

Sports & Entertainment Beat

Sports & Entertainment Spotlight – May 20, 2021

By Joshua Bloomgarden on 5.20.21 | Posted in Sports & Entertainment Spotlight

As readers from last week will recall, we spent [some time examining the notion of credibility](#). One week later, we're witnessing what credibility (or lack thereof) hath wrought on our subjects. Bob Baffert? Banned from New York horseracing tracks (including the upcoming Belmont Stakes) and facing potential civil liability from bettors who claim that the horse that they had bet on should have won the race – not Baffert-trained and doping offender *Medina Spirit*. The weight of Elon Musk's word in the cryptocurrency world? Apparently hugely significant as cryptocurrency markets have been in freefall mode since his latest comments about Bitcoin and Dogecoin. Mark Emmert and the NCAA? Predictably inert on the subject of name, image and likeness (NIL) laws, setting up July 1st as a looming question mark for whether and how college athletes will be able to reap the benefits of recently passed legislation in a handful of states, as a flurry of activity in the private sector seems to suggest that change is on the horizon – whether the NCAA likes it or not.

With the stage set, below is a sampling of the other stories I am highlighting this week:

- As all-time basketball great Kobe Bryant was officially enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame (and I encourage each of you to take 12 minutes of your day to watch his wife, [Vanessa's courageous and moving tribute to the late legend](#)), uncertainty remains as to his estate's destination for his brand's sneaker and apparel endorsement after having parted with Nike a few months ago – with some speculating that a return to Nike might actually be the most logical fit.
- NBCUniversal's new marketing playbook in the increasingly fragmented media landscape includes [serving as liaison between NBCUniversal talent and brands](#). With their recently striking a development deal with entertainment superstar Miley Cyrus, one can't help but wonder how they will leverage that relationship.
- Though evidence suggests celebrities do not have a significant impact on the public's likelihood of getting a COVID-19 vaccine (apparently that un-sourced meme that your friend's great aunt shared on Facebook carries more weight), many personalities are nevertheless taking up the mantle.

- A new platform enables celebrities to create their artificial intelligence-generated “deepfake” voice recordings for use in connection with brand endorsements, sponsorships and the like. Apart from drumming up memories/fears from a litany of sci-fi films, this new platform also raises legal questions relating to ownership of the resulting recordings and control over the exploitation of one’s name, image and likeness.
- NFT marketplace, NBA TopShot, faces new scrutiny as part of a class action lawsuit alleging that the “Moments” or tokenized basketball highlights being sold to platform users are not just mere collectibles but are actually securities being sold in violation of U.S. securities laws. However, there may be good reason to think the lawsuit might not last a “moment” longer.

Endorsement Deals, Sponsorships & Investments

[How Sneakers Became a \\$79 billion Business—and an Undisputed Cultural Symbol for Our Times](#)

May 18, 2021 via Co.Exist

Sneakers, once the symbol of athleticism, have transcended their primary function to become commercial and fashionable objects of desire. From sportswear and street style to catwalk fashion, sneakers have made their mark as cultural commodities.

[What Celebrities and Brands Stand to Gain from NFT Startups](#)

May 17, 2021 via Inc.com

From tennis champion Naomi Osaka to actor Johnny Depp, dozens of celebrities have launched non-fungible tokens (NFTs) — digital assets such as artwork and collectibles that are bought and sold using cryptocurrency — in recent weeks. Now, many are stepping even further into the trendy industry by backing NFT startups.

[Cubs News: Ryne Sandberg Now Smokes Marijuana Almost Every Day](#)

May 14, 2021 via Cubbie’s Crib

So, apparently Cubs legend Ryne Sandberg is a big weed guy now. There’s something I never thought I’d write. But with marijuana going mainstream more and more by the day, the Hall of Fame second baseman is now a spokesperson for the Chicago-based Verilife.

[LeBron James Imagines Life With A Snooze Button in New Mtn Dew Rise Campaign](#)

May 13, 2021 via Forbes – Business (subscription may be required)

Has LeBron James always been an early riser? Well, he’s never had much time for the snooze button. “I’ve always kind of been a morning person,” the Los Angeles Lakers basketball star tells Forbes. “Over the last 16 years, I have turned more into a morning person,

because you start to have kids, and when you start to have kids, you don't really get to decide if you want to be at night or morning person. You are a what-they-are person.”

