

The title 'Sports Ahead of the game' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. A small green horizontal line is positioned above the word 'Sports'. The background is the same sunset basketball court scene as the top header.

Sports Ahead of the game

NEWSLETTER | SPORTS | H1 2026

“Sports remains one of the most compelling sectors for long-term investors. As AI reshapes many industries, the fundamental drivers of sports, participation, engagement and premium experiences, continue to underpin attractive investment opportunities.”

DERK VERHEUL
SPORTS SPECIALIST
OAKLINS

MARKET TRENDS

Key insights

The key trends behind today's sports investment landscape

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Oaklins' team in Italy acted as the exclusive financial advisor to Siparex ETI on the acquisition of ATK Sports

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Sports M&A reaches a new high

The global sports sector continues to distinguish itself as an active investment market, with transaction activity reaching another record level. Over the twelve months through June 2026, 499 sports-related transactions were announced. Strategic acquirers continued to account for the majority of activity, while financial investors represented more than 40% of transactions. At the same time, cross-border transactions represented 42% of total deal activity, illustrating the international nature of sports investing.

The resilience of the sector is supported by several long-term structural drivers, including increasing health and wellness awareness, growing sports participation and fan engagement and the premiumization of sports products and experiences. But the transaction data also points to the broader development within sports, given that investors are expanding their focus beyond individual clubs, brands and service providers towards the platforms and rights holders that organize and monetize sport itself.

Competition for fans is becoming competition for capital

The recent FIFA Forward Enterprise proposal fits a broader structural trend. FIFA proposed bringing its commercial

rights and tournament operations together in a new FIFA-controlled entity, which was expected to raise up to US\$4.2bn from minority investors based on an initial equity valuation of US\$20bn. Following significant opposition from across the football ecosystem, FIFA subsequently withdrew the proposal.

Competition organizers are redesigning formats, creating more premium inventory and seeking more predictable commercial economics as they compete for global fans, media attention and institutional capital. This is already visible across the sports landscape. LaLiga partnered with CVC to accelerate the commercialization of the league and its clubs, while France's LFP created a dedicated commercial subsidiary in which (also) CVC acquired a 13% stake. In basketball, the NBA and FIBA are exploring a new European competition built around permanent franchises and institutional ownership.

For investors, these developments point to an investable sports universe that is gradually moving upstream. Capital is no longer focused only on the clubs and businesses participating in sport, but increasingly on the leagues, competition platforms and rights holders that control access to fans, content and commercial rights.

The football World Cup is a revenue catalyst, but does not automatically translate into increased profit

Few events concentrate global attention as powerfully as a football World Cup. The 2026 tournament drew more than

6.8 million spectators across 104 matches and was distributed through broadcast agreements in more than 220 territories. That creates immediate upside for sportswear, licensed merchandise, media, gaming, travel and technology businesses.

Adidas provides a good illustration. In Q2 2026, revenue increased 14% to a record €6.7bn, Performance revenue rose 39% and apparel increased 35%, with Football growth explicitly linked to World Cup collections. Yet operating profit increased by only 5%, partly because adidas invested an additional €212m in World Cup campaigns and activations. For companies, event-driven revenue is therefore only half the story: marketing intensity, margin, inventory risk and post-event retention determine how much of the uplift converts into sustainable earnings.

For companies, what remains after the tournament matters most

The answer differs by business model. Licensed apparel and equipment can see sharp event-year sales but also face inventory and markdown risk. Digital platforms can acquire users quickly, but value depends on retention, repeat engagement and paid conversion. B2B technology and infrastructure providers may benefit before the event and can turn a deployment into references, renewals and international expansion. Businesses that own first-party data, differentiated IP or distribution are better placed to turn temporary attention into lasting value.

Institutional capital continues to broaden the sports ecosystem

A clear takeaway from the last twelve months' transaction data is the continued breadth of investor interest across the sports ecosystem. While investments in professional teams and leagues remain highly visible, capital continues to be deployed across a wide range of adjacent sports assets, with examples including fitness and wellness operators, golf clubs and participation-driven (technology) concepts.

