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How Cooley Steered The Boston Celtics' Multistep $6.1B+ Sale

By **Al Barbarino**

David Silverman

Law360 (February 13, 2026, 5:50 PM EST) -- When the sale of the Boston Celtics was announced in March 2025 at a valuation of at least $6.1 billion, it became the most expensive transaction ever for a professional sports franchise at that time.

In June 2024, the Celtics had capped a dominant season with an NBA championship — the team's 18th — as the Grousbeck family prepared for a generational transition, with Irv Grousbeck serving as the family's financial steward and his son, Wyc Grousbeck, leading the team's day-to-day operations.

"Irv was a professor at Stanford Business School, and had a number of connections to Cooley partners in the Stanford Palo Alto community," said David Silverman, a Cooley LLP mergers and acquisitions partner who was part of the team that represented the family.

Early discussions with the Grousbeck family centered on stewardship as much as economics, Silverman said.

"Initially, conversations with Irv related to his long-term views of both his estates and some of the entities through which he had invested in the Celtics, and, at the broadest levels, ensuring that the Celtics continued to be in the hands of a long-term steward that was aligned with the interests of the franchise," Silverman said.

Grousbeck's key objectives included maximizing the value of the investment for himself, his estate and his beneficiaries.

That goal appears to have been met through a two-step sale scheduled to conclude in 2028. After a Grousbeck-led investment group acquired the team for $360 million in 2002, the Celtics are now expected to command a valuation of up to $7.3 billion when the deal is finalized.

By the time the sale process formally took shape, the environment for professional sports transactions had changed dramatically. Franchise ownership had emerged as a distinct asset class, buoyed by escalating media rights deals, strong demand for live events and a growing pool of global capital competing for scarce marquee assets.

In the NBA, those trends were amplified by the soaring values of the league's new media agreement, which reset expectations for long-term revenue growth. The media rights deal locked in a new 11-year agreement worth roughly $76 billion, with NBCUniversal, Amazon Prime Video and The Walt Disney Co.'s ESPN and ABC networks covering national NBA broadcasts from the 2025-26 through the 2035-36 seasons.

Silverman called the media deal a "significant driver of expectations for revenue uplift," as was the scarcity element of a marquee franchise coming to market.

The team's on-court performance added momentum. The Celtics' 2024 championship run translated into deep playoff revenue and heightened commercial demand at a time when the organization was also managing its cost structure carefully, Silverman explained.

The deal's structure was shaped by the composition of the Celtics' ownership group, which included long-term and financially sophisticated investors with differing liquidity and estate-planning objectives.

"Some members of the Celtics cap table were looking for liquidity, while others wanted to sort of continue the ride," Silverman explained.

Certain legacy owners also agreed to roll over equity into the new ownership group, a feature that supported the record valuation. Silverman noted that the rollover "provides the buyer with a financing source that's already built in and less sensitive to each additional dollar of the purchase price."

The buyer group is led by private equity veteran William Chisholm, and also includes Boston business executives and philanthropists Rob Hale, an existing Celtics owner; Bruce A. Beal Jr., president of Related Cos.; and Sixth Street, a global investment firm.

Under the deal structure, at least 51% of the team transferred at the initial closing, with remaining interests expected to be acquired in a second tranche by 2028.

While the deal was announced at a $6.1 billion valuation, the total consideration could rise to as much as $7.3 billion once the second stage is completed, reflecting anticipated NBA revenue growth and continued increases in franchise values.

Silverman said the approach allowed sellers to optimize value without placing an outsize financing burden on the buyer group at the outset.

While multistage franchise sales are not unprecedented, they carry distinct risks, a point underscored by disputes that have emerged in other NBA transactions. For example, the multistep sale of the Minnesota Timberwolves saw a staged transfer of control to buyers Marc Lore and Alex Rodriguez devolve into arbitration after seller Glen Taylor alleged the group missed a payment deadline. An arbitration panel ultimately sided with the buyers, forcing the completion of the deal and highlighting the potential pitfalls of deferred-closing structures.

Silverman said those types of situations informed Cooley's negotiations with both the buyer and the league. The transaction included detailed mechanisms designed to minimize funding failures, valuation disputes and execution risk.

"Any time the seller has a multistep transaction, they want to ensure certainty of payment at the subsequent events, that there's a clear mechanism for pricing that equity and that there would be real consequences if that second stage wasn't completed in accordance with the parties' contractual promises," Silverman said.

He also credited the professionalism of the Wachtell Lipton Rosen & Katz counsel to the investor group, calling that team "equally talented and cooperative in spirit" as the two sides worked "to find the right construct to get the deal done."

Beyond the economics and structure of the deal, the sellers were focused on conviction and cultural fit. As part of the transition, Wyc Grousbeck is slated to continue in the roles of CEO, co-owner and alternate governor through the 2027-2028 NBA season.

Recalling a transaction kickoff meeting at the Celtics' Waltham, Massachusetts, training facility, Silverman pulled out a championship hat during a call with Law360 — a souvenir he said Wyc Grousbeck had distributed at the event.

"There was a real passion for the Celtics ... and Bill Chisholm, more than two decades on [from the Grousbecks' 2002 purchase], had the same sort of passion for the Celtics, motivating him to pursue the deal in the way that he did," Silverman said.

Chisholm made clear he was prepared to reorganize his professional life to be active in Boston, Silverman noted, a signal that resonated with the selling group.

"I don't think you do that unless you really love the team," Silverman said.

--Editing by Alanna Weissman.
