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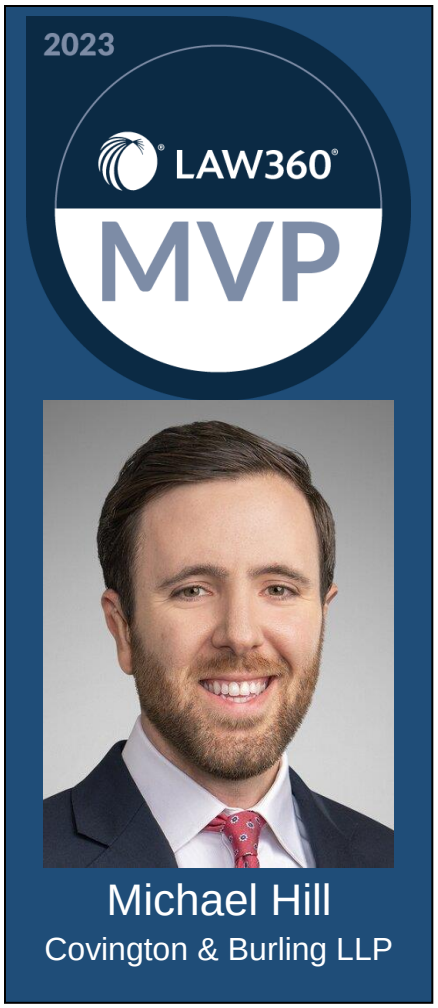
MVP: Covington's Michael Hill

By **Benjamin Morse**



Law360 (October 16, 2023, 1:08 PM EDT) -- Michael Hill of Covington & Burling LLP's commercial and corporate transactional practice coached the National Football League through its multibillion-dollar streaming deal with YouTube, earning him a spot as one of Law360's Media & Entertainment MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment in the past year:

Hill said his top accomplishment was advising the NFL on its "Sunday Ticket" deal transferring the program from DirecTV to YouTube. The subscription game package had belonged to DirecTV since its inception in 1994. YouTube owner Google reportedly agreed to pay the NFL more than $2 billion a year for the rights to air games for seven years.

"It was probably the biggest deal I worked on both in terms of the size of the deal, the importance to the broader media and streaming industries, and the satisfaction of working on it. I thought it was a really cool deal," Hill said.

It was also a transaction that took patience. "I've been working with the NFL for a long time on this stuff," Hill said. "It's a long process — the appeals can come up to the end."

Why he's in entertainment law:

Hill went into entertainment and media law in part because he has a personal interest in the industry.

"I've always been an avid consumer of media, of entertainment, whether it's TV or movies," he said.

Hill also enjoys the business side of media and entertainment. "I like the fact that I get to practice law focused on an industry, so I'm not just the legal mind but also understand the commercial realities of the industry as well."

He added, "Some lawyers are more, 'I practice a particular type of law,' [but] I feel like I am more of an industry lawyer where, working with different clients across the same industry, you get an interesting bird's-eye view of the whole industry and how different companies think about different things."

How entertainment law has evolved:

The biggest change to the industry since Hill started practicing entertainment law is the switch from cable television to streaming services, he said.

"When I first started, cable TV was still kind of the driver of the entertainment industry, the moneymaker," Hill said. "Obviously, that's declined a lot. Streaming has picked up a lot of that slack."

The business model of the streaming industry "is still very much in flux," he said, referencing in part the SAG-AFTRA strike and union members' demands regarding streaming services. The union represents actors in film and television, voiceover actors, and others, and it began a strike in July, seeking, among other things, higher residuals from streaming.

His advice to young attorneys in his field:

"If you want to be a media and entertainment lawyer, you have to be someone who can speak the language of the media and entertainment industry from a non-lawyer perspective," Hill said. He said it takes a lot of work, including reading industry trades and staying up to date on the day's top issues.

--As told to Benjamin Morse.

Law360's MVPs of the Year are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals, and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2023 MVP winners after reviewing more than 900 submissions.

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