



Philly.com

Monday, June 12, 2017

LEARFIELD, CONTROLLED BY COMCAST-BACKED \$4B ATAIVOS FIRM, BUYS COMCAST TICKETING BUSINESS

In a big bet on college sports, Comcast Corp. is selling its 300-employee Paciolan event-ticketing unit to Learfield, the college sports-media company controlled by Comcast-backed \$4 billion investment firm Atairos.

The deal will let Learfield bundle and expand services in the multi-billion-dollar college sports media market, which Texas-based Learfield and Comcast see as a major growth area.

Learfield manages advertising and marketing for more than 100 arenas and colleges, including all teams for the Pennsylvania State University Nittany Lions, Iowa State Cyclones, and Alabama Crimson Tide. The company's digital-related services, recently acquired, aim to help athletic departments squeeze more revenue from their sports programs.

Terms were not disclosed on Monday. Comcast Spectacor said it negotiated the Paciolan deal with Learfield in an arm's-length transaction.

Paciolan, one of the nation's largest ticket sellers, had stronger growth prospects with Learfield, Comcast Spectacor said. Paciolan is headquartered in Irvine, Calif., and operated through South Philadelphia-based Comcast Spectacor, processing about 120 million tickets a year and earning a small fee on each ticket transaction.

"Bringing Paciolan's business together with Learfield represents a positive realignment of assets within the greater portfolio," said Dave Scott, Comcast-Spectacor's chief executive officer in a note to employees on Monday.

Comcast Spectacor will now focus on stadium-management services, food concessions and hospitality, in addition to managing the corporate sponsorship of stadiums and arenas. Comcast Spectacor also owns the Flyers, of the National Hockey League, and the Wells Fargo Center.

Scott said in the letter that he expects the Learfield-Paciolan deal to close in about a month. When it does, Paciolan will be a Learfield subsidiary. In the Philadelphia area, Paciolan employs about 20 workers in Exton. Comcast Spectacor said Monday that there were no plans for employee cutbacks.

"We couldn't be happier," Learfield CEO Greg Brown said in a statement.

Atairos, run by former Comcast vice chairman Michael Angelakis, acquired Plano, Texas-based Learfield in late 2016 for more than \$1 billion, according to sources familiar with the deal.

Learfield is one of Atairos's biggest bets and it has connections to Angelakis.

Providence Equity Partners, a private equity firm, was one of the owners in Learfield and made \$425 million, according to published reports. Angelakis was the managing director of Providence Equity, based in Rhode Island, before Comcast hired him as chief financial officer in 2007.

At Comcast, Angelakis negotiated Comcast's acquisition of NBCUniversal for about \$30 billion in 2011 and became a confidant of Comcast CEO Brian Roberts. Seeking to return to deal-making, Comcast agreed to finance Atairos with \$4 billion, with Angelakis heading it. The firm was launched in early 2016, with offices in Bryn Mawr and New York.

Other Atairos deals include a \$250 million investment in the fallen-star online-deals site Groupon and a stake in the nation's largest operator of bowling centers, Bowlmor AMF.