Would You Pay £99,000 for This Self-Lacing Nike? Sneakers Unboxed Review

May 13, 2021 via The Guardian (Australia) - World News

‘It was all about being the freshest,’ says Koe Rodriguez, toothbrush in hand. ‘That’s how you pulled honeys, how you got respect from the hard rocks. That’s how you laid your game down. It was all about being fresh.’ The hip-hop historian’s not talking about his teeth, though, but his sneakers.

Celebrities Don’t Move the Needle When It Comes to Vaccine Willingness

May 13, 2021 via Morning Consult News

After administering more than 260 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, the United States now faces its next hurdle: encouraging hesitant Americans to get the shot. Famous figures, including director Spike Lee, Fox News anchor Brian Kilmeade and former President Barack Obama, have stepped up to share their experiences, taking on roles as vaccine influencers.

The World’s 10 Highest-Paid Athletes: Conor McGregor Leads A Group Of Sports Stars Unfazed By The Pandemic

May 12, 2021 via Forbes - Business

THE WORLD'S 10 A record four athletes — including one quarterback and two soccer legends — each earned \$100 million or more in the past year. For much of 2020, the world’s leading athletes were sidelined, working for reduced pay, playing to empty seats or isolated in competitive bubbles designed to thwart a pandemic that has sapped billions of dollars from professional sports. Still, for the best of the best, things couldn’t be better — at least in terms of their financial heft.

Film & TV

MarVista Entertainment, Elefantec Global Team for Spanish-Language Movie Powerhouse (EXCLUSIVE)

May 18, 2021 via Variety

MarVista Entertainment, one of the world’s biggest independent movie studios, and Elefantec Global, the media-entertainment startup launched by former Televisa execs José “Pepe” Bastón and Jeff Symon, have joined forces to create a Spanish-language movie studio.

NBCUniversal Television and Streaming Inks Pact With Superstar Miley Cyrus

May 17, 2021 via RealScreen

The Peacock brand has inked an overall talent and development deal with multi-hyphenate

global superstar Miley Cyrus. Part of the agreement includes a first look deal between NBCU Television and Streaming and Hopetown Entertainment, the prodco owned by Cyrus (pictured) and her mother, Trish.

Netflix's Hefty 'Knives Out' Deal Signals Toward a Future in Franchises, TV Adaptations of Films

May 17, 2021 via Firstpost

The “Knives Out” deal also highlights how much easier it is for a streaming service to exploit an already known title than to build one itself. “Knives Out.” Suddenly, the \$40 million whodunit, which Rian Johnson (Looper) wrote and directed as a “palate cleanser” after he completed a Star Wars, was a juggernaut that commanded top dollar in a frenetic bidding war.

Behind NBC's Decision to Put the Golden Globes On ice for a Year

May 15, 2021 via Los Angeles Times

Throughout the scandal swirling around the Golden Globe Awards show, longtime broadcaster NBC appeared flat-footed — seemingly unprepared to tackle the crisis that was consuming one of its biggest live TV events. Since late February, the Hollywood Foreign Press Assn., the group that owns the lucrative Golden Globes franchise, has been at the center of a furor over alleged ethical lapses, self-dealing and a lack of Black members — revelations that surfaced in a Los Angeles Times investigation.

Jimmy Fallon, NBC Making 'The Kids Tonight Show' Under New Development Deal

May 13, 2021 via Variety

Jimmy Fallon, host of “The Tonight Show,” and NBCU are expanding their programming together under a new development deal. “The Kids Tonight Show,” a late-night program hosted by young people, is among the projects being developed under a new pact struck between NBCUniversal and Fallon’s production outlet, Electric Hot Dog.

ESPN Inks Slimmed-Down \$4 Billion MLB Rights Extension

May 13, 2021 via Sportico - Business

ESPN has signed off on a renewal of its MLB rights deal, inking an extension that will keep the cable network’s signature Sunday Night Baseball telecast on the air through 2028. The seven-year pact was announced on May 13 at the top of Disney’s second-quarter earnings call.

Music Biz

Leonard Williams Can't Revive Warner Music Royalties Class Suit

May 18, 2021 via Bloomberg Law - Intellectual Property News (subscription may be required)

Musician Leonard Williams lost his bid to undo a lower court's denial of class certification in a

lawsuit against Warner Music Group Corp. over allegedly unpaid foreign streaming royalties, according to an unpublished decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Google Reaches Tentative Deal in Tin Pan Alley Copyright Suits

May 14, 2021 via Bloomberg Law - News Top Stories (subscription may be required)

Google LLC has reached a tentative settlement that would resolve three copyright lawsuits brought by the heirs of prominent Tin Pan Alley songwriters in California federal court over the availability of alleged “pirate” digital copies of their music on the internet search giant’s platform.

