



PRIVATE EQUITY DIVISION

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Overview of the Deal

On March 2025, a consortium led by Symphony Technology co-founder Bill Chisholm announced a deal to acquire a controlling interest in the Boston Celtics, Boston's flagship basketball team, in partnership with Sixth Street Partners. The deal has been valued at a record-breaking \$6.1 billion. The seller, Boston Basketball Partners LLC, originally led by Wyc Grousbeck, will have a minority interest in the deal, with Grousbeck retaining CEO and Governor positions at least through the 2027-28 NBA season. The deal is undergoing processing by the NBA Board of Governors and is to be finalized by mid-2025. This acquisition reflects a broader surge of interest by private equity in elite sports assets, particularly those with strong global brand recognition and commercial potential like the Celtics.

What is a basketball franchise?

A basketball franchise is a professional team with exclusive rights to play in a formalized league such as the National Basketball Association (NBA). Franchises are seen as profitable business assets given their exclusive geographic rights, entitlement to revenue sharing in the league, and access to collective bargaining agreements and television contracts. The teams capitalize on ticket sales, merchandising, concessions, local broadcasts, and corporate sponsors.

The closed-league model of the NBA provides stability to its franchises through limited entry and exit, thus maintaining long-term value. The Boston Celtics are among the teams with greater historical success in the league. Loyal fan bases, premium location venues, and strong merchandising are the main cash cows of the company. The Celtics' new ownership group is likely to leverage global brand value and local economic presence of the team through sustained initiatives to build greater global reach and digital fan bases.

Market Figures

Attributes	Values (USD Million)
Estimated Market Size (2025)	USD 12.94 billion
Forecasted Market Size (2030)	USD 18.51 billion
Projected Value CAGR ('25-'30)	7.42%

The American basketball market, driven primarily by the NBA, is projected to experience healthy growth throughout the decade. The NBA market was valued at around \$12.94 billion in 2025 and is also projected to grow at a CAGR of 7.42% to reach a value of approximately \$18.51 billion by 2030. The US remains the leading basketball market, but others, especially in Asia, are also growing fast through digital access and young fan participation.



Forbes reports that the average franchise value in the NBA increased to \$4.4 billion in 2024, a YoY increase of 15%. The Celtics' value of \$6.1 billion doesn't just account for premium valuation based on brand history and market size but also places it firmly above average. The NBA's future media-rights negotiations and global licensing initiatives are projected to continue driving franchise values upward in years to come.

Private Equity Landscape in Sports

The increasing presence of Private Equity funds in sports is transforming franchise ownership and operations on a global scale. Professional sports are attracting more and more investors due to their stable cash flows stemming from fan loyalty, media rights, streaming services, and global merchandising. PE firms have been shifting their position from merely passive owners to active strategic partners.

Around the world, PE companies have acquired stakes in football, Formula 1, rugby, NBA, NFL, and MLB. Sixth Street has also acquired a stake in Bay FC (women's soccer), and partnered with the San Antonio Spurs, another iconic basketball team. Managers like Silver Lake, RedBird Capital, and Arctos Sports Partners have backed a variety of European football teams. This wave of capital in the past few years marks a structural shift in how sports franchises are valued and operated.

Overview of Buyers and Target Company

Target Company Overview:

Within the NBA, the Boston Celtics are one of the most storied and accomplished franchises. Founded on June 6th 1946, the Celtics have since won 18 NBA championships, the highest within the entire league. Similarly, the team holds the record for the most division titles, with 35. A notable record is their 11 championship wins within 13 seasons from 1957 to 1969. Despite achieving relatively little championship success from the 1980s to 2000s, the team nevertheless secured numerous conference and division titles during this period. More recently, the Celtics once again won the championship in 2024, signaling potential for a bright future ahead.

The team roster features star players such as Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown, whose stellar performances have been rewarded with lucrative contracts of more than \$30 million USD per year. As a team, the Celtics' wage bills account to almost \$200 million USD each year, which is one of the highest in the league. The current roster comprises seasoned veterans with emerging talents, making it one of the hottest prospects to dominate the league in the coming years. Hence, it emerged as an attractive target in the growing landscape of private equity in sport. With a new ownership consortium and the injection of large amounts of capital no doubt to come in addition to the large amounts of spending already under way at the team, the Celtics are poised to be a very interesting team to follow both from a sporting perspective and an investment perspective.



Buyers Overview:

Bill Chisholm is the founder, managing partner, and chief investment officer of private equity firm Symphony Technology Group (STG Partners). Being an alumnus of Dartmouth and Wharton as well as being a lifelong Celtics fan, he not only has a strong investment expertise but also an intimate understanding of the team — its history, culture, values, and ambitions. Chisholm is widely considered to be the lead buyer within this deal, although the exact size of his stake remains unknown.

Sixth Street is a private equity fund that has committed more than \$1 billion USD as an equity partner. Notably, NBA rules state that a private equity firm cannot be the largest stakeholder of any given team, as well as that the controlling owner must contribute at least 15% of the total purchase price paid for the team.

