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Hollywood agencies gather up broadcast talent

By [Liz Mullen](#), Staff Writer

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Editor's note: *This story is revised from the print edition.*

The business of representing sports broadcasters, once made up of boutique firms in New York and scattered player agents representing a few clients in second-career broadcast work, has over the last five years become more specialized and more centralized.

And that center is becoming Los Angeles, home to the Hollywood talent agencies and an increasing number of sports broadcasting clients.

As changes in technology have put a premium on programming that can draw large audiences in real time, rights fees to broadcast live content such as sports events have increased, as have opportunities and salaries for broadcasters. For Hollywood agencies, with a history of representing on-camera talent and, for several, more recent moves into sports in such areas as player representation, broadcaster representation was suddenly a natural fit.

"As the value of live sports rights skyrocketed, so did the importance of the broadcasting talent who work in this space," said CAA agent Tom Young, who recently orchestrated former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo's CBS deal. "These personalities have amassed large audience followings, add credibility and context, and one can argue they are as integral to the broadcast as the actual game itself."

The Hollywood agencies have mounted a full-court press in the area by acquiring practices, hiring key broadcasting agents and signing top talent. The splashiest move was WME's \$2.4 billion acquisition of IMG, a pioneer in the representation of sports broadcasters, which it completed in 2014. But there have been plenty of other big moments, and they have produced a realignment of broadcasting talent.

As Headline Media Management President Michael Glantz puts it, "The reason a lot of broadcasters and talent have gone to the Hollywood agencies is the Hollywood agencies have gotten into the business."

Hollywood agency ICM Partners made a big move into sports and news broadcasting this year by acquiring Headline Media Management, which represents sports broadcasters including Chris Berman and Mike Golic. (Headline also represents news broadcasters, including Savannah Guthrie and Wolf Blitzer, and Glantz is

primarily a news broadcasting agent.)

Asked whether increased activity by Hollywood agencies in signing broadcasters had anything to do with Headline's agreement to be acquired, Glantz answered bluntly, "The answer is yes. Of course it does."

Giants move in

One event in the trend that went largely unnoticed by the sports industry dates back to 2014, when United Talent Agency acquired N.S. Bienstock, a major news broadcasters representation agency with clients such as Anderson Cooper and Bill O'Reilly.

But the consolidation may have started even before that, in 2012. "CAA, when they hired Nick Khan, got seriously into the business," Glantz said.

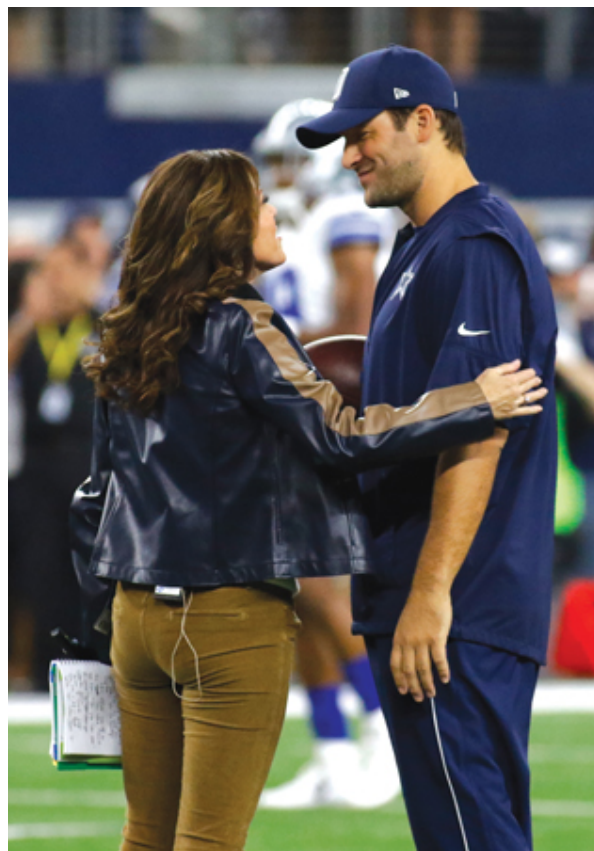
Khan is co-head of CAA's Television department, where he leads the news and sports media groups. He is the lead agent for ESPN's Stephen A. Smith and former "First Take" partner/nemesis Skip Bayless of Fox Sports, among others. (CAA also represents Max Kellerman, Smith's new partner on "First Take.")

