

MVP: Latham's Adam Sullins

By Zachary Zagger

Law360 (October 13, 2020, 3:48 PM EDT) -- Adam Sullins of Latham & Watkins LLP's entertainment, sports and media industry group helped guide the National Football League Players Association in forming a ground-breaking joint venture with the Major League Baseball Players Association and RedBird Capital Partners to commercialize professional athletes' publicity rights, earning him a spot as one of Law360's 2020 Sports & Betting MVPs.

HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF THE YEAR:

Sullins said his work on the joint venture of NFL Players Inc. — the NFLPA's licensing and marketing arm — the MLB players union and sports-focused private equity firm RedBird Capital, which was finalized in November 2019, was some of the most challenging of the year.

The three parties came together to form OneTeam Partners LLC to manage and commercialize name, image and likeness rights and negotiate group licensing rights for video games and trading cards, as well as develop new licensing platforms.

"Anytime you are sort of working on deals with multiple parties or multiple aspects, I think it just adds an extra layer of complication and, therefore, can be more difficult or more challenging," Sullins said. "At the same time, that is the stuff that keeps things interesting. That is the stuff that if you like what you do, you get to really sink your teeth into it."

In another challenging multiparty transaction, Sullins helped guide sports marketing company Endeavor in a deal where the company acquired a majority stake in the NFL's former events arm OnLocation Experiences for \$660 million, while at the same time striking a continuing commercial partnership between OnLocation and the NFL.

"The more pieces there are, the more complicated and challenging, but from my perspective, the more fun it is," he said.



WHY HE IS A SPORTS ATTORNEY:

Sullins said he grew up playing sports, which led him to play Division I soccer at Yale University as an undergrad, and he knew he wanted a career in sports in some way. But becoming a sports attorney was not a straight line.

"Sports has always been one of my passions," he said. "When I got out of college and decided that I was done playing soccer and was going to go to law school, I always did it with an eye to somehow being in the sports space."

He said he knew he wanted to "marry a career in law with sports," but, at that time, there were not really "sports firms" or "sports practices" like there are today.

Sullins' career "sort of just evolved over time," he said. "I made a few decisions in my career and ultimately found myself in an opportunity to pursue it and went after it."

One of those key decisions was to leave the law firm life and go in-house at Upper Deck, a sports trading cards and collectibles company. Sullins said he first took on a business affairs role, helping negotiate the company's licenses and manage its relationships with the leagues, before adding general counsel to his title. After about five years at Upper Deck, he returned to private practice, eventually landing at Latham, where he is now co-chair of the entertainment, sports and media industry group.

HIS ADVICE FOR JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

Sullins offered the advice he received many years back as a summer associate looking to one day work in sports. He said you must first become a good attorney, building your skills and knowledge base, but always "keep your eye on that prize."

"It starts with building a solid legal foundation, honing your legal skills while keeping your eye on what you ultimately want to do," Sullins said. "Frankly, I don't think it is any different if you want to do sports law or any other specific type of law or be in a specific industry. The advice is going to be the same. Make yourself into a really solid lawyer and work your way from there."

OTHER NOTABLE CASES:

Sullins has had ongoing work over the past year advising gambling and sports betting company Caesars Entertainment Inc. in expanding its relationship with sports media giant ESPN. Caesars, through its sports betting partner William Hill, is now the exclusive sports betting odds provider and the co-exclusive sportsbook linked to on the ESPN website along with DraftKings Inc. under a deal that was finalized last month.

Also, building off of Latham's work with the U.S. Soccer Federation in its successful joint bid for the U.S. to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup along with Canada and Mexico, Sullins is advising FIFA and U.S. Soccer on the process to select which 10 U.S. cities will host matches. The U.S. is set to host 60 of the 80 matches in the quadrennial tournament.

Having played soccer in college and having met his wife on the pitch, Sullins said working on bringing this event to North America is personal for him.

"Being in a soccer family, having the opportunity to be involved in that and getting to have the World Cup matches in North America in 2026 is something that we are all incredibly proud of," Sullins said.

— *As told to Zachary Zagger.*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2020 MVP winners after reviewing more than 900 submissions.