and Cleveland Cavaliers.

A Rhodes Scholar and Harvard Law School graduate, Carfagna teaches sports law at Harvard and the University of Miami, advises Harvard’s Committee on

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The Ask

The Snackers Speak: This month’s one-question poll will shape our May conference, guaranteed. What one conference break hallway treat would you most love to find when you emerge from one of the great sessions in Chicago this spring? [Click here](#) to share your feedback.

Tulane Law School Hosts 9th Annual Entertainment & Sports Law Conference

Tulane Law School will be welcoming top entertainment and sports industry leaders at its 9th Annual Entertainment & Sports Law Conference on April 10–11 in New Orleans, bringing lawyers, executives and students together for two days of panels, discussions and networking focused on the changing legal landscape of media, sports, technology and content creation.

Organizers said the conference will draw an audience of practitioners, academics and law students interested in the evolving interplay between legal practice and industries ranging from movie studios to professional sports leagues. Free of charge and held at Tulane's John Giffen Weinmann Hall, attendees can register for the event at: <https://centerforsport.wufoo.com/forms/wl0bxjx0f3ram8/>

As usual, the event will feature speakers from major firms, studios and sports organizations. Among them:

Kevin Yorn, founding partner of the Yorn Levine Entertainment Law Firm, kicked off the conference with insights on the convergence of entertainment law and emergent talent representation. A seasoned attorney and investor, Yorn has negotiated high-profile deals for top actors and creators and also supports philanthropic and cultural initiatives tied to the legal and entertainment communities.

Curtis Franks, general counsel for the FIFA World Cup at FIFA, spoke on legal strategies for major global sporting events, detailing compliance and governance complexities. Before joining FIFA, Franks led global marketing partnerships for Coca-Cola and advised sports and entertainment entities on regulatory and business matters.

Adam Glick, executive vice president of business operations at Warner Bros. Television, shared his perspective on contractual negotiation and dealmaking in scripted television production. Glick oversees business affairs for a vast portfolio of hit series and has steered negotiations involving leading showrunners across multiple networks and streaming platforms.

Jeff Dorso, senior vice president and general counsel for the Sacramento Kings, discussed legal considerations in franchise operations and stadium development. Dorso's role encompasses oversight of legal, real estate and development matters for the Kings and affiliated sports and entertainment properties.

Paul Friedman, executive vice president of the Music Affairs Group at Sony Pictures Entertainment, provided

insights into music rights acquisition and licensing in film, television and digital media. Friedman leads music transactions for Sony's global operations and has cultivated key partnerships with major digital platforms.

Rick Farman, co-founder of experiential events company Superfly, spoke about creating and protecting landmark live entertainment properties like Bonnaroo and Outside Lands. Farman's work spans strategic partnerships and innovative brand experiences within the live event sector.

Traci Bransford, partner and leader of Parker Poe's Sports & Entertainment Industry Team, addressed transactional law, contract negotiation and intellectual property protection for entertainment and sports clients. With more than three decades of experience, Bransford has counseled artists, teams and media organizations on legal and business challenges.

Victoria Cook, partner in the Frankfurt Kurnit Entertainment Group, focused her remarks on representation of creators across film and television. Cook's practice spans independent and studio-level work, advocating for filmmakers, actors and content producers.

Ashlye Keaton, co-founder of The ELLA Project and music and arts attorney, highlighted legal advocacy for artists and cultural creators, emphasizing protections for creative works. Keaton also serves on nonprofit boards and teaches arts administration and law.

Zach Schreiber, of counsel at Gibson Dunn, discussed sports and entertainment litigation with a focus on NIL rights, media rights and complex dispute matters. Schreiber brings a unique perspective from his prior work as a sports agent and front-office experience with NBA teams.

Vicky Neumeyer, senior vice president and general counsel for the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans, spoke on legal challenges in professional sports operations, including contracts and compliance. Neumeyer's long tenure with the Saints organization has spanned sponsorship agreements, broadcast contracts and legal strategy across NFL and NBA business functions.

Rakesh Kilaru, partner at Wilkinson Stekloff, provided expertise on antitrust litigation affecting sports and media companies, including landmark NCAA-related cases. Kilaru has led high-impact litigation and negotiation efforts in antitrust and commercial disputes nationwide.

Ashlye Keaton and other panelists discussed local policy issues affecting creative sectors from music to performance

rights, underlining the importance of legal advocacy at community and industry levels.

Organizers said the 2026 conference will continue a tradition of engaging leading voices in law and business to explore issues such as media rights, contract negotiation, antitrust

law and the impact of new technologies on industry practice. Tulane Law School's Center for Sport and the Sports Law Program again helped shape panels, fusing academic insight with real-world counsel.

