

Sports

Expertise

Bird & Bird's extensive experience of advising on competition law in sports reflects the firm's focus on the sector. We advise governing body associations and major events organisers on EU law and competition law, in relation to both their regulatory role and commercial operations, in various sports including football, rugby, cricket and tennis.

We advise on the EU Treaty rules on the free movement of persons and of services (and on the corresponding rules under the EU's association agreements) in relation to the organisation of sports events and tournaments. We advise on competition law in relation to a wide range of operations, spanning the organisation of sports events, the exploitation of media rights (for example through joint selling of rights for participating entities) and in relation to a variety of commercial agreements. These agreements include sponsorship agreements, merchandising and licensing agreements, agreements for the staging of sports events or matches, and ticketing (including payment) arrangements. In relation to sponsorship and merchandising agreements, we frequently advise on related commercial arrangements between the parties, involving for example exclusive sourcing of the relevant products.

We have been closely involved in some significant competition law investigations in the sector. These have included the successful defence of an investigation by the UK broadcasting regulator OFCOM concerning alleged joint selling of radio broadcasting rights to football matches. We also advised the French professional league in proceedings before the French Competition Council to obtain (successfully) the extension of the permitted licensing term for live broadcasting rights for football league matches from three to four years.

Case study:

We advised the Football Association on the application of EC and UK competition law to a number of commercial arrangements and tenders relating to the sale or licensing of media rights in relation to football matches controlled by The FA and on competition law in relation to numerous agreements relating to sponsorship, staging of matches, licensing of rights and related issues.

Case study:

We advised the French football league in a procedure before the Competition Authority in connection with the exclusive distribution of premium channels/content by some xDSL operators



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