Non-Fungible Tokens

Judges Can’t Allow For-Profit Group to Use Likeness for NFTs

May 18, 2021 via Bloomberg Law - Big Law Business - Top Stories (subscription may be required)

Group wants to use Tennessee judges’ images to raise money for charity. It would take some proceeds, which is not ethically permissible, opinion says. Judges can’t ethically participate in a for-profit group’s plan to use their likeness for unique, or non-fungible, tokens that would be auctioned to raise money in in part for legal aid groups, the Tennessee judicial ethics committee said.

NBA’s Top Shot Lawsuit Says Dapper’s NFTs Need SEC Clampdown

May 14, 2021 via Sportico Business

A new lawsuit charges that the sale of NBA Top Shot “Moments” violates the federal Securities Act of 1933, a law designed to both safeguard investors in the purchase of publicly offered securities and deter fraudulent acts in the marketing of those securities. Dapper Labs, a Vancouver-based blockchain company that has partnered with the NBA, and its CEO, Roham Gharegozlou, are accused of illegally selling unregistered securities. The company, however, has a number of defenses that it can and likely will offer in future court filings.

NFTs are Trending Up. Here are the Opportunities for Brands and Retailers

May 12, 2021 via CB Insights - Blog

NFTs are a very real opportunity for brands and retailers, with applications ranging from authenticating tangible goods to reducing friction in e-commerce to generating new revenue through virtual sales. Here are the top-line bullets you need to know.

Why This Unicorn Founder Believes NFTs Could Still Have a Bright Future

May 12, 2021 via Insider Monkey Blog

NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, have somehow managed to capture the public imagination like no other crypto trend has before. Even as the price of Bitcoin was skyrocketing to new all-time highs, the global headlines were focused on the \$69 million Christie's auction of Beeple's art collection, and names including Eminem, Grimes, and Jack Dorsey have famously minted and sold their own NFTs. However, after the explosive hype of early 2021, it now seems that the initial boom is starting to die down.

Right of Publicity

La. Senate Votes for College Athlete Endorsement Deal Bill

May 18, 2021 via New Orleans City Business - News

The Louisiana Senate unanimously voted on May 17 to let college athletes make money off endorsements and sponsorship deals, similar to actions being taken across several states. Sen. Pat Connick's bill could have had Louisiana as the first state to allow student athletes to earn cash off their name, image or likeness.

'Dating App' for Athletes and Brands Ends Seed Round With Eye on NCAA

May 18, 2021 via Sportico - Business

As it looks to make immediate inroads in the impending collegiate name, image and likeness market, digital marketplace Icon Source closed a \$1.6 million seed round with support from existing and new investors, including Hawke Ventures. Hawke Ventures, whose portfolio includes subscription box company FabFitFun and beauty and wellness festival host, Beautycon, is the venture capital arm of marketing consultancy Hawke Media. Icon Source's chief revenue officer Scott Taylor previously held the same role at Hawke Media, which has worked with several thousand brands to date. Icon Source said it plans to tap into that expansive network as it continues to bring companies onto its platform.

College Athletes May Finally See Their Big Pay Day

May 17, 2021 via Social Media Biz

College sports have always been a draw for millions of fans across the nation, and with nearly 8 million viewers tuning in to this year's March Madness, it should come as no shock that there's plenty of money to be made. In fact, college sports bring in an average of \$1 billion in revenue each year. While organizations like the NCAA and the universities that educate these student athletes certainly stand to make big bucks, there's been a long standing debate as to whether or not the athletes who are the face of the game should get a piece of the pie as well.

Now There's a Deepfake Audio Platform Where Celebrities Can License AI-Generated Voice Clips

May 16, 2021 via Gizmodo

Whenever deepfakes make the news, it's almost always for the latest terrifying way bad actors have figured out how to spawn hoaxes or cyberbully people using the AI-powered technology. However, the media industry has found some more practical (and less sinister) applications, such as using face swaps to craft more realistic visual effects, syncing actors' mouths with dialogue in dubbed films, and, now, automating voice work.