

A Powerhouse in Sports Representation

An Interview with Michael “Vino” Levine and Howard Nuchow, Co-Heads, CAA Sports

EDITORS' NOTE In 2006, 2007 and 2008, Michael Levine was recognized by Street & Smith's The Sports Business Journal as one of the Top 40 Sports Executives Nationwide Under the Age of 40. He was inducted into its Hall of Fame in 2008 and has since made 13 appearances on the publication's list of the Top 50 Most Influential Executives in the Sports Business. In 2013, Levine earned the Honoree of the Year Award from the UJA-Federation of New York's Sports for Youth. He graduated from Cornell University with a BA in history.

Howard Nuchow has been featured consistently among the Top 50 Most Influential Executives in the Sports Business by Street & Smith's The Sports Business Journal since 2008, and was one of its Top 40 Sports Executives Under the Age of 40 in 2003 and 2007 before entering its Hall of Fame in 2008. Prior to joining CAA in 2007, he was the first employee of Mandalay Sports Entertainment (MSE), one of the premier sports companies in the U.S., which owns and manages professional sports franchises throughout the country.

Nuchow and Levine are on the board of CAA Eleven, a company they helped form in 2012, which manages the broadcasting, sponsorship, and licensing rights of the UEFA EURO™, UEFA European Qualifiers™, and UEFA Nations League™ on behalf of UEFA.

COMPANY BRIEF The five-time recipient of the award for “Best in Talent Representation and Management,” presented by The Sports Business Journal, CAA Sports (caa.com) represents more than 3,000 of the world's best athletes in such sports as baseball, football, hockey, basketball, and soccer, in addition to coaches, on-air broadcasters, and sports personalities. Beyond traditional athlete representation, CAA Sports provides unique opportunities for clients off the field in areas including entertainment, licensing, endorsements, speaking, philanthropy, publishing, and video games. CAA Sports also works in the areas of media rights, property sales and sponsorships, brand consulting, venue development and strategic advisory, and executive search, and received the award for “Best in Corporate Consulting” at the 2018 Sports Business Awards, and “Best in Property Consulting, Sales, and Client Service” in 2014, 2016, 2019, and 2022.



Michael Levine



Howard Nuchow

What was your vision for creating CAA Sports 16 years ago and what did you see as the opportunity for the business?

Nuchow: It became very clear early on in our conversations with Creative Artists Agency (CAA) that building a sports division within the world's best talent agency would enable us to create unprecedented opportunities for clients across all areas of the

global sports industry. We learned that CAA was built on a culture of collaboration – this idea that agents work in teams, pulling from the individual expertise and strengths of its members – to provide best-in-class service to clients.

We initially set our sights on building the best sports talent representation practice, and once established, we would move into other areas of the sports business.

Levine: Our plan was to assemble a team of world-class agents who were entrepreneurial, service-oriented, and could thrive in a collaborative environment. Throughout our careers, we have both witnessed different roll-up attempts in the sports industry, and from that we knew that it was not just about gathering superstar agents, but very specifically identifying agents who would be a good cultural fit. Then, if we arm them with CAA's global expertise and resources in entertainment and culture, CAA Sports would be an absolute powerhouse in the talent representation space.

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We saw this philosophy quickly come to life in those early years, and our impact was immediate. Shortly thereafter, our success was acknowledged publicly. We won Best in Talent Representation at the Sports Business Awards in 2009, 2010, and 2011, and for eight consecutive years we topped *Forbes’* Most Valuable Sports Agencies list beginning in 2013.

How has CAA Sports evolved over the years?

Nuchow: We are the world’s largest sports representation agency. Our clients include many of the most accomplished athletes in football, basketball, baseball, hockey, and soccer, in addition to broadcasters, coaches, and sports personalities. We handle all aspects of their business – both on and off the field – and are in awe of what these clients have achieved throughout their careers.