Gaming Partner Kieron Frazier Joins Fox Rothschild

SLA member Kieron Frazier, a corporate and transactional attorney, has joined Fox Rothschild in Chicago, where his growing legal expertise around the gaming industry will come in quite handy.

"With Illinois' gaming industry continuing to boom, we are thrilled to welcome Kieron to our Chicago office," said Gordon E. Gouveia, Fox's Chicago Office Managing Partner. "Kieron's depth of experience in the gaming sector, combined with his unique background in sports law make him a valuable addition to our respected gaming industry team."

Specifically, Frazier provides advice on regulatory compliance, licensure and internal investigations in addition to transactions and other general corporate matters. Frazier's clients include leaders in sports wagering, fantasy sports, iGaming, horse tracks, video gaming and lotteries. He also supports tribal licensees and social gaming operators and



investors.

In addition, Frazier counsels clients on a variety of corporate and finance matters, including team-level transactional work, financing, media transactions, mergers and acquisitions.

In addition to being an SLA member, he was selected to the list of "Black Executives on the Rise," by CDC Gaming and African Americans in Gaming in 2024.

Prior to joining Fox, Frazier was of counsel at Greenberg Traurig LLP. He was also previously Associate Counsel for the NFL's Minnesota Vikings, where his broad responsibilities extended from labor and employment law to risk management, litigation and stadium development.

Frazier earned his J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law and his B.S. from University of Illinois.

Staurowsky Announces Retirement from Teaching

After a distinguished career spanning more than three decades at Ithaca College, Ellen J. Staurowsky has announced she will formally retire on December 31, 2025, marking a new phase in her lifelong commitment to sports, education, and social justice. A professor in the Roy H. Park School of Communications, Staurowsky has been internationally recognized as a leading voice on gender equity, Title IX, college athletes' rights, and equity in sport media throughout her tenure.

Staurowsky's connection to Ithaca began long before her faculty appointment—rooted in family ties to the region and deep personal meaning tied to her father's birthplace. After earning her master's at Ithaca College in the 1970s and later a doctoral degree, she returned as a faculty member and became an integral part of the sports media program. Her work has extended far beyond the classroom, as she has

co-authored influential books, contributed expert research on athlete exploitation and inequality, and served as editor-in-chief of the Title IX Alert.

For nearly 30 years, Staurowsky taught and mentored students who were drawn to her passion for sport as both a cultural force and a platform for justice. She helped create innovative courses like Women's Sports Media Incubator and produced podcasts that challenged the next generation to rethink the role of policy and representation in athletics.

Despite her formal retirement, Staurowsky insisted she is not stepping away from her work. She plans to continue writing, researching, and supporting former and current students as they pursue careers in sport, media, and advocacy. She will also continue her role as Editor-in-Chief of Title IX Alert

SPORTS LAWYERS

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ing sessions are designed to foster dialogue and collaboration among practitioners from law firms, leagues, teams and governing bodies.

The 2026 conference marks more than five decades of SLA's commitment to advancing the understanding and ethical practice of sports law. Scheduled sessions will likely cover evolving topics such as athlete representation, collective bargaining developments, intellectual property challenges, and international sports law trends. While a detailed agenda has yet to be released, past conferences have featured a mix of educational panels and keynote speakers from high-profile sectors of the industry.

PETER CARFAGNA

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Sports and Entertainment Law and its Journal on Sports and Entertainment Law, and supervises the Harvard Sports Law Clinic.

Built for the disputes emerging now

FAIR Sports was founded "to address the growing need for specialized dispute resolution services in college athletics. We provide fast, affordable, and reliable alternatives to traditional litigation, helping institutions, athletes, and other stakeholders resolve conflicts while preserving relationships and protecting the integrity of collegiate sports."

In addition to formal programming, attendees can expect numerous opportunities for professional development and networking throughout the four days. The event also typically includes receptions, committee meetings and informal gatherings that help build community among members of the SLA and the broader sports law ecosystem.

Registration details and session schedules are expected to be announced in the months leading up to the event. For sports law practitioners and students alike, the SLA 2026 Annual Conference represents a key moment to stay current on legal trends shaping the business of sport.

FAIR's arbitrators, mediators, and Ombuds bring "real industry experience to each matter," helping parties address disputes related to:

- Incoming athletes with existing contractual issues
- Departing athletes with unresolved breaches
- Overlapping scholarship cancellations and appeals
- Fractured relationships, third-party pressures, and rising tensions

For more info, visit <https://www.fairsports.org/>

23XI Racing, Front Row Motorsports Settle Antitrust Dispute with NASCAR

By Thomas Nash, of Tulane Sports Law

On December 11, 2025, 23XI Racing and Front Row Motorsports reached a settlement with NASCAR over the antitrust lawsuit concerning NASCAR's charter system and the lack of competitiveness and fairness it fostered. As part of the settlement's terms, teams competing in NASCAR's Cup Series will now have permanent or "evergreen" charters as opposed to the revocable variety NASCAR was issuing before this settlement.

