

## The Firms That Dominated In 2020

By Jack Karp

*Law360 (November 29, 2020, 8:02 PM EST)* -- The eight law firms topping Law360's Firms of the Year managed to win 54 Practice Group of the Year awards among them, for guiding landmark deals, scoring victories in high-profile disputes and helping companies navigate uncharted legal seas made rough by the coronavirus pandemic.

The top spot was shared by Covington & Burling LLP and Latham & Watkins LLP — which were both also named Firms of the Year in 2019 — each nabbing eight practice group awards. Kirkland & Ellis LLP and Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP were close behind with seven wins apiece. And Mayer Brown LLP, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP and Sullivan & Cromwell LLP all followed, each notching six wins.

Many of the firms credited their success this year to a collaborative nature and their attorneys' ability to cooperate across practice areas.

"We see increasingly that clients are focusing on our collaborative, team-based culture as something that sets the firm apart," Covington Chair Doug Gibson told Law360, adding that "our model fosters our partners bringing other partners into matters if they have the most relevant expertise and experience."

Kenneth M. Doran, chairman and managing partner at Gibson Dunn, sounded a similar note, saying his firm's "practice groups work together really quite seamlessly."

"We bring a team-oriented approach to address our clients' issues in, I think, a novel manner, a creative manner, and we work aggressively with our clients to produce big wins," he said.

That ability to bridge practice areas and locations was especially important for some firms during this year's pandemic. "I think it has thrown into relief how good we were at coordinating across practices and markets," said Michele Johnson, global chair of Latham's litigation and trial department. The pandemic "really showed how connected we were even though we can't be together."



## Latham

One of the most high-profile of Latham's wins this year came representing the underwriters in Saudi Aramco's \$29.4 billion IPO, the largest of all time. The complex, cross-border transaction required the cooperation of attorneys from at least 10 Latham offices and five jurisdictions and involved the firm's capital markets and energy practice groups, according to Marc Jaffe, global chair of the firm's corporate department.

"To say the transaction was multijurisdictional would be an understatement," Jaffe said.

The record-shattering deal established Saudi Arabia's national oil entity as the world's most valuable company at the time of the offering, with an initial market capitalization of \$1.7 trillion.

Not to be outscored, the firm's sports and betting practice group kicked a winning goal for the U.S. Soccer Federation.

In March, a Latham team subbed in for previous defense counsel just weeks before trial in a much-followed pay discrimination suit brought by the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team against U.S. Soccer over claims the federation paid its women less than their male counterparts.

U.S. Soccer's original legal team had sparked public backlash with its argument that the women were paid less because they have less skill than male players.

Latham instead demonstrated that the women's team had negotiated fixed salaries rather than higher game bonuses and that World Cup bonuses were based on prize money awarded by FIFA and not in control of U.S. Soccer, Johnson said.

"We refocused to arguments that were aligned with U.S. Soccer's values, and ours as well," said Johnson.

In May, a California federal judge agreed and dismissed the female players' equal pay claims on summary judgment.

The firm's mergers and acquisitions group also worked on several big-ticket deals this year, including Uber Technologies Inc.'s \$2.65 billion acquisition of Postmates Inc. and Nvidia's pending \$40 billion purchase of Arm Ltd. from Japan-based SoftBank Group, marking the largest transaction this year in the mergers and acquisitions space.

--Editing by Amy Rowe.

