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French Sports Company Lagardere SA Nearing Acquisition Of BEST

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By Daniel Kaplan & Liz Mullen, Staff Writers, SportsBusiness Journal

French sporting and publishing giant Lagardere SA is close to acquiring BEST, multiple sources said, which would introduce a player with significant financial wherewithal into the U.S. sports agency marketplace. A deal could be consummated as early as next week, the sources said. Lagardere is one of France's largest and most influential companies, and has been making a major push into sports media and marketing rights globally in the last several years. But its U.S. sports business is very limited, accounting for about 1% of its sports division's revenues. Blue Equity Chair & Managing Dir **JONATHAN BLUE**, whose private equity firm which launched and owns BEST, said in an e-mail, "Blue Equity has a long standing policy of never commenting on any portfolio acquisitions or partnerships until they have been completed." BEST Managing Dir **MIKE PRINCIPE** declined to comment. **ARNAUD LAGARDERE**, Lagardere SA's owner and son of the namesake, said during an earnings call last month that the company was keen to make a U.S sports acquisition. He made similar remarks to SportsBusiness Journal last September. He declined to comment for this story. He said in September that while he expected the sports division to make money, near term profits were not as important. With the deep pockets to back that up, Lagardere with a BEST purchase could be a major competitor to IMG, CAA and Octagon. BEST and Lagardere have already done business together. Last year, BEST's head of tennis, **KEN MEYERSON**, defected to Lagardere with some of his clients, including **ANDY RODDICK**. In return, Lagardere paid BEST a low seven-figure settlement.



AN IMPRESSIVE ACQUISITION: BEST represents about 200 athlete clients and boasts a major NFL and NBA practice, as well as a tennis practice and fledging coaches and broadcaster practice. Blue Equity launched into the sports business in the summer of '06 by acquiring the tennis, television and events divisions of the former SFX Sports as well as the practice of veteran NBA and NFL agent **BILL STRICKLAND**. Sports pioneer, tennis agent and founder of the former firm ProServ **DONALD DELL** joined Blue Equity as part of that deal. Dell still is a key exec at BEST. The company became a major player in the NFL business, when in May '07 it acquired the business of prominent NFL agent **JOEL SEGAL**, who counts Titans RB **CHRIS JOHNSON**, Saints RB **REGGIE BUSH** and Eagles QB **MICHAEL VICK** as clients. In the summer of '08, BEST acquired the practice of major NBA player agent **DAN FEGAN**, who counts Mavericks F **SHAWN MARION**, Suns G **JASON RICHARDSON** and Nets F **YI JIANLIAN** as clients. The sports division of Blue Equity was rebranded as BEST (Blue Entertainment Sports Television) in March '08. Its other sports businesses include Team Championship International, which owns participatory sporting events Hoop It Up, Let it Fly, and Kick It, as well as the events SFX owned, operated or held the rights for, such as the Legg Mason tennis tournament, the Boston Marathon, and the French Open and U.S. Open of tennis.

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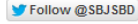
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