In February of 2016, NASCAR announced its new charter system that awarded teams guaranteed entry into races, finan-

cial stability, and a share of TV revenue. However, by 2023, teams began claiming that the system lacked permanence and diverse streams of revenue, with many teams calling for "evergreen" or nonrevocable charters, as well as additional revenue sharing outside of TV deals and sponsorships upon the expiration of the 2016 system. This settlement stems from the antitrust lawsuit filed on October 2, 2024, by both 23XI Racing and Front Row Motorsports against NASCAR, alleging that NASCAR imposed an unfair charter system through a non-transparent ultimatum that limited team leverage and favored NASCAR. Specifically, experts determined that

NASCAR had monopoly power over premier stock racing teams, concluding that teams felt pressure to continue with the charter system because they didn't want to lose their charters, and there were no alternative options. 23XI and Front Row Motorsports did not join the charter, instead seeking a permanent charter system for all applicable teams and around \$367 million in damages via the lawsuit.

"We believe it's a settlement that's going to grow this sport, that's going to be great for the teams and NASCAR, but most importantly, for the fans," says Jeffrey Kessler of Winston & Strawn LLP in New York City, who is representing 23XI Racing and Front Row Motorsports. "This is a landmark moment, one that ensures NASCAR's foundation is stronger, its future is brighter, and its possibilities are

greater," said NASCAR in a recent statement. NASCAR is represented by Chris Yates of Latham & Watkins LLP in San Francisco.

SOURCE(S):

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- <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/sports/nascar-auto-racing/article313449743.html>
- <https://www.nbcsports.com/nascar/news/long-as-nascar-antitrust-lawsuit-reaches-settlement-a-win-for-fans-who-get-their-sport-back>

NCAA Bans Six Players for Sports Betting

By Kiland Harrison, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 7, 2025, the National Collegiate Athletic Association permanently banned six basketball players across three universities for violating the league's sports betting policies. The three cases involving the six student-athletes were resolved via negotiated resolution in coordination with the student-athletes' schools, per infractions process operating procedures.

In February 2025, the NCAA enforcement staff investigated the University of New Orleans for potential game manipulation involving men's basketball players Cedquavious Hunter, Dyquavian Short and Jamond Vincent. A teammate reported overhearing the three discuss having a third party place bets on their December 28, 2024, game. Phone searches revealed text messages leading investigators to conclude the trio manipulated performances in seven games for financial gain. All three provided false or misleading information during the investigation. Next, the NCAA began reviewing Mississippi Valley State games for suspicious bet-



ting activity. A player reported overhearing Donovan Sanders discuss "throwing" a December 21, 2024 game. Donovan Sanders later said he and teammate Alvin Stredic were offered money to underperform in an early January game. Investigators found that Sanders provided betting information for two

games and Stredic for one. Both failed to fully cooperate or provide requested records. In late 2024, violations involving Arizona State's Chatton "BJ" Freeman surfaced when messages on another student-athlete's phone showed that Freeman knowingly provided inside information to a Fresno State student-athlete and his then girlfriend. Both of them bet on his performances. Freeman denied

sharing information as well as having his own fantasy sports account, despite evidence such an account existed under his name and email.

"Hunter and Sanders declined to participate in their respective cases," the NCAA said in its statement. "Short, Vincent and Stredic were unresponsive to enforcement staff

as their respective cases were processed. Freeman participated in a negotiated resolution and agreed to his violations” it continued. “I just had a child”, former University of New Orleans guard Cedquavious Hunter said on ABC’s “Good Morning America. “The school wasn’t paying me, so I was trying to get money to actually take care of my child.” The Committee on Infractions has only confirmed the violations, not penalties. Under updated Division I guidelines, student-athletes who bet on their own games or share inside information generally receive a permanent loss of eligibility, leaving the involved student-athletes ineligible until reinstated by an NCAA member school.

SOURCE(S)

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- <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/07/sport/basketball-ncaa-bans-6-athletes-gambling-investigation>
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Iowa College Athletes’ Geolocation Lawsuit Dismissed on Qualified Immunity Grounds

By Bridget Rachek, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 5, 2025, U.S. District Judge Rebecca Goodgame Ebinger dismissed the federal lawsuit of Iowa College Athletes versus the Iowa Department of Public Safety’s Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI). Judge Ebinger held that although the investigators’ warrantless geolocation search was unconstitutional under the Fourth Amendment, the defendants were entitled to qualified immunity because the right at issue was not clearly established at the time of the investigation.

