

4 BigLaw Attorneys The Sports World Can't Live Without

By **Jake Simpson**

Law360, New York (July 21, 2015, 4:07 PM ET) -- When it comes to antitrust cases, multibillion-dollar television deals or rule-breaking scandals that require legal action, U.S. sports leagues turn to a select few BigLaw partners for their most important matters.

Among that elite group, four attorneys stand out for their longtime roles as chief outside counsel to sports leagues and their preeminence in the sports law world.

Joseph Leccese



As the chairman of Proskauer Rose LLP and co-chair of its preeminent sports law practice, Joseph Leccese has been an indispensable resource for virtually every major U.S. sports league. But at the very beginning of his career in sports law, he was just in the right place at the right time.

"When I was a first-year associate, I was asked to accompany a partner to the NBA, which seemed like a very good way to spend an afternoon," Leccese said. "I think I was selected because the deals I was working on happened to close and he ran into me in the hallway."

That meeting ultimately led to the NBA adding four franchises in the late 1980s, and it began Leccese's

career in sports law. Though he spent much of his time as an associate working on private equity deals in the media sector, Leccese continued to work for the NBA and added other sports league clients, beginning with the Association of Tennis Professionals in 1990.

Today, Leccese and the Proskauer team count the MLB, NFL, NBA, NHL, MLS, ATP, WTA and USGA among their formidable roster of pro sports league clients. The firm can offer a full-service experience to sports clients, with teams that handle litigation, labor law and corporate law in sports.

Leccese was just 49 when he was elected Proskauer chairman in 2010, the youngest chairman in the firm's 135-year history. Despite the demands that come with firm leadership, he has remained actively involved in his firm's biggest deals for sports leagues and teams.

"I don't think my practice has changed very much," he said. "I still spend an extraordinary number of hours practicing law."

Since becoming chairman, Leccese has worked on the Pac-12 conference's 12-year, \$3 billion television contract with ESPN and Fox, and helped the NBA with the imposition of a lifetime ban on former Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling and the forced sale of the team. The firm continues to work on the biggest deals in sports, with record-breaking price tags seemingly every year.

"We've done some very significant deals over the last four years," Leccese said. "As the size of the deals has gotten larger, the media coverage by both business and sports outlets has grown substantially."

--Editing by John Quinn.