This diversified investment landscape is reflected throughout the transaction data. KSL Capital Partners' multi-billion-euro acquisition of ClubCorp and DIF Management's acquisition of Enjoy Wellness are investments across fitness, infrastructure and participation-led businesses that demonstrate the attractiveness of sports-adjacent assets. At the same time, investments in Eagle Football Group, Swansea City, Royal Multisport, the Cleveland Browns and several emerging sports franchises underline the enduring appeal of premium rights holders. Rather than viewing sports as a collection of individual clubs, investors approach the sector as an interconnected ecosystem offering multiple investment themes and long-term consolidation opportunities.

Technology continues to play an increasingly integral role across the sports value chain

Sports media and technology represented more than one fifth of all transactions during the period, making it the second largest segment within our dataset. Interestingly, the transactions themselves suggest that investor focus is evolving beyond standalone sports technology companies towards solutions embedded in the day-to-day operations of sports organizations.

Recent acquisitions and growth investments involving Teamworks, Sportway Media Group, Pixellot, LiveBarn and PlayerData span across different sports-related elements such as athlete performance, automated broadcasting and club management software. Collectively, these transactions illustrate

how technology is becoming an integral part of the sports value chain rather than a standalone vertical.

Artificial intelligence is expected to accelerate this development. Unlike industries in which AI can potentially replace large parts of the underlying product or service, sports remains fundamentally built around scarce assets such as media rights, live events, iconic brands and loyal fan communities. AI is therefore more likely to enhance the economics of those assets by helping sports organizations operate more efficiently, deepen fan engagement and unlock additional value from existing assets. This combination of resilient underlying assets and accelerating technological innovation continues to make sports an attractive sector for long-term investments.

Strong brands continue to command investor attention

The value investors place on differentiated assets is also visible in sports products and apparel. Strategic buyers and private equity firms continued to pursue companies that strengthen brand portfolios, expand international distribution and increase exposure to attractive growth categories such as pickleball, outdoor recreation and cycling.

Public market valuations reinforce this trend. Listed sports apparel and equipment companies (10.8x LTM EV/EBITDA) continue to trade at a meaningful premium to sports retailers (5.2x LTM EV/EBITDA), reflecting investors' preference

for businesses with differentiated products, intellectual property and strong consumer loyalty.

New sports continue to expand the investment universe

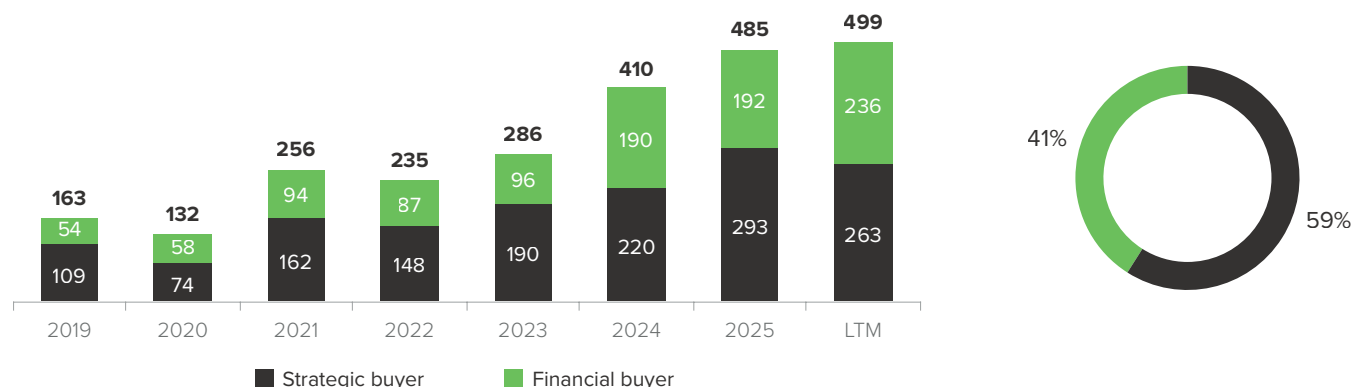
The transaction data also highlights the growing diversity of the sports investment landscape. Alongside traditional sports properties, investors increasingly targeted niche sports such as pickleball, lacrosse, sailing, cricket and digitally enabled competition formats. These investments reflect a broader trend whereby capital is flowing towards sports that demonstrate growing participation, expanding audiences and improving commercial maturity.