The investigation began in 2021, after concerns arose that college athletes were violating NCAA sports-wagering bylaws. By 2023, several athletes faced criminal charges for underage gambling or falsifying records related to online wagering. Some athletes were permanently stripped of their collegiate eligibility through NCAA discipline. During the investigation, DCI reportedly used geolocation software from sportsbook apps such as FanDuel and DraftKings, which allowed agents to track athletes’ locations inside athletic facilities without obtaining a warrant. In April 2024, current and former athletes from the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and Ellsworth Community College filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa, naming the DCI and several agents as defendants. The plaintiffs allege that officers accessed their historical app-generated location data in a manner that constituted an unreasonable search under the Fourth Amendment, and the search warrants later obtained for their phones were invalid

because they were based on evidence collected without a warrant. The DCI agents denied wrongdoing, arguing that their actions were lawful within the scope of a felony match-fixing and gambling investigation and that, at minimum, qualified immunity protected them from liability, since no clearly established legal precedent prohibited the use of geolocation verification systems in this context.

In her opinion, Judge Ebinger acknowledged that the athletes had “sufficiently alleged” a Fourth Amendment violation but ultimately held that the DCI agents were shielded by qualified immunity. She explained that although warrantless collection of historical geolocation data “would be unconstitutional under traditional Fourth Amendment principles,” courts had not yet determined whether information from sportsbook verification systems constituted a search requiring a warrant. Because the law governing app-generated geolocation data “was not clearly established at the time of the investigation,” the DCI agents could not be held personally liable. Judge Ebinger also ruled that the subpoenas used to obtain athlete information served a lawful purpose under Iowa’s felony match-fixing statute. As a result of these findings, her ruling dismissed the lawsuit in full and ended proceedings at the district-court level.

“The Court found that the Defendants violated our clients’ rights; however, dismissed the case due to the judicially created doctrine of qualified immunity,” plaintiffs’ attorney James Roberts said in a statement. He criticized the “clearly established” standard, stating: “The government should not

get off on a technicality — simply because there isn't a case telling them they can't use this technology to violate people's rights. We will be appealing this ruling to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit and are prepared to take this case to the Supreme Court of the United States." The Iowa Attorney General's Office declined to comment on the dismissal. The case has been dismissed, with appeal proceedings expected.

SOURCE(S)

- https://www.espn.com/college-sports/story/_/id/46871376/federal-lawsuit-brought-iowa-college-athletes-dismissed
- <https://cbs2iowa.com/news/local/judge-dismisses-lawsuit-from-iowa-athletes-over-sports-betting-investigation>
- <https://www.1630kcjj.com/2025/11/07/judge-dismisses-lawsuit-between-iowa-student-athletes-and-gambling-probe-investigators/>

Former Coach Pleads Not Guilty in Federal Gambling Case

By Sam Safferstein, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 6, 2025 former NBA player and assistant coach Damon Jones pleaded not guilty to wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy in two federal cases alleging his involvement in illegal gambling schemes. Jones entered the pleas in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, where prosecutors allege that Jones placed unauthorized wagers and used insider information to facilitate gambling activity.

In late October 2025, federal officials charged thirty-four individuals in connection with two extensive gambling investigations. Prosecutors assert that one scheme involved bets on NBA games using confidential player-injury information, while the other centered on rigged poker games that employed high-tech cheating devices such as X-ray tables, hidden cameras, and altered shuffling machines; authorities further allege that these events were connected to operations run by members of the Gambino, Genovese, and Bonanno crime families. Jones, a resident of Texas, is accused of attempting to pass along information about an NBA player's expected absence before it became public. Prosecutors claim he later sold non-public details regarding Mavericks power forward Anthony Davis' anticipated playing time on January 15, 2024, for which he allegedly received \$2500. Authorities also claim he was used as a "face card", an athlete whose presence helped draw in high-spending participants for the poker games, and that he was paid \$2500 for at least one rigged game in which he was instructed to observe other conspirators (individuals compared to prominent players such

as LeBron James and Steph Curry) and fold when in doubt. They allege these games generated over seven million dollars. Other defendants, including Marves Fairley, Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier, and Hall of Famer Chauncey Billups, face charges in one or both matters, and several have upcoming court appearances as the cases progress.

