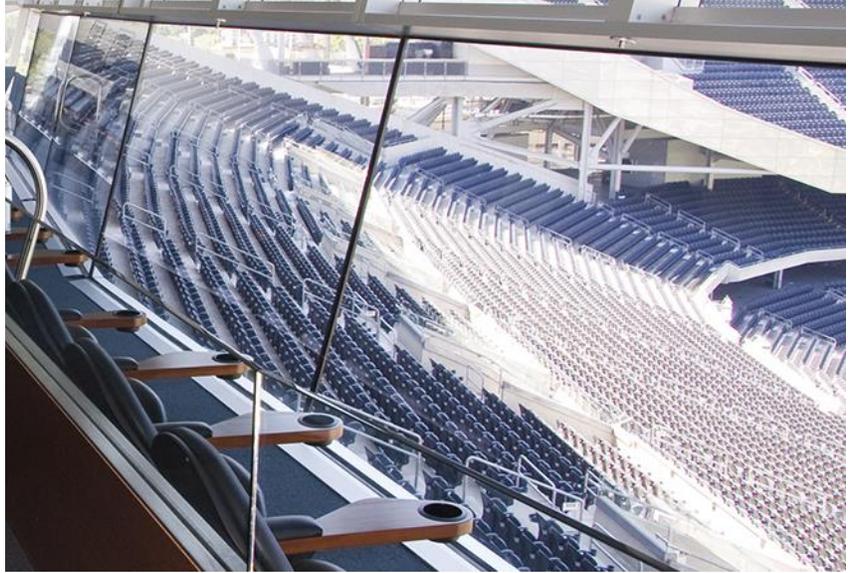


THE COMEBACK:

Sports in a Worldwide Pandemic



PART 1:

The Business of Sports

EVENT RECAP

Aired on Wednesday, March 10, 2021

The importance of sports on our national landscape cannot be overstated. We've seen time and time again the healing power sports can have in our communities, but this crisis is different. No longer can we have loud boisterous crowds, lines of people, and fans interacting with athletes in packed stadiums – the things that remind us of our sense of community and national pride. So, how do we return to this? Can we recreate the magic of sports? And if so, how?

That's what Foley & Lardner explored in the first installment of its Leadership Insight series, [The Comeback: Sports in a Worldwide Pandemic](#). Here are some of the key takeaways and learnings from each panelist's conversations on the business of sports.

Rick Horrow (Host) – Author, *Sport Business Handbook: Insights from 100+ Leaders who Shaped 50 Years of the Industry*

- **The Shutdown of Sporting World:** Almost a year to the date, the sports world faced its most significant interruption since WWII. The NBA canceled its regular season after a player tested positive for COVID-19; March Madness, MLB, NHL, PGA, the Olympics, and others would soon follow-suit.
- **The Costs:** In all, the vanishing of sports in the U.S. alone cost the sporting world over \$12 billion and cost 1.3 million sports jobs – either furloughed or lost entirely.
- **A Resilient Industry:** Even with this enormous loss, the resilient sports world innovated. Establishing new ways of viewing events, like the virtual NFL draft, creating novel fan experiences, and increasing the prevalence of esports.
- **Next Roaring Twenties?:** Can we expect the 21st version of the 'Roaring Twenties'? This series hopes to provide a guide map and serve as a resource for getting there.

Bob DuPuy (Host) – Partner, *Foley & Lardner LLP*, Former Chief Legal Counsel, President and COO, Major League Baseball

- **Sports' Healing Power:** Sport has always played a role in the comeback from a national trauma. The uncertainty in outcome coupled with strong rooting allegiances – whether they be national, college, or city – creates a strong feeling of personal connection and interest.
- **Pent-Up Demand:** The country has waited for the return to sporting events and is eager to see its teams play live – professional sports leagues are preparing to meet this demand.
- **The Challenges:** As the sports world aims to meet demand, many constituencies will need to be considered and given weight as the world eyes a return, including the safety of fans and players; federal, state, and local government restrictions and protocols; and vendor and media relationships.

