

CAREER SPOTLIGHT: LEN BROWN

Len Brown is the Chief Legal Officer/Executive Vice President for Licensing & Merchandising for the PGA TOUR, Inc. JD from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, MBA & BS from Pennsylvania State University.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Please briefly explain your career path and what led you to your current position.

I have always had a love for sports and could not imagine a life without them. I was a student-athlete through college but, out of undergrad, I took a job as a stockbroker. Although I was doing well, I was not passionate about my career. I decided to leave my position as a broker and ventured back into my other love—music. I started doing music production for others while working on my rap album (yes—my album). Because I loved what I was doing, I thought that I would pursue starting an independent record label. In order to sharpen my business skills, I enrolled in the MBA program at my alma mater, Penn State. My MBA was in finance and logistics. The summer before returning to State College, I married my college sweetheart. Between my first and second years of business school, my oldest child was born. As such—at least in my mind—dreams of struggling to start a record label were over (or at least on hold). Thus, after graduation, I took a “safe job” at Ford Motor Company in Detroit.

After two years at Ford—and many late-night conversations with my wife—I decided to apply to law school. I had to get back into sports and/or music, and I thought being a lawyer (agent and/or front office executive) was the route.

I went to U Penn Law School, which took me back to my hometown of Philadelphia. By this time, I was the father of two, and I had a lot of responsibility. That, I think, made me laser-focused on my goal of finding a job in sports. I took every intellectual property, sports, and/or entertainment law class offered. As Vice President of the Entertainment and Sports Law Society, I was constantly reaching out to industry executives under the guise of asking them to speak to our group, as my primary goal was to build up my network. I summered at Proskauer Rose in NYC, as it was (and still is) **the** firm for outside representation of the major sports leagues. I had a great summer at Proskauer, but, as the father of small kids at this point, my wife and I questioned raising a family in New York City.

During my summer at Proskauer, a good friend of mine summered at Williams and Connolly (W&C) in Washington, D.C. Known as one of the premiere white shoe litigation firms in the country, the firm also had

this niche sports representation practice. My buddy convinced me to reach out to the partner at the group, and, after interviewing, taking a judicial clerkship, and strongly finishing out my 3L year, I took a job at W&C.

At W&C, I helped represent incredible athletes like Grant Hill and Tim Duncan (I am dating myself). From W&C, it was on to Turner Sports and the Atlanta Braves, and from there, to the PGA TOUR.

2. What is something you wish you could tell yourself in law school?

Do well. I mean stay at the top of your class (it is important) but have more fun. Enjoy the ride and pedagogy. It is likely your last chance to be free from all of what comes with “adulting.”

3. What is something that has changed since you began working in the sports and entertainment industry, and how has that change impacted your current job in the industry?

I would say that advances in technology and social media have rippled into changes in the media space, NIL area, and gambling arena—all of which have resulted in significant changes to my job and the industry, in general.

4. How much involvement does an in-house legal department have when your company, organization, or team signs on for a Netflix series or major motion picture?

Our legal department was heavily involved from the very beginning stages of the Netflix series and would/will be involved at the inception of any similar projects. Our philosophy is to work with the business units from the very beginning of a deal. Not only do we avoid issues down the road, but also, understanding the business objections from the outset, forces (and/or allows) our legal team to proactively and creatively think about ways to achieve our desired outcomes.

5. What key issues in the sports and entertainment industry are especially relevant right now, and what do you see becoming more prevalent in the next 5-10 years?

Back to technology and social media, it is important to keep the integrity of the game (of any sport) while facilitating innovations such as gaming, etc. I fear that you could lose the core of the sport by chasing ancillary revenue sources.

6. How do you envision the growth of legal sports gambling impacting your career in the next decade? How can attorneys get ahead of what's to come?

Similar to last the question, job #1 is protecting the integrity of the enterprise. Gaming can bring fresh eyes and a new audience, but it can also bring some bad things. The Black Sox scandal happened over 100 years ago, but we still talk about it. The NFL could, and would likely, recover from a scandal like that. Smaller niche sports such as golf and tennis may not ever recover from something like that.

Getting out in front of it. The legal department drafted and adopted an integrity policy governing our approach to gaming before we ever signed any sponsorship, data distribution, or other deal surrounding the gaming industry. As lawyers, we need to think of the potential negatives and try our best to mitigate them beforehand.

7. What is one of the biggest misconceptions in your industry?

One of the biggest misconceptions is that the legal work around sports is somehow different. It is all the same. We just have a cool client.

8. What is one piece of advice that you would give to students trying to break into the sports and entertainment industry?

To the extent that you can afford it, be willing to go anywhere and take any reasonable position in sports because, much like coaching, once you have a job in sports, you are in “the club,” which makes it easier to get the next job in sports.