"We may be engaging in plea negotiations," said Jones' court-appointed attorney, Kenneth J. Montgomery. Prosecutors, represented by U.S. Attorney Joseph Nocella Jr. of the Eastern District of New York, stated that "the defendants turned professional basketball into a criminal betting operation, using private locker room and medical information to enrich themselves and cheat legitimate sportsbooks." Another defendant connected to the poker conspiracy, Angelo Ruggiero Jr., had a five-million-dollar bond request denied by the U.S. District Judge Roman Reyes, while alleged organizer Robert Stroud was ordered to remain in home confinement after investigators reported recovering hidden cameras and poker equipment during a search.

SOURCE(S):

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Former Hawks Executive Linked to Embezzlement

By Drew Schott, of Tulane Sports Law

On October 29, 2025, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Georgia indicted former Atlanta Hawks finance executive Lester T. Jones Jr. in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia on one count of federal wire fraud connected to Jones’ alleged embezzlement of more than \$3.8 million from the franchise. Jones, whose conduct was discovered in a team-backed audit, is accused of filing fraudulent expense reimbursement requests for transactions that did not exist and using the Hawks’ American Express corporate credit cards without the team’s knowledge to pay for personal expenses collectively worth millions of dollars.

Jones previously worked for the Hawks from March 2016 to June 2025 and most recently served as the franchise’s Senior Vice President of Financial Planning and Analysis. Starting in 2021, his responsibilities included managing the team’s corporate credit card account with American Express and overseeing its electronic expense reimbursement platform. According to federal prosecutors, Jones abused his position by charging unauthorized transactions to the Hawks’ corporate credit cards including personal vacations to the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Switzerland, and Thailand among other locations, as well as Louis Vuitton apparel, tickets to concerts and sporting events, and expenses for a Porsche. Jones concealed these purchases by manipulating financial reports, forging emails to prove the legitimacy of the charges, and wrongfully assigning large balances to a credit card affiliated with the Hawks’ team operations. In one instance, prosecutors allege that Jones filed a fabricated reimbursement request worth nearly a quarter of a million dollars from what he claimed was the Hawks’ hotel stay in Las Vegas for the 2024 NBA Emirates Cup. This stay never happened, yet Jones added



false information to an email from American Express and forwarded it to his colleagues, which enabled him to eventually approve the reimbursement request and use its funds to pay off personal expenses. Since Jones utilized “false and fraudulent pretenses” to earn money from a wire communication across state lines, his conduct constituted a federal wire fraud violation because he transmitted data relating to the reimbursement request from the Hawks’ corporate computer server in Georgia to the server of the franchise’s electronic expense reimbursement platform in Virginia. See 18 U.S.C. § 1343. Jones pleaded not guilty and was released on a \$10,000 bond during the last week of October 2025.

The U.S. government is represented by Bernita Malloy of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Georgia in Atlanta, while Jones is represented by Judy Kim of the Law Office of Judy Kim, P.C. in Atlanta. Federal wire fraud charges carry a maximum sentence of twenty years in prison, and if Jones is convicted, he must forfeit all money and property linked to his embezzlement of nearly \$4 million from the Hawks. See 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(c) and 28 U.S.C. § 2461(c).

SOURCE(S):

- “Indictment”
- Docket
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- <https://www.law360.com/articles/2409055/ex-atl-hawks-exec-charged-with-stealing-3-8m-from-team>
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/atlanta/news/former-atlanta-hawks-executive-charged-with-3-8m-wire-fraud-scheme-prosecutors-say/>

Trading Card Company Files Antitrust Lawsuit

By Sam Thornton, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 6, 2025, sports card distributor Wild Card, Inc. sued industry competitor Panini America, Inc. in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas for antitrust violations. Wild Card alleges that Panini used anticompetitive and monopolization tactics to diminish Wild Card's trading-card market.

Wild Card, a Tennessee trading card distributor, has been a trending sports card distributor since 2021 after a previous multi-year hiatus from the industry. Wild Card alleges Panini violated federal laws such as the Sherman Antitrust Act and Clayton Act by "weaponizing its dominance to choke off Wild Card's emerging trading card brand." In turn, Wild Card believes Panini warned major sports card distributors carrying Wild Card products that they would be eliminated from access to card allocations. These alleged threats from Panini subsequently led to four major distributors unexpectedly withdrawing from Wild Card orders despite high

demand. In addition, Wild Card also alleges Panini "effectively blocked Wild Card's access to essential distribution and production channels required to compete."

"All we want is an opportunity to compete with the same set of rules," Wild Card CEO Daniel Atkins said. "We can't get a fair shake in the market, but I believe we can get a fair shake in a court of law." Wild Card is represented by Christopher John Schwegmann of Lynn Pinker Cox & Hurst LLP in Dallas. The case will be heard before the U.S. District Judge Amos L. Mazzant.