As the range of investable sports assets continues to broaden, the opportunity set for both strategic and financial investors expands accordingly. Combined with sustained transaction activity, increasing institutional participation and continued technological innovation, these developments support a positive outlook for sports M&A. We expect the sector to remain active, with high-quality assets continuing to attract significant investor interest.



Deals dashboard

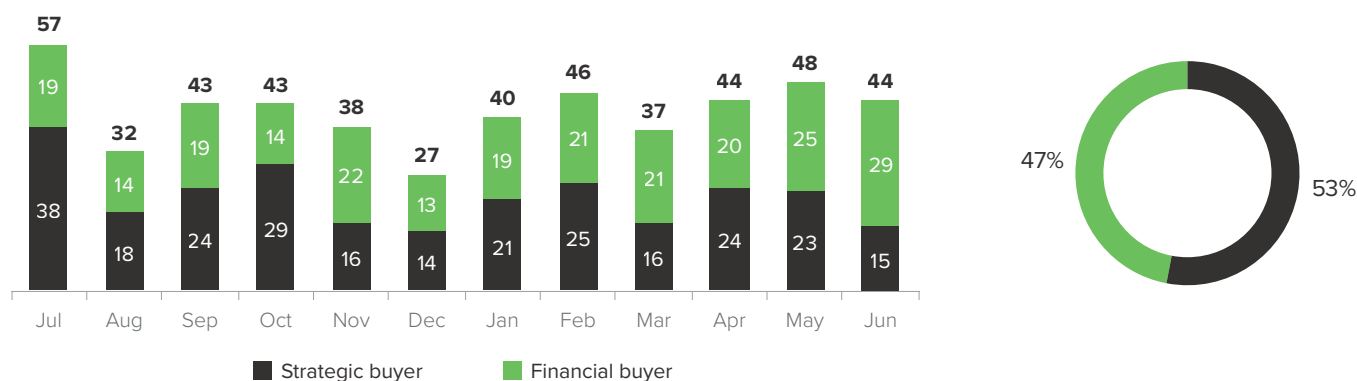
Annual number of deals in the sports sector split by buyer type (2019 – 2026 June LTM)



Note: Financial buyers only include platform acquisitions, excluding add-on acquisitions

Sources: Mergermarket, Oaklins research

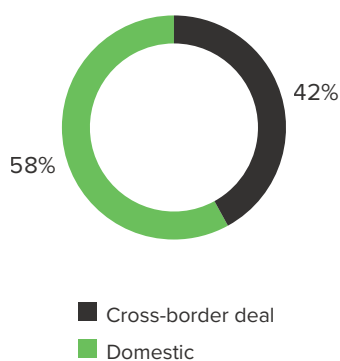
Monthly number of deals in the sports sector split by buyer type (2026 June LTM)



Note: Financial buyers only include platform acquisitions, excluding add-on acquisitions

