

The Deal

VOICE OF THE DEAL ECONOMY

VOL. 8 NO. 12 JUNE 21 — JULY 4 2010

FACES OF DEAL LAWYERS

The Deal scouts out eight of the best up-and-coming talent in transactional lawyering, including Akin Gump's John Goodgame

THE STEADY HAND

By **CLAIRE POOLE**

THERE'S nothing that John Goodgame likes to do better than surf, having grown up on the beach in Clearwater, Fla. But he also likes to play pickup basketball at the downtown Y in Houston, which he thinks serves him well as an energy transactions lawyer at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. "You may not know everyone, but you quickly are able to identify people's strengths and weaknesses," he says. "And if they're not necessarily good but they have a good attitude, you'll want them on your team."

The 38-year-old Goodgame has been blessed with being good—and having a good attitude. After studying accounting at the University of Florida at Gainesville, he went to the University of Houston Law School on a scholarship and joined Akin Gump after clerking there. He made partner in 2007.

Goodgame has mostly done work for companies with operations in the middle part of the oil and gas industry—transportation, processing and storage—including Regency Energy Partners LP (its recent drop-down of assets from General Electric Co.) and Enterprise Products Partners LP (its \$1 billion purchase of two natural gas gathering and treating systems in the Haynesville Shale from Yorktown Energy Partners-backed M2 Midstream LLC in April for \$1.2 billion).

He's also done work for explorers such as Anadarko Petroleum Corp., including its \$4.7 billion acquisition of Western Gas Resources Inc. in 2006, and Plains Exploration & Production Co.; power plant operators such as Dynegy Inc.; and PE shops such as Natural Gas Partners.

Christopher Ray, general counsel of Natural Gas Partners, who is working with Goodgame on the complex restructuring of Eagle Rock Energy Partners LP, describes Goodgame as cool under pressure, extremely responsive, good on finance and very proactive. "He doesn't point out the problem; he works through it and suggests ways to solve it. It takes a lot of the work off my desk," Ray says.

Kevin Blodgett, general counsel at Dynegy, says Goodgame helped the company get through a particularly sticky transaction in which it had to change its agreement to sell nine power plants to LS Power Associates LP for \$1 billion when the private equity firm grew concerned about operational issues at its Arlington Valley plant in Arizona. Goodgame drafted the amendment, in which Dynegy agreed to take less cash for the plants so long as LS Power agreed to release it from any indemnity claims.

"While you never like to get less money, he got us to see things from the other side," Blodgett says. "He was calm in the face of adversity. He's definitely the kind of guy you want on your side of the table."

Goodgame says his job is not to argue but to find solutions. "I learned long ago that it's not about you. It's about figuring out what your client wants and getting them there, and the other side as well."

It hasn't always been easy. In 2004 one of his colleagues called him a deal killer because a lot of the transactions he was working on in the midstream sector didn't happen (the fact that 60% were for the buy side and 30% were auction situations didn't help). "It was a competitive time," he says. "It taught me that you're not in control."



Goodgame cool under pressure

Michael Dillard, who worked with Goodgame on the Dynegy-LS Power deal at Akin Gump before jumping to Latham & Watkins LLP earlier this year, says Goodgame's style is key. "Some think he's too young to be a boardroom lawyer, but he's very good with boards. He's very calm when crazy things are going on around him, which keeps people around him calm."

Goodgame coaches his twin sons' basketball and soccer teams, surfs and reads—the last book was "Cutting for Stone" by Abraham Verghese on the diamond monopoly. He also writes on legal subjects, and teaches corporate finance at his legal alma mater.

"It forces me to go back and revisit—and sometimes relearn—'first principles,' forces me to practice speaking about those concepts without using inside lingo. It's two hours, once a week, of public speaking combined with trying to get audience participation. That's good practice for anybody in any business." ■

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The Deal

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