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- <https://ublawsportsforum.com/2025/11/17/wild-cards-lawsuit-complicates-paninis-legal-fight-against-fanatics/>

Investors Sue Clippers Owner Over Aspiration Deal

By Braeden Trotter, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 3, 2025, Los Angeles Clippers owner Steve Ballmer was sued by eleven former Aspiration investors in Los Angeles County Superior Court for fraud and aiding and abetting fraud. These investors allege that Ballmer used Aspiration, a California fintech company which later rebranded to Catona Climate Solutions, to secretly pay Clippers' star forward Kawhi Leonard millions of dollars to circumvent the NBA salary cap.

Catona received a significant investment of \$50 million from Ballmer in 2021. During this time, the company entered into a four-year, \$28 million agreement with Leonard's company, KL2 Aspire LLC. The deal was focused on a "no-show" endorsement, which required no action on Leonard's behalf. Leonard was to receive the money as long as he remained with the Clippers. The plaintiffs allege that the agreement served as a means to siphon money to Leonard, thereby circumventing the NBA salary cap and ensuring he remained with the team despite already being signed to a maximum contract. The complaint further asserts that Ballmer and Catona's leadership concealed the agreement's existence from the investors while also misleading them about the company's financial health, leading them to com-

mit funds to the company based on misleading information. The plaintiffs are seeking \$50 million in damages to recoup their losses from the investment.

"A lot of people have been hurt here. This lawsuit is being brought to recoup their losses. We look forward to our day in court, where everything will be aired out and justice will be done," said Skip Miller, an Aspiration investor serving as counsel for the plaintiffs. Miller is a founding partner at Miller Barondess, LLP in Los Angeles. Colin Rolfs of Miller Barondess, LLP, also joins him. "These were the guys who committed fraud. Look, they conned me," said Ballmer following the accusations. Litigation remains ongoing at this time.

SOURCE(S):

- [Clippers' Steve Ballmer sued by investors over Kawhi Leonard deal](#)
- [Report: Clippers owner Steve Ballmer added to lawsuit over Kawhi Leonard deal | Reuters](#)
- [Los Angeles Clippers owner Steve Ballmer lawsuit explained: Why are 11 Aspiration investors suing him? - AS USA](#)
- [Investors sue Steve Ballmer, Joseph Sanberg, and Baker](#)

- Hostetler over alleged carbon-offset fraud
- Clippers owner Steve Ballmer sued by Aspiration investors | Yardbarker

- Colin H Rolfs Profile | Los Angeles, CA Lawyer | Martindale.com

Emmanuel Clase and Luis Ortiz Indicted on Bribery Charges

By Anthony J. Kolarik IV, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 5, 2025, former Cleveland Guardian pitchers Emmanuel Clase and Luis Ortiz were indicted in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York in Brooklyn for wire fraud conspiracy, honest services wire fraud conspiracy, conspiracy to influence sporting contests by bribery, and money laundering conspiracy. Clase and Ortiz are alleged to have conspired with two unnamed gamblers to throw specific types and speeds of pitches, and the gamblers used this inside information to place in game prop-bets to profit no less than \$460,000.

In response to unusual betting, Major League Baseball contacted federal authorities and began investigating. Upon investigation, several instances of suspicious behavior from both pitchers were discovered. The usual agreement between Clase and the gambler was for Clase to throw balls (instead of strikes) or a slower pitch on his first pitch of the game. For example, in a game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, a series of texts were exchanged between Clase and the two gamblers each placing wagers of around \$4,000 that a pitch thrown by Clase would be a Ball/HBP. Despite Clase attempting to throw a ball for his co-conspirators the hitter swung at the pitch anyways resulting in a strike and the bettors lost their wagers. Ortiz also agreed to participate in the scheme by similarly agreeing to throw balls over strikes in return for compensation. A similar style agreement between the pitchers and the gamblers happened numerous times in games throughout April, May, and June of this year. In the indictment, Clase and Ortiz are alleged to have committed wire fraud conspiracy for devising a scheme to defraud Betting Platforms of money and for transmitting the bribes through wire communication, honest services wire fraud for devising a scheme to defraud the Cleveland Guardians and the MLB of their rights to the honest services through bribery and purposefully transmitting the bribes through wire communication, conspiracy to influence sporting contests by bribery for willfully carrying out a scheme to influence MLB

games through bribery, and money laundering conspiracy for using financial institutions for transactions involving the several unlawful activities listed above. All of these counts are pursuant to Title 18 of the United States Code. Both Clase and Ortiz are facing a potential punishment of a maximum of 20 years in prison.