Tom Ricketts – Owner, *Chicago Cubs*

- **Challenge of Spring Training:** While spring training is now underway, there were many logistical challenges in getting 150 members (including players, coaches and personnel) to Arizona. Once arriving, the focus turned to testing, tracking, and monitoring COVID-19 under the MLB's protocols. Hopeful for a return-to-normalcy for players as they're increasingly vaccinated.
- **Fans in the Stands:** The team has worked closely with many constituents to ensure a positive fan experience upon their return to live events. The club collaborated and worked with state and local officials on safety protocols, shared information and best practices with the White Sox and other Chicago teams, and worked with various vendors and sponsors to ensure a smooth return.
- **Maintaining Fan Trust:** In addition to getting fans to the ballpark, maintaining trust and openness throughout the pandemic was a focus for the club. Ricketts explained how the team communicated with fans on questions of ticketing, in-person events and safety efforts via social media, television, and remote events.
- **New Technologies:** To help ease the return of fans and promote best safety practices, the team and stadium are leveraging technology; moving to touchless entry systems with new magnetometers, removing paper tickets, and making concession purchases cashless.

Dr. John DiFiori – Director of Sports Medicine, *National Basketball Association*

- **Evolving Role:** Dr. DiFiori's top priority has always been the same; the health and wellness of the NBA's players. But the specific focus shifted dramatically, consumed by understanding this virus to keep players, coaches, and referees safe on a day-to-day basis.
- **Working with Stakeholders:** Many people across varying areas of work are required to put on a professional sporting event. And while Dr. DiFiori's team doesn't have direct management over every group, sharing and providing best practices to the league's front-offices was critical in helping them create strategies that work for employees and communities.
- **Lasting Impact of these Challenges:** Dr. DiFiori expects that even as they quell the need for infection control with vaccination and other measures, the role of infectious disease doctors will remain involved to not only manage COVID-19, but also influenza and other viruses. Furthermore, stadium innovations such as touchless operational techniques will be a lasting benefit of the pandemic protocols that will keep players and fans safe going forward.

Donald Dell – Founder, *ProServ*

- **Challenges Facing Individual Athletes:** While it may have been easier to navigate COVID-19 in more individualized sports like tennis and golf, these players still felt the pressure and a mutual obligation to take care of themselves as to not risk the whole league.
- **Recovering from Economic Loss:** Managing fans and their comfort level will remain critical for leagues as many fans may be skeptical of returning to a large-scale event early on. Dell believes there could be problems in managing the lingering virus, so it will be important for stadiums to understand the risk and provide proper safety measures.
- **Athletes' Philanthropic Responsibility:** Today's athletes are becoming much more philanthropic in their actions as a whole and individually. Dell cites two potential reasons: (1) Athletes are more socially conscious than ever before and (2) the money has gotten enormous and offers players more opportunity to give back to their communities.

Kyle Sanborn – Vice President of Marketing, *Enterprise Holdings*

- **Staying Flexible and Building Trust:** Enterprise settled on two pillars to help it navigate the pandemic: remain flexible and build trust and confidence in the brand. To accomplish this, Enterprise focused on 'doing what's right for right now' in terms of messaging and its brands.
- **Marketing and Story Telling:** With the many locations and demographics it serves, it's important for Enterprise to uniquely connect and communicate on the ground in different markets, a difficult task amid the pandemic. Enterprise evolved the way it thinks about the value of its in-person events, focusing on whether it can hold them safely, effectively, and profitably. As things open back up, Enterprise wants to engage its customers via activation – but needs to ensure the cost and audience levels make it worthwhile.
- **Best, Middle, Worst Case Scenarios:** It's important to think about the best, middle, and worst-case scenarios around this pandemic. Focusing on this helps ensure Enterprise has the necessary lead-time to get things up-and-running, prepare communications, and adapt accordingly by region, partner needs, and sentiment of its consumers.