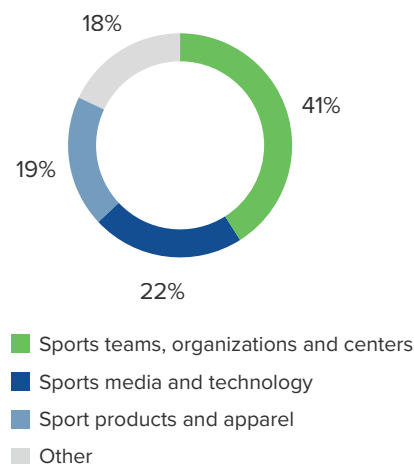
Sources: Mergermarket, Oaklins research

Cross-border distribution – 2026 June LTM



Sources: Mergermarket, Oaklins research

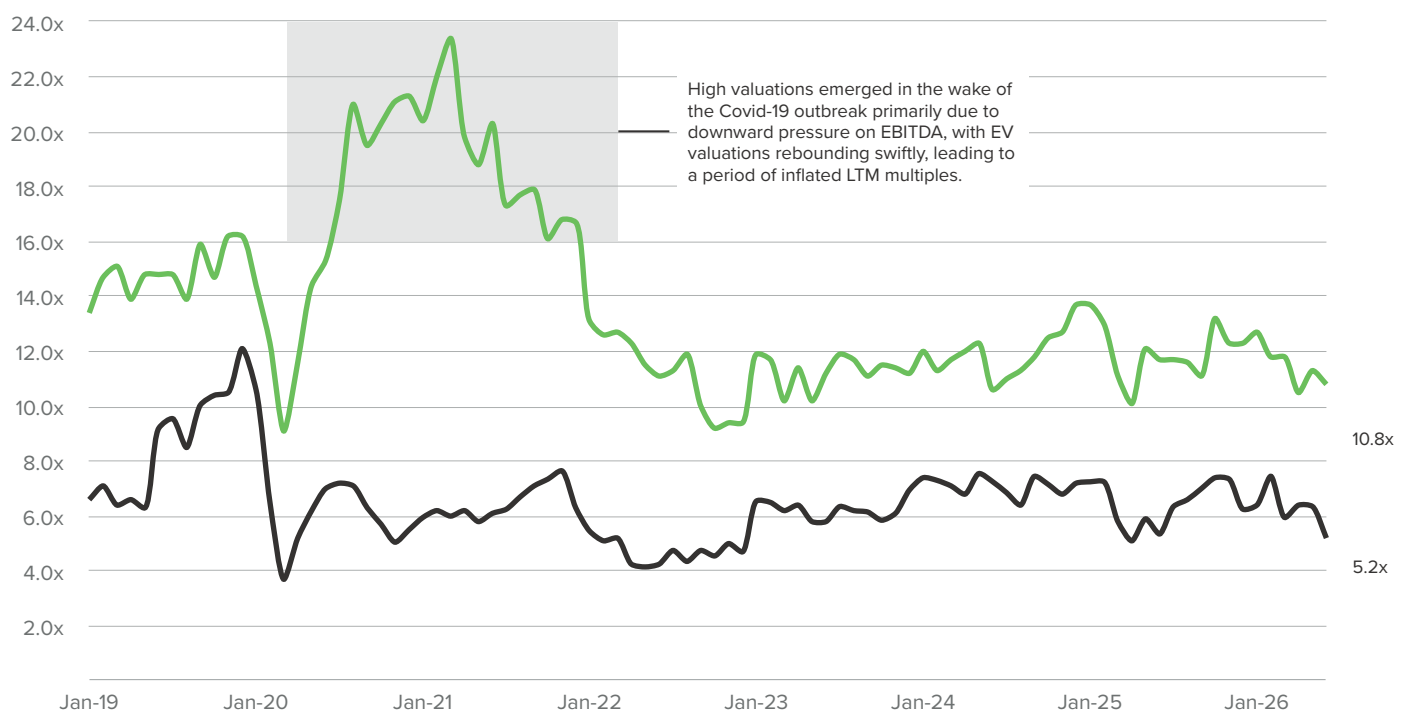
Sector split – 2026 June LTM



Sources: Mergermarket, Oaklins research

Valuation

Valuation of sports products and apparel, split between brands and retail (LTM EV/EBITDA, as per June 30, 2026)



Source: CapitalIQ

Sports apparel and equipment brands H1 2026



Sports retail H1 2026



Sports teams, organizations and centers:

June

Cannae Holdings, a US-based private equity firm, acquired **Exeter Rugby Club**, a UK-based professional rugby club, for €38m