“Integrity, honesty, and fair play are part of the DNA of professional sports. When corruption infiltrates the sport, it brings disgrace not only to the participants but damages the public trust in an institution that is vital and dear to all of us” said U.S. Attorney Joseph Nocella Jr. The government’s case is being represented by Assistant United States Attorneys Sean M. Sherman and Eric Silverberg from the Public Integrity Section in the Eastern District of New York. “Has never, and would never improperly influence a game – not for anyone and not for anything” said Chris Georgalis, an attorney representing Luis Ortiz. Ortiz is represented by Georgalis of Flannery Georgalis in Cleveland. His client “has devoted his life to baseball and doing everything in his power to help his team win. Emmanuel is innocent of all charges and looks forward to clearing his name in court.” Said Michael J. Ferrara, an attorney representing Emmanuel Clase. Clase is represented by Ferrara of Dinsmore in Columbus. Over the past few weeks both Clase and Ortiz have pleaded not guilty.

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Australian Basketball Forward Cleared to Join Idaho State Despite NCAA Opposition

By Brad Hutchison, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 4, 2025, Idaho State forward Caleb Van De Griend reached a settlement with Idaho State University and the National Collegiate Athletic Association over a wrongful termination and eligibility-related lawsuit. Consequently, Van De Griend has won a temporary restraining order to play in the 2025-2026 season.

Van De Griend, a forward who transferred to Idaho State University from a Division II program, faced a dispute against the NCAA ahead of the 2025-2026 college basketball season. After finishing his undergraduate degree, Van De Griend enrolled at Idaho State University as a graduate student, with the goal of playing under transfer and academic-progress rules. The NCAA ruled him ineligible, citing its “five-year clock” limitation and prior playing history. Van De Griend believed the NCAA misapplied its rules. In June 2025, Van De Griend filed suit against the NCAA in the District Court of Bannock County in Idaho. Van De Griend asserted that the NCAA’s enforcement of the “five-year clock” and eligibility waivers unjustly prevented him from playing Division I athletics by depriving him of NIL money and revenue-sharing opportunities he would have received. The complaint alleged violations of the Idaho Competition Act, breach of contract, and tortious interference. His counsel

also asserted that the NCAA’s arbitrary enforcement restrains trade and harms student-athletes. In its decision, the court granted Van De Griend a temporary restraining order, holding that the NCAA is barred from enforcing its rule and Van De Griend is eligible to play. The judge emphasized that Van De Griend would be denied the chance to participate in the “revenue-sharing opportunities” Idaho State is offering athletes, and not being able to play would impair his “competitive development” and prospects to play professional basketball.

“This isn’t just a win for Caleb,” said Darren Heitner, counsel for Van De Griend, in a recent LinkedIn post recapping the outcome. “It’s a stand for fairness, due process, and common sense in college sports.” Heitner, of Heitner Legal, P.L.L.C. in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is joined by David R. Kress of the Kress Law Office in Pocatello, Indiana in their representation of Van De Griend. The NCAA has not publicly commented about the recent decision.

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MLBPA Reaches Settlement with Agent James Murray Over Breach of Confidentiality

By Emma Fernald, of Tulane Sports Law

On October 29, 2025, the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) reached a settlement with agent James Murray over allegations that he secretly shared confidential union information with MLB officials during the negotiations surrounding the 2020 season. The agreement includes a four-year decertification from contract negotiations, a \$100,000 fine, and conditions allowing Murray to con-



tinue providing limited marketing and advisory services to certain clients. If he seeks recertification after the ban, he must pay an additional \$150,000.

The controversy stemmed from the MLBPA investigation into Murray’s conduct during the COVID-shortened 2020 season, which uncovered hundreds of emails and text messages between Murray and senior MLB officials. The MLBPA concluded that Murray undermined the union’s bargaining position by encouraging league executives

to bypass union leadership, assisting efforts to limit player compensation, and later obstructing the union's inquiry into his actions. Based on these findings, the MLBPA issued a lifetime ban, which is the most severe penalty available under its agent regulations. Murray appealed the decision to arbitration, and while the appeal was pending, the parties entered settlement discussions that resulted in the four-year decertification agreement.

"James Murray was not banned by the MLBPA; rather, Mr. Murray voluntarily agreed to a resolution that permits him to continue to provide certain services to current and future players, while taking a step back from player contracts

for a period of time," stated Murray's attorney, Christina Sarchio of Dechert LLP in Washington, D.C. The MLBPA did not issue a public statement regarding the settlement, but in the disciplinary letter, the union wrote that Murray had been "acting as a mole."