Bruce Beal Jr. is the president of Related Companies, a leading real estate firm. With over 30 years of experience in developing various projects across a range of asset classes, Beal brings further business acumen and financial expertise to the group. Most importantly, Beal is also the vice chair and partner of another American sporting team — the NFL's Miami Dolphins. His relevant experience in a similar sporting venture will be greatly valuable to the group.

Rob Hale is the founder and CEO of telecommunications company Granite Telecommunications. Notably, he is part of the existing ownership of the Celtics, and will remain on the board upon the acquisition by Chisholm's group. Hale is likewise a lifelong Celtics fan, and crucially already has experience in the team's development. He brings a crucial understanding of the team's current strengths and challenges, and has the understanding of how they can reach a further level of success.

Overall, the multiple buyers within the group contribute unique backgrounds and skill sets. Backed by a significant pool of capital and already boasting a superstar team, the acquisition will likely propel the Celtics to new heights.

Deal Rationale

The \$6.1bn sale of the Boston Celtics to a PE-led consortium represented by William Chisholm marks the rise of the NBA as a premium global asset class. In particular, the NBA's \$76bn broadcast agreement in media rights explains the deep interest in sport teams and the rise in franchise valuations, with the Celtics' deal being the most expensive franchise sale in sports history.

For PE investors, constantly looking for companies with predictable cash flows and non-cyclical businesses, the Celtics represent an unprecedented opportunity for long-term growth, as it combines strong brand prestige, a solid fan base, and consistent competitiveness with resilient long-term cash flows.

The acquirer, Sixth Street Partners, is not new to the sports industry. In 2022, they struck a deal with Spanish soccer team Real Madrid for a stake in certain stadium operations, and separately



increased their stake in FC Barcelona’s LaLiga television rights to 25%. They also already own a minority stake in another NBA team, the San Antonio Spurs—one of the league’s most consistently well-managed franchises. That investment proved instrumental in gaining operational insight and, above all, legitimacy within NBA governance circles, which likely eased the path to this larger bet on the Celtics. Considering their stakes across different teams and championships, Sixth Street has managed to diversify its exposure to the sports industry and is likely exploring opportunities for shared best practices in areas such as merchandising, digital content, and fan engagement, testing the ground for potential synergies. This is part of a growing trend of American investors creating multi-club, cross-sport portfolios aimed at unlocking synergies across leagues, leveraging analytics, and expanding global reach.

Interestingly, the same strategy pursued by Sixth Street had also been sought by Bain Capital. Within the framework of sports diversification, Bain Capital had also recently taken over the Italian football club Atalanta and, shortly after the Celtics’ ownership announced plans to sell in July 2024, the Bain Capital executive Stephen Pagliuca declared his intention to bid for majority ownership of the team. His competitive bid, strengthened by his intimate ties to the organization and the broader basketball ecosystem, emphasized a debt-free structure and corporate continuity. Therefore, one could assume his offer as seeking to bolster the Celtics’ European footprint and perhaps initiating a model akin to City Football Group in soccer. However, Pagliuca’s offer was ultimately rejected, with several reports suggesting that interpersonal tensions between Pagliuca and Celtics majority owner Wyc Grousbeck were a key factor in the deal’s breakdown.

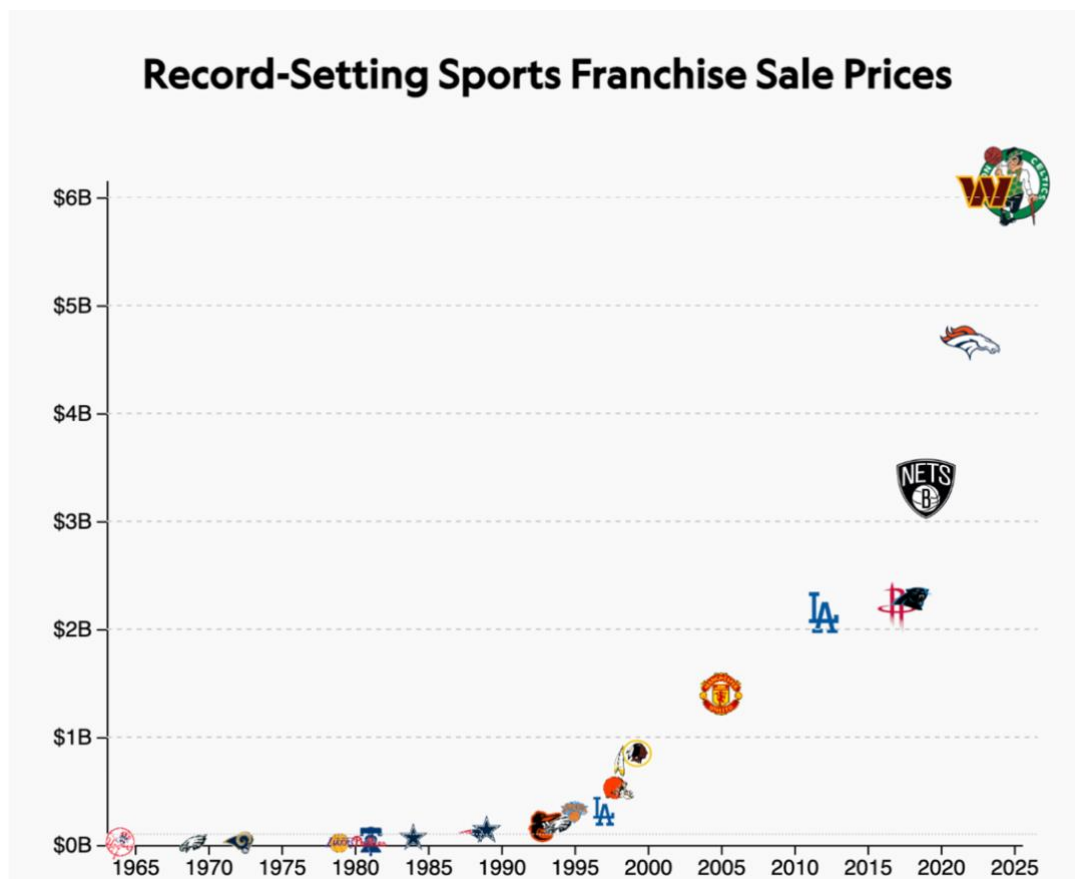
Continuity will still be central even with Sixth Street’s acquisition: the consortium will acquire 51% of the team outright, with a pathway to full ownership by 2028, and Grousbeck will remain team governor until the 2027–28 season. Moreover, the value of the remaining 49% will be tied to league revenue growth. This mechanism both hedges downside risk for buyers and provides sellers with upside if the NBA continues its expansion trajectory. Such a creative structure illustrates how sports finance is evolving: less about gut feel, more about institutional sophistication.