Levine: We have also solidified our leadership position in the corporate representation side of the sports business. Today, we work on behalf of brands, leagues, teams, governing bodies, college conferences, and owners on their most important revenue streams like sponsorship, media rights, and facility development; we provide executive placement services; and so much more.

Within the past decade, we have replicated all of the domestic success we have seen in these areas overseas, and are incredibly proud of the impact the agency and our clients are having on the international sports marketplace.

How do you define CAA Sports’ mission and purpose?

Nuchow: At CAA, we strive to be the best company in the world and the most

powerful resource for our clients. We are advocates. We mentor one another, and aim to be leaders internally and externally. We are committed to making our company reflective of the world we live and work in every day.

CAA Sports is now 750 employees strong, spanning five continents. Our leadership team is second to none, beginning with Paul Danforth, President of CAA Sports. Paul has been with the agency almost as long as we have, and we consider him our third partner. There is nobody as accomplished or as highly regarded as Paul in our business.

Levine: We have the most impressive female executives working at the highest levels of leadership in our organization: Jordan Harnsberger is our Chief of Staff, and Lisa Joseph-Metelus serves on the Agency Board; Aubree Curtis and Liz Gray co-lead CAA Brand Consulting; Jennifer Duberstein is our General Counsel, and Beth McClinton leads our communications strategy globally; Marissa Dishaw and Jen Kardosh oversee Marketing and Client Servicing in Baseball and Hockey, respectively, and Jessica Holtz just became the first female NBA Agent ever to broker a super-max contract and she did two in one day.

The future is bright for the next generation of leaders at CAA Sports. Alexa Cook in our Property Sales division joined the agency as an assistant in 2010, and last year she brokered more than \$1 billion in sponsorship transactions on behalf of such clients as the Los Angeles Clippers, Formula One, and Riot Games.

What differentiates CAA Sports from other agencies in the industry?

Levine: The agency’s culture is by far our biggest differentiator. It’s something we collectively work hard to nurture every day. The idea is simple: when we take care of each other, good things happen. We encourage everyone to live by these words. We are accountable to each other. We share knowledge and experience. We work in teams. We are advocates for our clients. I don’t know of any other agency that operates this way. It’s one of the most rewarding aspects of the job.

What do you see as the core strength of the CAA Sports team?

Nuchow: Our people are our strength. We have the great fortune of working with the most ambitious, driven, and innovative agents and executives. Our colleagues work at the highest levels of the industries in which we operate, making anyone, anywhere just one phone call away at any time. Our leaders are exceptional mentors, investing their time in training the next generation of superstars. Our bench is deep and impressive, and continues to grow every day.

What has made the relationship between the two of you work so well?

Levine: We are friends first and foremost. Howie and I have grown up in this business together. Our families are close. We vacation together. We love each other; we fight all the time; and are equally committed to making decisions that benefit everyone.

Nuchow: The foundation of our relationship is built entirely on trust. We share the same goals for each other, the company, our clients, and all of our employees – and those are success and happiness. The relationship is actually pretty easy, and is just as good today as it was 16 years ago when we started CAA Sports, and 30 years ago when we first met.

How do each of you focus your efforts and describe your management styles?

Levine: We definitely have a yin-yang approach to management, but we share the same philosophy in that any decisions we make have to be for the greater good of CAA.

Nuchow: Vito is infectious – you just want to be around him and his positive energy. He is the biggest advocate for everyone’s success. My strength is seeing around the corners. I look for things that might impact our business and success.

Levine: The combination of our skill sets enables us both to bring the best versions of ourselves to work every day, while knowing the other person is watching out for them every step of the way. Howie is constantly looking out for me and I couldn’t possibly do this job as comfortably or capably without him constantly covering my back.

What is next for CAA Sports?

Levine: We are 19 business areas strong, with plans to keep growing. We are experiencing tremendous success both domestically and internationally. We have just opened a new office in Singapore, and have plans to expand into even more markets worldwide.

Nuchow: We are so proud of the many women and men in leadership who are guiding this company to new and exciting opportunities. It’s a really transformative time for us. ●