Ares Management, a US-based private equity firm, and **Joe Tsai**, a Hong Kong-based sports investor, led a Series E funding round for **Premier Lacrosse League**, a US-based professional lacrosse league, of €88m

DIF Management, a Netherlands-based infrastructure investment manager, acquired **Enjoy Wellness**, a Spain-based operator of sports centers, for €300m

Shamrock Capital Advisors, a US-based private equity firm, acquired an undisclosed stake in **Swansea City Football Club**, a UK-based professional football club, for an undisclosed amount

MSP Sports Advisors, a US-based sports investment firm, acquired **Black Foils SailGP Team**, a New Zealand-based professional sailing team, for an undisclosed amount

Feyenoord Rotterdam, a Netherlands-based professional football club, acquired a 95% stake in **Stadion Feyenoord**, a Netherlands-based football stadium, for an undisclosed amount

KSL Capital Partners, a US-based private equity firm, acquired **ClubCorp**, a US-based operator of golf courses, country clubs and resorts, for €2.3bn

Graf Global, a US-based special purpose acquisition company, acquired **BIG3**, a US-based professional three-on-three basketball league, for €251m

May

Arctos Partners, a US-based private equity firm focused on sports, acquired a 3.2% stake in the **Cleveland Browns**, a US-based professional American football team, for an undisclosed amount

Urban Gym Group, a Netherlands-based gym operator, acquired **Vondelgym Rotterdam**, a Netherlands-based fitness

location, for an undisclosed amount

A consortium of investors led by the **Lakshmi Mittal family**, a UK-based private investor, and **Adar Poonawalla**, an India-based private investor, acquired a 93% stake in **Royal Multisport**, an India-based professional cricket team, for €1.3bn

A consortium of investors led by **Apollo Sports Capital**, a US-based sports investment platform, acquired a 30% stake in **Pickleball**, a US-based pickleball platform, for €192m

April

KKR, a US-based global investment firm, acquired **Hometown Soccer Holdings**, a US-based football league, for an undisclosed amount

DulN Sports Club, a Spain-based operator of fitness and wellness clubs, acquired **SohoFit Badalona**, a Spain-based fitness and wellness center, for an undisclosed amount

Lionel Messi, an Argentina-based professional footballer and private investor, acquired **Unio Esportiva Cornellà**, a Spain-based professional football club, for an undisclosed amount

A group of Norway-based investors participated in a funding round for **Norway Chess**, a Norway-based organizer of international chess tournaments, of €9m

Penner Sports Group, a US-based sports investment firm, acquired a 40% stake in the **Colorado Rockies**, a US-based professional baseball team, for €574m

Quantum Pacific, a UK-based private equity firm, acquired **Los Gallos Spain SailGP Team**, a Spain-based professional sailing team, for an undisclosed amount

March

Nordic Wellness Group, a Sweden-based gym operator, acquired **Step In**, a Sweden-based gym operator, for an undisclosed amount

Synergy Sports Capital, a US-based private equity firm focused on sports, acquired **LOVB Salt Lake**, a US-based professional volleyball team, for an undisclosed amount

A consortium of investors led by **Aditya Birla Group**, an India-based industrial group, acquired **Royal Challengers Sports**, an India-based professional cricket team, for €1.5bn

Arcadia MapleLeaf Soccer, a US-based private equity firm, acquired **Ottawa Rapid FC**, a Canada-based professional women's soccer team, for an undisclosed amount

CR7, a Portugal-based investment company owned by Cristiano Ronaldo, acquired **Union Deportiva Almería**, a Spain-based professional football club, for an undisclosed amount

February

Bertram Capital, a US-based private equity firm, acquired Club **Gallos Blancos de Queretaro**, a Mexico-based professional football club, for an undisclosed amount

Somersault, a US-based operator of children's gymnastics centers, acquired six locations of **The Little Gym**, a US-based provider of children's gymnastics programs, for an undisclosed amount

January

David Lloyd Leisure, a UK-based operator of sports and recreational clubs, acquired **Avenue Tennis**, a UK-based tennis and fitness facility, for an undisclosed amount