The move represents how CAA, a 42-year-old agency that launched CAA Sports in 2006, has built its broadcasting practice: strategic hires of top agents. Creative Artists Agency was founded in 1975 and has represented news broadcasters for 20 years. Current news clients include Megyn Kelly, George Stephanopoulos and Maria Bartiromo. It represented some sports broadcasters, as well, but its practice of representing sports analysts and announcers grew exponentially after it hired Khan, who had worked at ICM.

CAA does not reveal how many clients it represents, but it had clients all over Super Bowl week coverage this year, including Mike Greenberg, a client they signed last year, and NFL scoop machine Adam Scheffer, both of ESPN, and Fox Sports broadcasters Joe Buck and Mike Pereira.

CAA also represents top NBA reporter Adrian Wojnarowski, who became a client after his agent, Matt Kramer, joined the agency from CSE in summer 2015.

Earlier this year, CAA hired Josh Santry away from IF Management. At least four of his clients from that New York-based agency — Joe Davis, who replaced Vin Scully as the Los Angeles Dodgers announcer and Jessica Mendoza, ESPN's first female analyst, Fox Sports 1 personality Nick Wright and ESPN's Maria Taylor, who hosts "SEC Nation" — have joined Santry at CAA.



Tony Romo (talking to NBC Sports' Michele Tafoya) made the move from football to CBS with the help of CAA agent Tom Young.

Photo by: GETTY IMAGES

On the Move

2012

■ **April** – Nick Khan leaves ICM Partners for Creative Artists Agency. His clients include Jim Lampley and Jalen Rose. ICM's Evan Dick also makes the move, with clients Jemele Hill and Michael Smith.

Meanwhile, crosstown rival WME has also stepped up its representation of sports broadcasters. WME was formed in 2009 when the William Morris Agency, which dates back to 1898, merged with Endeavor.

WME and its predecessor agencies always had a presence in the broadcasting space, and current news broadcasting clients include Al Roker, Willie Geist and Lara Spencer.

WME does not represent athletes on the field or the court, but even before acquiring IMG it represented sports broadcasters such as Katie Nolan, as well as star athletes over the years that it tapped as having the potential to cross over beyond sports. Those athletes include Serena Williams; NBA stars Steve Nash, Kevin Garnett and LeBron James; and NFL hall of famer Michael Strahan. WME agents Brad Slater, Josh Pyatt and Brandt Joel have represented Strahan since 2009, right after he signed his first deal to join "Fox NFL Sunday."

For WME, getting broadcast deals is just one aspect of how the agency represents talent, said WME's head of television and broadcasting, Rick Rosen.

"We're in the same business we've been in forever, in the business of taking clients and building brands and building companies," Rosen said. "If there's someone that only wants to do broadcasting, we will of course sign them. But what differentiates us is our ability to build businesses."

WME has a list of athlete clients who are interested in broadcast work as well as other aspects of entertainment, including James and Cam Newton, as well as retired athletes, including Kobe Bryant and Alex Rodriguez. WME negotiated a deal for Rodriguez to join Fox as an MLB analyst for this season and also negotiated a deal for him to host a new series on CNBC tentatively titled "Back in the Game," about athletes in financial trouble.

2014

■ **January** – WME completes its acquisition of IMG for \$2.4 billion.

■ **January** – United Talent Agency, one of the world's largest celebrity representation entities, acquires N.S. Bienstock, which reps Pam Oliver and others.

2015

■ **August** – Media agent Matt Kramer leaves CSE to join CAA. His clients include Adrian Wojnarowski.

2016

■ **May** – Blue Equity acquires 3 Kings Entertainment, whose clients include Elle Duncan, Doug Kezirian and Zubin Mehenti.

■ **June** – Octagon signs longtime ESPN executive Tim Scanlan to run its sports broadcast talent representation group, which includes Bob Ley, Chris Fowler, Bill Cowher and Rebecca Lowe.

■ **August** – Jordan Bazant leaves TLA Worldwide for WME. His clients include Troy Aikman and Chris Myers.

■ **October** – Sandy Montag leaves WME-IMG for The Montag Agency after working his entire career, about 30 years, at IMG. Clients include Bob Costas, Mike Tirico, James Brown, Jim Nantz and Scott Van Pelt.

2017

■ **January** – Peter Raskin leaves TLA Worldwide, forms Rubicon Talent.