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Judge Denies Temporary Restraining Order in Rose Bowl and UCLA Lawsuit

By Jake Dicker, of Tulane Sports Law

On November 12, 2025 a Judge in Los Angeles County Superior Court denied a request by the city of Pasadena and the Rose Bowl Operating Committee (RBOC) for a temporary restraining order that would have forced UCLA to maintain their home at the Rose Bowl. On October 29, 2025, the city of Pasadena and the (RBOC) sued UCLA in the Superior Court of California in Los Angeles for breach of contract and anticipatory repudiation. The plaintiffs allege that UCLA has been in discussions with SoFi stadium in regards to the location of future UCLA football home games, and is in breach of the lease contract currently keeping the football team at the Rose Bowl.

UCLA has played its football games in the Rose Bowl since 1982, and plaintiffs in their complaint emphasize the historical significance of the stadium, as well as the hundreds of millions of dollars they have invested in improvements to the stadium over recent years. In 2014, the city of Pasadena and the RBOC signed a thirty year lease with UCLA that mandated the Rose Bowl as the only venue in the Los Angeles/Orange County area that could host UCLA football games. Within that lease, it was stated that UCLA's attempt to depart from the Rose Bowl would constitute a breach of contract. The complaint alleges that in direct contradiction with the lease, UCLA has been in exploratory talks with SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California to move the football team's home games there as soon as the 2026 season. The city of Pasadena and the RBOC sought specific performance in the form of a court-ordered injunction requiring UCLA to continue playing its home games at the Rose Bowl through

2044, as well as monetary compensation.

"UCLA must be held to its contractual obligations with the City: to keep the Rose Bowl Stadium as the home of UCLA Football and to preserve a long-standing partnership in American sports," stated plaintiffs' lawyer, Nima Mohebbi of Sidley Austin LLP in Los Angeles. Mary Osako, Vice Chancellor of Strategic Communications for UCLA, said of the possibility of moving stadiums that "while we continue to evaluate the long-term arrangement for UCLA football home games, no decision has been made." UCLA is represented by Jordan McCrary of Morgan Lewis LLP in Los Angeles. Judge James C. Chalfant, presiding over the case, denied the city of Pasadena and the RBOC's request for a temporary restraining order that would force UCLA to play its games at the Rose Bowl. He reasoned that this was not an immediate threat, since the next UCLA football game in contention won't be played until the fall of 2026, however Chalfant did state that specific performance may be applicable in this case, and plaintiffs now look towards the discovery phase of litigation.

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Dallas Stars and Mavericks Continue Dispute Over Shared Arena

By Hailey Bell, of Tulane Sports Law

On October 28, 2025, the Dallas Stars filed a counterclaim against the Dallas Mavericks in their lawsuit regarding joint management of the American Airlines Center, the city-owned arena the teams have been sharing since 2001. The Mavericks state that it should be recognized as the sole owner of Center Operating Company (the entity used by the Mavericks and Stars to lease the right to play their games and operate in the arena) because of an alleged lease breach by the Stars.

The Mavericks originally filed the lawsuit in the Business Court of Texas, accusing the Stars of violating their agreement by uprooting their headquarters to Frisco, Texas, as part of an alleged exploration of potential new arenas for the team. As a response to the Stars' potential move, the Mavericks contend that the lease the teams have with the arena requires the teams to maintain their headquarters in Dallas. The Mavericks further alleged the Stars are not authorizing investments for necessary maintenance and improvements to the American Airlines Center. However, the Stars contend that the Mavericks are attempting a "hostile takeover" of the arena and state that they have, in fact, made investments into the arena in recent years. The most recent development comes from the Stars, who allege the Mavericks are actually the ones breaking the provision of the lease that requires the teams to be headquartered in Dallas. In the team's amended counterclaim, the Stars allege the owners of the Mavericks designated Las Vegas as the team's principal corporate executive office in 2024, which would



break the lease agreement the Mavericks accuse the Stars of breaking. The Stars contend that on the basis of the 2011 bankruptcy resolution that the team assets are free and clear of disputes over the control of the arena and organization. The most likely conclusion to this dispute is a settlement, but the two sides have yet to find any common ground.

"The Mavericks engaged in the very conduct they allege entitles them to take full control of the American Airlines

Center," Stars' attorney Joshua Sandler of Winstead PC in Dallas said in the amended counterclaim. "The Mavericks haven't moved their offices, unlike the Stars," Mavericks' attorney Charles Babcock, representative for the Mavericks, of Jackson Walker in Houston and Dallas said. "Their principal corporate and executive offices are within the city of Dallas, just as they've always been. There isn't any question that the Stars moved to Frisco." The teams are

scheduled for a jury trial on January 26, 2026, in Texas Business Court, and their next scheduled conference hearing is on November 21, 2025.

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