Peter Mallouk, a US-based private investor, acquired a 71% stake in the **Kansas City Wizards**, a US-based professional soccer club, for €428m

Crux Football, a UK-based women's football investment platform, acquired a 49% stake in **FC Rosengård**, a Sweden-based professional women's football club, for an undisclosed amount

Sports products and apparel:

June

Frasers Group, a UK-based sports retailer, acquired a 78% stake in Accent Group, an Australia-based retailer and wholesaler of footwear and apparel, for €524m

Shamrock Capital Advisors, a US-based private equity firm, led a growth investment in **Cards HQ** and **Sports Card Investor**, US-based sports card

retail, data and content platforms, of an undisclosed amount

May

Lumiforte, a Netherlands-based developer of functional coatings, acquired **Footline**, a Belgium-based developer of sports field line-marking products, for an undisclosed amount

Selkirk Sport, a US-based manufacturer of pickleball equipment, acquired **Bread & Butter Pickleball**, a US-based manufacturer of pickleball equipment, for an undisclosed amount

GoldenPump, a Germany-based manufacturer of gym apparel, acquired **Sportnahrung Engel**, a Germany-based retailer and manufacturer of sports supplements, for an undisclosed amount

April

Pure Hockey, a US-based retailer of hockey equipment, acquired **Perani's Hockey World**, a US-based hockey equipment retailer, for an undisclosed amount

Fenix Outdoor International, a Switzerland-based outdoor products group, acquired a 35% stake in **Devold of Norway**, a Norway-based manufacturer of sports, leisure and protective clothing, for €10m

BSN Sports, a US-based provider of sports equipment and apparel, acquired **Sports Endeavors**, a US-based specialty soccer retailer, for €256m

NextStage, a France-based private equity firm, acquired **Sports Co**, a France-based holding company of the SKISET, Skimium and Netski brands, for an undisclosed amount

March

Pelican International, a Canada-based provider of paddle sports equipment and outdoor lifestyle accessories, acquired **KL Companies**, a US-based manufacturer of kayaks, canoes and recreational boats, for an undisclosed amount

Siparex, a France-based private equity firm, acquired **ATK Sports**, an Italy-based manufacturer of ski touring bindings and accessories, for an undisclosed amount

WeSports Group, a Sweden-based sports equipment group, acquired **Renew Group Sweden**, a Sweden-based manufacturer of floorball equipment, for an undisclosed amount

February

MidEuropa, a Poland-based private equity firm focused on Central Europe, acquired **Oshee Polska**, a Poland-based manufacturer of sports drinks, water and protein bars, for an undisclosed amount

Manifattura Valcison, an Italy-based manufacturer of cycling and winter sports apparel, acquired **Wolvenberg**, a Belgium-based distributor of cycling apparel, for an undisclosed amount

Head Austria, an Austria-based sports equipment company, acquired **Le Col**, a UK-based producer of cycling apparel, for an undisclosed amount

Frasers Group, a UK-based sports retailer, acquired **Maxi Sport**, an Italy-based online retailer of sportswear, footwear and equipment, for an undisclosed amount

January

ANTA Sports, a China-based manufacturer of sports apparel, footwear and accessories, acquired a 29% stake in **PUMA**, a Germany-based manufacturer of sportswear, footwear and accessories, for €1.5bn

Bluestone Equity Partners, a US-based private equity firm focused on sports, media and entertainment, acquired an undisclosed stake in **Selkirk Sport**, a US-based manufacturer of pickleball equipment, for an undisclosed amount

Alta Semper Capital, a UK-based private equity firm, acquired **Nature's Rule**, a United Arab Emirates-based manufacturer of sports nutrition and dietary supplements, for an undisclosed amount

Synergia Capital Partners, a Netherlands-based private equity firm, acquired **Van Assendelft Hollander Bogaert**, a Netherlands-based provider of camping and outdoor sports equipment, for an undisclosed amount

Sports media and technology:

