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Sports Law Is a Tough Game to Enter

Transitioning from a conventional law practice to work as a sports agent can be a tough game for lawyers, as discussed in this [Fulton County Daily Report](#) story profiling several Atlanta lawyers who attempted to make the play. For one lawyer, [Bondurant, Mixson & Elmore](#) partner Von DuBose, a gamble on Michigan State University defensive end Ervin Baldwin paid off. After months traveling across the country to watch Baldwin practice and play, and counsel him on handling media interviews, the Chicago Bears drafted Baldwin, allowing DuBose to continue to build his sports agent business. On the other hand, personal injury and criminal defense lawyer Mawuli Davis, who focused his efforts on representing basketball players, never found an opportunity to represent a player in a major league deal. Without a client to build on or the funding needed to pursue clients, Davis "decided to cut his losses and stick to traditional legal work."

Given that the sports agency business demands high up-front costs to lure clients, one might think that the field would be dominated by deep-pocketed, mega law firms. But the truth is that very few agents work for the Am Law 200:

"Being an agent doesn't work with big firm economics," said Brandon Witkow [a sports agent lawyer]. Big firms bill by the hour, but the vast majority of sports agents receive a percentage of their clients' salaries, Witkow said. Also, a big firm lawyer working as an agent can't bill for the countless hours he'll spend doing tasks that are standard agent fare. "You incur a lot of time as an agent preparing pitch packets for clients, traveling to meet team general managers and to summer camps," Witkow said. "Those are costs that can't be directly passed on to the client."

A few large firms, including [Bryan Cave](#), [Dow Lohnes](#), [Stinson Morrison Hecker](#) and [Williams & Connolly](#) have a sports agent practice. And some firms, such as [Covington & Burling](#) or [Proskauer Rose](#) have sports law practices, representing the leagues or teams rather than acting as agents for individual players. Indeed, by representing individual players, these firms would conflict themselves out of their ability to represent the big corporate entities that can afford large firm rates. As a result, despite the initial start up costs, the sports-agent field continues to remain dominated by small shops or solo practices.

Posted by Carolyn Elefant on May 12, 2008 at 12:25 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

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