

## Marketing and Sponsorship: Jerry Cifarelli Jr. buys back ANC from Learfield, and brings founder Jerry Sr. on as his top adviser

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✍️ **T**his is a father-and-son sports marketing story. You won't read many of those in these pages. In 1997, **Jerry Cifarelli Sr.** started a venue signage company with help from the likes of former **NBA** Commissioner **David Stern** and **Alan Cohen**, former owner of the **Boston Celtics** and chairman/CEO of MSG.

**ANC** grew from a supplier of rotational signage to a provider of full-scale venue technology. Some recent examples: a pending scoreboard replacement for the **Washington Commanders**; a new center-hung video display and LED ribbons at the **American Airlines Center** in Dallas; or a full exterior signage buildout at the **Wells Fargo Center** in Philadelphia.

On the way to those projects that can now total in the tens of millions, **ANC** went from private equity ownership to being acquired by **Learfield** in 2015. Jerry Sr. retired in early 2022. **Jerry Jr.**, who grew up in the industry working for **ANC** and Fenway Sports Group, started another venue media company, which Learfield thought similar enough that it sued, alleging that Jerry Jr.'s **C10** was started by former Learfield employees in violation of non-compete agreements. Jerry Jr. litigated right back, accusing Learfield of antitrust. The lawsuits were eventually resolved and C10 bought **ANC** from Learfield early this year. Now it's the prodigal son in charge, with Jerry Sr. an investor/adviser.

Management changes following the acquisition included bringing on longtime **ANCers** **Joseph Occhipinti** as COO, **John Obropta** as chief revenue officer of advertising, along with **Alex Gomez** as executive vice president, business development, and **Kirsten Savage** as head of **ANC's** service.

Difficulties at competitor **Daktronics**, which reported a \$13 million loss in its most recently reported quarter, along with an alarm noted in an **SEC** filing regarding "doubt about our ability to continue as a going concern" (later downplayed by Dak management) have son and father convinced there's a hole in the market big enough to install endless center-hung scoreboards.

"There's a huge opportunity for us to take a bigger piece," said Jerry Jr. "I feel safe saying we're the most stable company in a hardware market that's in a bit of disarray."

**ANC's** model varies from most venue technology providers, in that it reserves and sells advertising on the technology it provides to arenas and stadia.

"Teams most often look at signage as nothing more than a cost center — we're selling what we look at as revenue-generating assets, so if we can help provide that revenue, service the hardware, and provide the software behind it, we're there as long as the venue is," said Cifarelli Jr.

You aren't likely to see **ANC** signage at any of their new installations. Whereas many signage/scoreboard companies pay for sponsorship as part of their deals, "We won't write checks, but we will bring in clients for what we build," said Cifarelli Jr.

Associated agency businesses have **ANC** buying and managing advertising and hospitality for brands including Hankook Tire, and retailer Discount Tires. There's the non-sports business, with a recent installation at the MGM Music Hall at

Fenway in Boston. C10 is set up as a holding company, because “we feel that the industry is primed for consolidation, and the way to grow in this stuff is to go out and acquire,” said Cifarelli Jr.

Jr. is clearly driving the **ANC** bus now, while Sr. is far more content than during his Learfield retirement, because he’ll always want to have some involvement. “It was more than a little emotional to walk away from something you’ve created and grew for so many years,” said Jerry Sr., across the table at Polpo, the Greenwich, Conn., Italian restaurant where he’s been a fixture for decades. “Now I am back with some skin in the game — but it’s the other Jerry’s company.”

As for the footstep following: son after father?

“Our industry’s full of this already,” insisted Cifarelli Sr., citing ownership combinations like the Jones, Kraft, and Leonsis father-son combinations. “We’re doing it at a different scale, but that could change.” More than a quarter-century later, “I still enjoy being in the pick and shovel side of the business.”

We’re certain that’s an attribute, among many, shared by father and son.

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