

ASU's Sports Law and Business program is in a league of its own

Selig Speaker Series draws heavy hitters from the sports world to inspire aspiring students

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Breaking into the baseball business, or any other sport, is like hitting a grand slam — difficult but highly satisfying.

It requires solid connections, says [Aaron Hernandez](#), assistant dean and executive director of the [Allan "Bud" Selig Master of Sports Law and Business program](#) in the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law.

That's why he created the [Selig Speaker Series](#), which brings in heavy hitters from the world of sports to speak to students in the program. The graduate program, the first of its kind in the country, celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

"Sports is rife with nepotism," said Hernandez, who joined ASU in 2020. "We needed to create highly nepotistic opportunities that our students would benefit from."

Mike Hazen, general manager for the Arizona Diamondbacks, is kicking off this year's series at 6 p.m. on Feb. 6 in the Great Hall at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law on the Downtown Phoenix campus. He will be followed later this year by Jimmy Sexton, a sports agent who represents the National Football League players for the Creative Artists Agency. The series is free and open to the public.

Event details

Selig Speaker Series

Previous speakers include Michael Bidwill, owner of the Arizona Cardinals; James Jones, general manager for the Phoenix Suns; and Karen Leetzow, president of the Chicago Red Stars.

“When you look at our track record, you see that they are pretty blue-blooded people involved in sports,” said Hernandez, a first-generation law school graduate who attended Marquette University for its sports law program. “We think of ourselves as having the premium offering for people who want to break into sports.”

Hernandez said the goal of the series is twofold.

“One, we want to show off the connections that we've got. You look at the roster, it's pretty impressive. I challenge another program to put their speaker lineup for a year up against that one.”

“The second part is to introduce these people to our students and our sports law community,” said Hernandez, who previously worked as the associate director of football at the NCAA.

The series gives students a private one-hour window to meet the speaker and gain indispensable knowledge from these leaders in the sports industry while making valuable connections. That is followed by a talk that is opened to the public.

Hernandez said that the series has gained national recognition. After speaking at the series, Bidwill talked about the program with another NFL owner at a league meeting.

Hernandez said it was “surreal” to have the Selig program being discussed among NFL owners at a league meeting.

Hernandez says he plans to build on the program's success.

“We have been able to grow this to a national draw of speakers in the sports industry,” he said. “We have aspirations of making the event itself a national one, where people make the trip to Phoenix specifically for the Selig Speaker Series. Alumni and supporters reach out to me all the time saying they want to fly in for this thing and they do. This has been wonderful for us because we benefit from this affinity around the world... It helps solidify ASU as a leader in the sports

Who: Mike Hazen, general manager for the Arizona Diamondbacks

When: 6 p.m., Feb. 6

Where: Great Hall, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Downtown Phoenix campus

RSVP

Next speaker ...

Who: Jimmy Sexton, a sports agent who represents the National Football League players for the Creative Artists Agency

When: 6 p.m., March 27

Cost: The series is free and open to the public.

More info

industry.”

10 years of industry education

[Evan Singletary](#), assistant director of the program, says Hernandez is the catalyst for successfully expanding the program's brand.

“He has the ability to really connect with students and connect with people in the industry,” said Singletary, who is also a former student-athlete and program alum. “He is the glue that brings them both together.”

The Master of Sports Law and Business program was started in 2015 with the help of a \$2 million endowment from Selig, Major League Baseball's commissioner emeritus. The graduate program combines the study of sports, law and business to help students receive an employment edge in the competitive sports field.

“Working in the sports industry is something not well advertised,” said Singletary, who has worked with NCAA teams as well as the Los Angeles Rams.

“If you want to get into marketing or business, there are a lot of pathways. Not for sports. The ASU program presents a clear and tangible way to get into real-world sports by providing opportunities for students to learn from people who have done the very thing they want to do,” he said.

Singletary discovered the program during the pandemic. His immediate goal after graduation was to work in sports. He stumbled on ASU's Master of Sports Law and Business and never looked back.

“It was an awesome experience,” said Singletary, who teaches several classes in the program. “Going through the program allowed me to understand sports as a whole, whether it was working in the business or legal areas of the industry or just enjoying sports.”

Singletary says he learned things like contract analytics in sports and business, the legal aspect of sports and how to increase ticket revenue.

“But also, being able to develop a network of people in the industry was really cool,” he said. “I was talking to people that I wanted to be some day but also I was in the room connecting with people from the Phoenix Suns and the Diamondbacks.”

The program initially enrolled students that were predominantly from Arizona, but now they are drawing from across the country.

Part of the appeal is that Phoenix has three major league sports teams. But a big draw is the faculty, which is comprised of people with power positions in the industry.

Selig flies in every week to teach MLB Impact on Law and Society, and also share stories about legends such as Hank Aaron and Jackie Robinson.

Students do not need to be pursuing a law degree to apply but the program does look for applicants with experience in sports. Nearly half of the program's students are or were student-athletes; 20% are completing the program alongside earning their JD.

ASU ranks among [top U.S. institutions for employable graduates](#), and the Sports Law and Business program is no exception. More than 80% percent of alumni have jobs in the sports industry.

"We get a lot of talented people in here and we need to make sure they are in front of the right people so they can show off their dance, which brings me back to the speaker series where we bring in people with a lot of sway," Hernandez said. "We hear from so many students that say the program opened up opportunities they didn't know existed."

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



From left: Aaron Hernandez, assistant dean and executive director of ASU's Sports Law and Business program; Greg Powers, head coach, ASU Hockey; and Marina Carpenter, general counsel, Arizona Coyotes converse during the Fall 2023 Selig Speaker Series event. Photo by Julia Jacome