

MVP: Willkie's Jared Bartie

By **David Steele**

Law360 (October 27, 2023, 1:07 PM EDT) -- Jared Bartie of Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP's sports transactions practice led an NBA team in an unprecedented naming-rights deal, represented minority investors in the sale of another NBA team, and brokered a groundbreaking league streaming rights agreement, earning him a spot as one of Law360's 2023 Sports & Betting MVPs.

His biggest accomplishments of the past year:

Bartie is a basketball lifer, tracing back to his high school playing days in the Boston area, and has worked in the front office for the NBA and for the Charlotte Bobcats, later renamed the Hornets. So Bartie pointed to the deal that returned the naming rights to the Utah Jazz's home arena to Delta Air Lines, and to the three-year streaming rights deal with Amazon for the youth pro basketball league Overtime Elite, as his biggest of the year.

"I came kind of full circle with those two," he said.

The Jazz's arena in Salt Lake City had been named the Delta Center from its opening in 1991 until 2006. Bartie helped negotiate a naming-rights deal with home security company Vivint in 2015, and now has assisted on the first known return to a previous rights-holder by a major U.S. team.

"Coming up as a basketball junkie, I was familiar with almost every arena," he said, adding that he is close to reaching his longtime goal of visiting all 30 current NBA arenas. "So being able to work on a transaction that, going into it, I knew was going to be significant, given the history of the respective organizations and their prior partnership, was pretty fulfilling."

The deal with Overtime Elite, meanwhile, went in the opposite direction. "I juxtaposed that deal, the nostalgia of reuniting the Jazz and Delta Air Lines," he said, "with representing this game-changing disruptor basketball organization in Overtime Elite, and being able to advise Overtime with its first global media rights deal with this much-recognized media partner and global brand like Amazon."

His love of the sport led him to being an early adopter of the concept of Overtime Elite, he said, and he



was also aware that streaming was the future of sports media rights.

"It was a great cutting-edge transaction and I realized what it signified in the moment, and I was very pleased to be able to be a part of it," he said.

His biggest challenge of the past year:

As demanding as the Overtime Elite streaming deal was, Bartie said, "My biggest challenge was probably staying abreast of what I'll call the ever-evolving college sports landscape, and helping to, at the same time, navigate, strategize and see around the corners for our collegiate industry clients."

"It's just been very fast-paced, and an unprecedented paradigm shift," Bartie said. "What happened this past year was something we've never seen in the collegiate landscape. So you had to stay abreast of every move and understand the significance of every move with college arrangements and what that meant." That encompassed a lot of steps, he added: "Navigating potential media rights, strength of conferences and player recruiting and movement — and always appeasing alumni and supporters."

"I think it's been an incredibly exciting year in the college ranks. Depending on how you came out on it, it might not be exciting, though," he said.

His proudest moment of the past year:

Again, Bartie turned to an NBA transaction, his representation of musician J. Cole and North Carolina auto magnate Damian Mills as limited partners in the purchase of the Charlotte Hornets from majority owner Michael Jordan in June. Not only had Bartie been general counsel and chief administrative officer for the team when it was named the Bobcats and owned by BET founder Robert Johnson, he had been part of the league's team marketing and business operations group, with Charlotte one of the markets he oversaw. Bartie also was with the Bobcats when Johnson brought in Jordan as a minority owner and head of basketball operations in 2006.

"It was always a good market, but it was an interesting market because I worked for Bob before, at BET. So to have the opportunity to work with Bob again was fantastic," Bartie said.

"It was a true, in every way you would define it, full-circle experience for me." he added about negotiating part of the Hornets' sale.

Why he's a sports attorney:

Also part of the Charlotte NBA organization at the time was team President Ed Tapscott, who had been instrumental in Bartie moving full time into sports law. Their ties went back to Bartie's undergraduate days at American University, where Tapscott was the head men's basketball coach. Bartie was attending on an academic scholarship, but his former high school coach reached out to Tapscott to ask about finding a place for Bartie on the team.

"Tap wanted me to sit out for a year and film games, and then [the] next year, be kind of a walk-on," Bartie recalled. "There's no way I was coming off of being on a state championship high school team to go film games, right?"

Bartie declined the offer, but he got to know Tapscott, who has had a long career as a college and NBA coach and executive — and who had received his law degree from American while serving as an assistant coach there before his promotion to head coach.

"That was extremely instrumental in me being who I am right now," Bartie said. "I was the first person in

my family to go to college. I was told I was going to be the first one to go, and I was told I was going to be a lawyer, so that's what I was going to do. I had the passion for sports and basketball, and Ed Tapscott was the first lawyer I'd ever met. He happens to be a Black lawyer, and happened to be a basketball coach. So he resonated with me immediately."

Tapscott also gave Bartie his first job in sports, he said. While attending law school at Northwestern University, he had a summer internship in New York City with the U.S. attorney's office. He cold-called Tapscott about future job possibilities, and Tapscott offered him an unpaid internship at sports marketing firm Advantage International — now known as Octagon — where he was an agent. Bartie not only left the other internship, he told Northwestern he would return late for the fall semester because of his new opportunity with Tapscott.

"He's been in my life and influential for quite some time." Bartie said.

What motivates him:

In what he called "a macro sense," Bartie said he tries to be an example to young lawyers with similar backgrounds, to be the role model he did not have coming up in the profession.

"I didn't know any lawyers growing up, as I mentioned," he said, "and didn't have a forged path to follow, or anyone to be a resource relative to information regarding the type of career that I might be able to enjoy. So I try to lead by example, try to spend as much time as I'm able to being a resource or giving advice or providing mentorship."

However, Bartie added, "In a more micro sense, it's all about my daughter, my 15-year-old daughter, Madison, who is one of the most incredible people I've ever met in my life. Extremely talented and smart and compassionate. And I just try to set a good example for her and work in a way that lets her know that she has options in life. And to the extent I need to sort of block and tackle for her because we all need that, I'm motivated to do that, but also to support her as she finds her way and allow her to really experience her full potential to do whatever it is in life she wants to do.

"Not what I want her to do, not what the world thinks she should do, not what type of education she has that may lead her into certain industries traditionally," he continued, "but for her to be — and it sounds cliché — the best she can be as long as that also allows her to be the happiest she can be. It sounds a little hokey, but anybody who knows me knows that is about as real an answer as you'll get from me."

-- As told to David Steele

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