■ **February** – The Montag Group merges broadcast practice with sports/news media talent firm IF Management, whose clients include Holly Rowe and Michael Morse.

■ **February** – ICM acquires Headline Media Management, whose clients include Chris Berman, Mike Golic, Kevin Harlan, Mike Emrick, John Berman, Tom Jackson, Brad Nessler, Keith Hernandez, Brianna Keilar and Pierre McGuire.

■ **March** – Josh Santry leaves IF Management and goes to CAA. At least two of his clients, Joe Davis and Jessica Mendoza, have joined him at CAA.

“WME was already in the business, but when they bought IMG, they were much more in the business,” Glantz said.

Going back to this year’s Super Bowl, WME represented seven of the 12 announcers and analysts on the pregame show and main broadcast. One, Erin Andrews, came to WME after it acquired IMG in 2013.

Two others, Troy Aikman and Chris Myers, became clients of the Hollywood agency when agent Jordan Bazant, a former partner at TLA Worldwide, joined the Hollywood firm last year.

Top money still rising

Pioneer sports broadcasting agent Sandy Montag, who started his career working with John Madden at IMG 30 years ago, joined WME-IMG as part of that purchase. He started his own broadcast and media consulting firm, The Montag Group, in 2014, but he worked representing talent at WME-IMG for two years before moving his talent business to his own group late last year.

Earlier this year, The Montag Group, which represents the titans of sports broadcasting, including NBC’s Bob Costas and Mike Tirico, CBS’s James Brown and Jim Nantz and ESPN’s Scott Van Pelt, merged its broadcast representation business with IF Management, which specializes in recruiting and developing young broadcasting talent from smaller markets.

Montag said that at IMG, “I think we were the first, in the early ’80s,” when the agency began representing sports broadcasters. “Back 20 [or] 30 years ago, we were basically dealing with three over-the-air networks and ESPN. That was really it.”

The growth of the broadcast business, producing more platforms and more jobs, is one reason for the consolidation of broadcasting talent and agents now, he said.

“Today there are so many agencies trying to do it,” Montag said. “I think also current player agents are. If their clients are retiring, they are trying to get into that space by representing their clients in broadcasting. I think you are seeing the proliferation of agencies representing broadcast talent. And, because there are so many, you are seeing consolidation along the line.”

Montag would not discuss salaries in dollar figures, but other industry insiders say that, despite some retrenchment at some of the networks, the top money for A-list talent continues to rise. A few years ago, SportsBusiness Journal reported that top sports broadcasters were earning in the range of \$5 million a year, but that number has increased by a couple of million dollars, sources said.

More sports broadcasters are now making seven-figure salaries, sources said.

Private equity investor Jonathan Blue says there is plenty of growth ahead for the sports broadcasting business. “It’s the next natural progression for the representation business,” Blue said. “The broadcasters and announcers of today and their compensation are the athletes of 10 years ago and 15 years ago.”

Blue was involved in building a multisport talent agency called Blue Entertainment Sports Television through a series of rollup acquisitions and then selling it to Lagardère Group in 2010.



After a deal in late 2015 to acquire Maxx Sports &

WME works with Serena Williams and other athletes on deals beyond the field of play.

Photo by: GETTY IMAGES

Entertainment fell through, Blue acquired Washington, D.C.-based broadcasting talent agency 3 Kings Entertainment in May 2016. 3 Kings represents more than 100 media clients, including news anchors and reporters, weathercasters and sportscasters.

Blue said he is in discussions with multiple talent agencies, including more than one broadcasting talent firm, about future acquisitions. Although he is in talks with other types of talent agencies, Blue said, "broadcasting is the focal point."

Although the Hollywood agencies are taking up a big chunk of the business, Blue thinks there is room for outsiders, noting that not every agent wants to be part of "a behemoth with a three-initial name."

ICM Partners founding partner Ted Chervin said broadcasters become "easily identifiable celebrities" and need access to the other things that Hollywood agencies can provide, helping drive clients to those firms.

"If you are an anchor on 'SportsCenter' or an announcer for the NFL, you may also want to produce scripted television shows or produce or host entertainment shows in the unscripted space," Chervin said.

Chervin predicts the consolidation will continue. "It has been going on for some time, and we've seen a number of acquisitions and combinations," he said. "I don't think we're at the end of it because there are still opportunities out there."

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