

MVP: Latham's Christopher Yates

By Alison Knezevich

Law360 (November 5, 2024, 12:02 PM EST) -- Chris Yates of Latham & Watkins LLP's antitrust and competition practice has guided prominent clients such as the U.S. Soccer Federation, Atlantic Coast Conference and UFC through some of the most closely watched antitrust litigation in the sports world, earning him a spot as one of the 2024 Law360 Sports & Betting MVPs.

Why he's a sports antitrust attorney:

"I began [in] antitrust, and then I was fortunate enough to begin working on sports cases," Yates said, noting he enjoys sports, including soccer, football and basketball. "I'm really lucky in that I get to work at the intersection of two things that I really love."

Yates believes attorneys are most successful when they do what they enjoy, find their work intellectually challenging and like the people they work with.

Antitrust "was the thing that checked all those boxes for me," he said.

Yates' practice isn't all sports-related, though. He said the opportunity to learn about a range of industries is one of the things he loves about antitrust law. His clients have included Walmart, StarKist, Coach and Kate Spade's parent company Tapestry Inc., and eyewear company EssilorLuxottica.

Yates has developed a diverse base of "fascinating clients" who he said bring challenging questions.

"And that's what I love about being a lawyer," Yates said.

He said breaking down complex economic concepts for a judge or jury comes down to bringing stories to life.

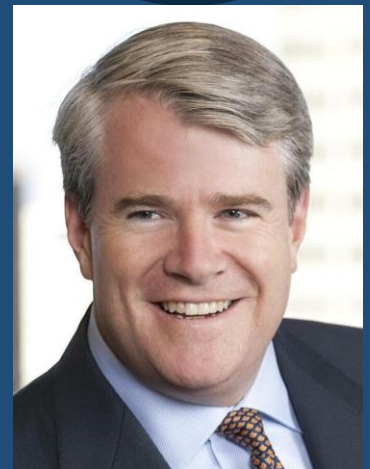
A juror "might have an advanced degree, or might have a high school education, or anywhere in between," Yates said.

"You've got to think about ... a way to present this in a way that's going to be intuitive," Yates said.

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MVP



Christopher Yates
Latham

Other notable cases he's worked on:

Yates has built a bustling practice litigating in courts across the U.S. on behalf of high-profile clients in cases at the intersection of antitrust and sports.

He currently leads the Latham team representing UFC in litigation by former fighters who alleged the organization suppressed their wages. A Nevada federal judge granted preliminary approval to a \$375 million settlement to resolve the fighters' claims Oct. 22.

In a case scheduled for a January trial, Yates represents a longtime client, U.S. Soccer, the sport's U.S. governing body, in a lawsuit by the North American Soccer League in New York federal court, alleging U.S. Soccer and Major League Soccer conspired to exclude NASL and others from competing against MLS.

The Latham team in June obtained a summary judgment dismissal of NASL's claim that the U.S. Soccer Federation's standards laying out requirements for becoming a sanctioned league in and of themselves caused the league injury.

Yates also serves as lead defense counsel for the Atlantic Coast Conference in several class action lawsuits alleging antitrust violations by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, including *House v. NCAA* litigation, in which a landmark \$2.78 billion settlement with former athletes was reached over name, image and likeness compensation.

And in a case that's just getting started, Yates is representing NASCAR in antitrust litigation lodged Oct. 2 by Front Row Motorsports Inc. and NBA legend Michael Jordan's 2311 Racing LLC.

His advice for junior attorneys:

It's all about seeking opportunities and mentors, Yates said.

"Raise your hand; take on new opportunities," he said. "Work on things that you like, with people who are going to give you the at-bats and going to be great mentors."

What motivates him:

Helping a client "meet their business goals and deliver the best result possible is what we try to do every day," Yates said.

"I'm always motivated to try to deliver the best results possible for the client, whether that's winning at trial, winning a motion to dismiss, settling it, [or] trying to resolve something even before it gets to litigation," Yates said.

--As told to Alison Knezevich. Additional reporting by Lauren Berg, Elaine Briseño, David Steele and Jade Martinez-Pogue. Editing by Drashti Mehta.

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 2024 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.