

## Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Sean McFarlane

By Mike Curley

*Law360 (October 8, 2019, 4:00 PM EDT)* -- Sean McFarlane of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP has headed up big deals, including a consortium's acquisition of the YES Network, and represented the New York Arena Partners in their bid to construct a new home for the New York Islanders, earning him a spot among sports and betting law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

### **THE BIGGEST CASE OF HIS CAREER:**

McFarlane represented a member of the consortium that purchased the Yankees' YES Network from Disney in August. The consortium, which included Yankee Global Enterprises, the Sinclair Broadcast Group and Amazon, reached the deal to buy out Disney's 80% share in the TV station.

McFarlane and Gibson Dunn represented RedBird Capital Partners, which provided equity investments for the deal, and which evolved into the "fulcrum" for a deal that involved a large number of parties and investors. McFarlane said it was their job to oversee transactions and convince everyone that the outcome was fair.

"We worked very hard to earn the trust and respect of everyone in that consortium," he said. "And really, serving in that role is only possible if you have that trust and respect."

### **HIS PROUDEST MOMENT:**

McFarlane said that being entrusted with such a high-profile, high-stakes transaction as the YES acquisition has been a highlight of his career.

"To be right in the middle of everything and representing your clients, but also making sure the deal got over the

**RISING  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
STAR**



**Sean McFarlane**  
Gibson Dunn

Age: 34  
 Home base: New York  
 Position: Associate  
 Law school: Harvard Law School  
 First job after law school: Boies  
 Schiller Flexner LLP

finish line, in such a big deal of that nature," he said. "To be entrusted in that task was a very proud moment for me."

#### **WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:**

Showing his children the value of hard work and dedication is a major motivator for McFarlane, who said he wants to teach them that if you're going to dedicate yourself to something, you should take it seriously.

"My wife and I were blessed with triplets a few years ago, so just looking at their faces every morning is all the motivation I need to do a good job at work," he said.

He added he sometimes looks back to his college days, when he was a boxer, especially when he approaches a difficult part of a transaction. In the ring, he said, there's nobody there to assist you, so to him, boxing taught invaluable lessons in preparing and getting over fears no matter how they manifest in everyday life.

"These kinds of negotiations can get heated and aggressive, but nobody's tried to hit me yet," he joked.

#### **OTHER NOTABLE CASES:**

McFarlane told Law360 that he's had a big year, and the YES Network deal is not the only big venture he's worked on lately.

He was part of the team advising the New York Arena Partners in its joint venture bid for building the Belmont Park Arena — a \$1 billion deal for the new home of the New York Islanders. He said that project was another highlight of his career so far, as Gibson Dunn acted to represent the partnership as a whole.

He's also played a key role in representing Stars Group as it negotiates a gambling agreement with the NBA, Stars' first partnership with a pro sports league in the U.S. after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision legalizing sports betting last year.

"Everybody is just trying to get a feel for what these types of agreements should look like, what kind of things you should be concerned about," he said. "It's a particularly exciting thing to be able to work on. We're kind of getting in on the ground floor of this burgeoning industry."

#### **HOW HE THINKS THE INDUSTRY WILL CHANGE:**

McFarlane said that with the rise of legal sports betting, it's a very important time in both the sports and entertainment industry. While historically, the biggest interest has been in media rights, now the sports and entertainment world will have to figure out how to integrate gambling into the mix.

"We're on the cusp of a convergence of sports, media rights and betting here," he said. "It's a very exciting time to be involved in the industry, because the deals that are being negotiated now and the agreements that are being signed up are going to be having far-reaching ramifications over the next 10 years."

— *As told to Mike Curley*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300*

*submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 years old as of April 30, 2019, in order to be considered for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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