June

Gamma Waves, a Netherlands-based sports investment company, acquired a 20% stake in **Sportway Media Group**, a Sweden-based provider of AI-automated sports video and data production, for €20m

Affirma Capital, a Singapore-based private equity firm, acquired **SmartScore**, a South Korea-based golf technology and club management platform, for €62m

May

Pentland Ventures, **Darco Capital** and **Bolt Ventures**, UK- and US-based investment firms, led a Series A funding round for **PlayerData**, a UK-based provider of wearable sports technology, of €10.3m

Cristiano Ronaldo, a Portugal-based professional football player and private investor, acquired **LiveMode**, a Brazil-based sports streaming service, for an undisclosed amount

UNA Sports Group, a US-based investment firm, acquired the New York Summer and Winter teams of **X Games**, a US-based extreme sports team platform, for an undisclosed amount

PlayMetrics, a US-based provider of operations management software for youth sports organizations, acquired **SportsEngine**, a US-based sports technology platform for youth and amateur sports, for €341m

April

Bluestone Equity Partners, a US-based private equity firm, acquired **PoolHouse Global**, a UK-based developer of gaming software for snooker and pool, for an undisclosed amount

Zwift, a US-based virtual cycling and fitness platform, acquired **VirtualTraining**, a Czech Republic-based developer of virtual cycling training software, for an undisclosed amount

Hg Capital, a UK-based private equity firm, led a growth investment in **Teamworks**, a US-based provider of enterprise software for elite sports organizations, for an undisclosed amount

Bay Collective, a US-based multi-club ownership platform, acquired **Sunderland AFC Women**, a UK-based professional women's football team, for an undisclosed amount

March

Vintia, a Germany-based leisure management software company and part of Salto Wecosystem, acquired **Tactics**, a Belgium-based provider of management software for sports, youth and cultural activities, for an undisclosed amount

Eversports, an Austria-based sports booking platform, acquired **MATCHi**, a Sweden-based racket sports booking platform, for an undisclosed amount

February

Sports Entertainment Gaming Global, a US-based mobile gaming and lottery platform, acquired **Veloce Esports**, a UK-based esports and motorsports media platform, for an undisclosed amount

Genius Sports, a UK-based provider of sports data and betting technology, acquired **Zeal**, a US-based digital sports and gaming media network, for €1bn

January

PSG Equity, a US-based private equity firm, acquired an undisclosed stake in **Pixellot**, an Israel-based provider of AI-automated

sports production and streaming solutions, for an undisclosed amount

Ascent Sports Group, a US-based youth and amateur sports technology platform, acquired **LiveBarn**, a Canada-based provider of live and on-demand sports broadcasting, for €340m

Other:

June

EMMA Capital, a Czech Republic-based investment firm, acquired a 20% stake in **Entain Holdings CEE**, a Poland-based sports betting and gaming group, for €425m

May

KKR, a US-based global investment firm, acquired **Arctos Partners**, a US-based private equity firm focused on sports, for €1.7bn

April

Bally's Intralot, a Greece-based provider of lottery and sports betting solutions, acquired **Evoke**, a Gibraltar-based online gaming operator, for €2.1bn

Sports Tours International, a UK-based sports travel agency, acquired **Golfbreaks**, a UK-based specialist golf travel company, for an undisclosed amount

March

Coral Tree Management, a US-based private equity firm, acquired an undisclosed stake in **Range NYC**, a US-based indoor golf and entertainment company, for an undisclosed amount

KKR, a US-based global investment firm, acquired **Global Sport Group**, a UK-based sports investment and management platform, for €1.2bn

February

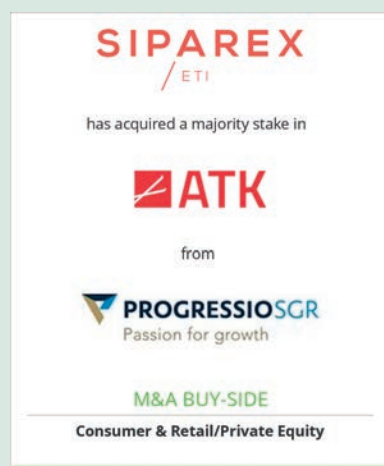
Shore Capital Partners, a US-based private equity firm, acquired **Go2Sports**, a US-based provider of support and development services to youth sports clubs and leagues, for an undisclosed amount