From a strategic lens, Chisholm and his partners likely view the Celtics not just as a team, but as a platform. Symphony Technology Group’s background in software and analytics may promote advancements in fan engagement and performance optimization, making the franchise increasingly tech-enabled. Therefore, we could expect investments in personalized content, digital ticketing, and AI-powered operations. Sixth Street’s participation also signals a potential for expansion through commercial partnerships and global brand growth. Their previous sports investments—in Real Madrid’s stadium financing and the Spurs—suggest they are building a portfolio that spans geographies, leagues, and verticals, in a broad broad scope that could deeply benefit the Celtics.

On the whole, this deal shows that sports teams are not merely trophies, but community-centric media companies with a large-scale impact. This explains why private equity is entering, despite league ownership restrictions. The Celtics are not just a flagship NBA team, but a brand with multi-generational reach, and this sale reveals the complex interplay of capital, legacy, and strategy, ultimately suggesting that sports, once seen as a passion investment, are now ground zero for innovation and institutional finance.

Deal Structure

In a historic deal worth \$6.1 billion, the Boston Celtics are being purchased, breaking the previous record for the most money ever spent on a North American sports team. This is more than the previous record set by the Washington Commanders in 2023, which was \$6.05 billion as showed in the graph below.



Ownership Breakdown:

There are two stages to the acquisition. The investor group headed by Symphony Technology Group co-founder Bill Chisholm will initially purchase a majority stake in the franchise that exceeds 51 percent. It is anticipated that the Grousbeck family and their partners will hold the remaining stake until 2028, at which time Chisholm's group will have the opportunity to purchase complete ownership.

As per NBA regulations, the controlling owner must provide at least 15% of the purchase price in personal funding, and private equity firms cannot hold the largest stake in a team. Chisholm is expected to satisfy those requirements, with reports indicating he'll contribute over \$1 billion personally, including an upfront payment of almost \$500 million at close and the remainder over the following three years.



Financial Metrics:

According to the sales prospectus reviewed by BDT & MSD Partners, the Celtics generated \$493 million in revenue during the 2023–24 season. This implies an Enterprise Value-to-Revenue (EV/Revenue) multiple of approximately 12.4x, underscoring the premium valuation attributed to marquee NBA franchises.

Advisory Roles:

The transaction involves several prominent financial and legal advisors:

- **Investor Group (Buyers):**
 - *Financial Advisor:* Goldman Sachs & Co. LLC
 - *Legal Counsel:* Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz
- **Sellers (Grousbeck Family and Boston Basketball Partners):**
 - *Financial Advisors:* BDT & MSD Partners, J.P. Morgan, and the Jordan Park Group
 - *Legal Counsel:* Cooley LLP

As full ownership changes hands by 2028, the new consortium can pursue opportunities for capital restructuring, such as refinancing current obligations, bringing in minority co-investors, or even securitizing future revenue streams — a tactic more commonly used in contemporary sports finance. With NBA franchise valuations growing exponentially, the Celtics might fetch even greater enterprise multiples in secondary transactions. If the ownership group seeks liquidity in the future, alternatives like partial stake sales to sovereign wealth funds or strategic media partners can be an option, subject to their alignment with NBA governance. The transaction therefore sets a precedent not only in size, but also in how institutional capital can be strategically staged, governed, and deployed in elite-level sport in the coming decade.



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