Groupe Eventeam, a France-based sports and entertainment group, acquired **Hemispheres Voyages**, a France-based sports and cultural travel agency, for an undisclosed amount

Alignment Growth Management, a US-based growth investment firm, led an investment round for **Kings Competition**, a Spain-based operator of the **Kings League** seven-a-side football competition, of €55m

Highlighted Oaklins Sports deal

Siparex ETI has acquired a majority stake in ATK Sports from Progressio SGR



Oaklins' team in Italy acted as the exclusive financial advisor to the buyer, Siparex ETI

Siparex ETI has acquired a majority stake in ATK Sports S.r.l. from Progressio SGR, marking the exit of the seller and the reinvestment of the founding family's second generation. Acquisition financing was provided by a banking pool led by Banco BPM. The transaction represents the first major milestone for Siparex ETI's team in Italy.

ATK Sports is a global leader in the design and manufacture of high-performance ski mountaineering bindings. Founded in 2006, the company generates over 85% of its revenue internationally through a commercial subsidiary in the USA, a network of more than 1,100 specialized retailers and over 25 distributors operating across more than 30 countries. Siparex ETI is a French private equity firm. The company's industrial plan focuses on accelerating international expansion, developing the hybrid bindings segment, launching innovative outdoor components and pursuing external growth opportunities through bolt-on acquisitions.

Progressio SGR is a private equity fund that served as the majority shareholder of ATK Sports from 2021 until its exit.

Selection of Oaklins' sports deals

 has been acquired by SFH Holding M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail	 has been acquired by  M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail	 has acquired a majority stake in  from  M&A BUY-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Private Equity	 has sold  to  M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Private Equity	 has been acquired by AWC M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail
 has acquired  M&A BUY-SIDE Healthcare/Private Equity	 has secured a Series A funding round FUNDING, DEBT ADVISORY & ECM Industrial Machinery & Components/TMT	 has sold its Events division to  M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail	 has been acquired by Transformation Capital M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Private Equity	 has acquired  M&A BUY-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Private Equity
 has acquired nutrimuscle® from  M&A BUY-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Food & Beverage/Private Equity	 has been acquired by  M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Private Equity	 has been acquired by  M&A SELL-SIDE Consumer & Retail/Private Equity	 management has invested in the company alongside BC Partners  MANAGEMENT ADVICE (MBI/MBO) Consumer & Retail/Private Equity/TMT	 has been acquired by  M&A SELL-SIDE Business Support Services/Private Equity/TMT

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- Debt advisory
- Valuation advisory
- Corporate finance services

RECOGNIZED EXPERTISE

Sports is one of our focus areas. Combining comprehensive sector knowledge with global execution has led Oaklins to become one of the most experienced M&A advisors in this sector and others with a large network of relevant market players worldwide. This results in the best possible merger, acquisition and divestment opportunities for your company.

If mergers, acquisitions or divestitures of businesses or business units are part of your strategy, we would welcome the opportunity to exchange ideas with you.

✉ DERK VERHEUL

Director
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Derk is a director at Oaklins Netherlands, where he is the global lead of the sports sector team. He is also part of Oaklins' consumer team. Derk has extensive experience in advising an array of clients, including family businesses, corporates and private equity firms, on numerous cross-border and local transactions. His expertise spans various sectors, especially sports, TIC, consumer goods, IT services and energy. Notable M&A transactions he has worked on include the sales of Kubus Sports to Transformation Capital, Trust to Egeria, Simadan to Parcom Capital and HSO to The Carlyle Group.

Derk joined Oaklins Netherlands in 2017 after completing his master's in finance at the University of Groningen.



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Debt Advisory		Equity & ECM Advisory		Valuation Advisory	Founder
					
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