

MVP: King & Spalding's Thomas Sprange KC

By **Caroline Simson**

Law360 (November 7, 2024, 12:02 PM EST) -- King & Spalding LLP partner Thomas Sprange KC acted as lead counsel for Colombia's state-owned oil company in a dispute with global engineering giant McDermott International Ltd. that ended in a \$900 million settlement favoring his client, earning him a spot as one of the 2024 Law360 International Arbitration MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment:

Sprange told Law360 he was particularly pleased this year to be working on a wide variety of cases, including the restructuring case involving McDermott, which opened after an arbitral tribunal issued a \$1 billion award in favor of King & Spalding client Refinería de Cartagena SA, or Reficar, an ongoing \$1 billion arbitration against Turkey filed by Dutch subsidiaries of Canadian miner Alamos Gold and a \$500 million fraud case arising from West Africa oil trading activities.

In the restructuring case, Sprange and King & Spalding obtained a positive result for Reficar in March. The long-running dispute stemmed from the construction of a major oil refinery in Colombia. The United Kingdom's restructuring proceedings involved a unique issue of international law, raising the question of whether rights in global insolvency proceedings were inconsistent with the U.K.'s obligations to recognize and enforce international arbitration awards, according to King & Spalding.

Meanwhile, the Alamos Gold case relates to the Turkish government's alleged unfair nixing of certain mining licenses while the company was well into the construction of the Kirazli Gold Mine. First filed in 2021, the case proceeded through a round of briefing this year and a hearing on jurisdiction and the merits last month.

The fraud case is a 12-week trial in London's High Court and involves Alta Trading UK Ltd., formerly Arcadia Petroleum Ltd., which is targeting former Arcadia Petroleum CEO Peter Bosworth and former oil trader Steven Kelbrick, among others.

Sprange said there are unique challenges to doing such different cases all at the same time.



"If you're doing an arbitration-related fraud case in a commercial court and a related restructuring case in the Chancery Division, and then you're before an investment treaty tribunal, you've got the elite of the elite as judges and adversaries in pretty specialized areas," Sprange said. "You've got to not only get on top of the case, but you've also got to get on top of new areas. So you're playing away from home in each case."

"It's the inherent knowledge and expertise in the jurisprudence and the practice of those various forums that you don't necessarily have at the beginning, and you have to catch up," he said. "So it's extremely exciting, but also it has its moments."

His biggest challenge:

While working on the Reficar case, Sprange said there was one point where he had to do six cross-examinations in two hearing days.

"It was just an intense level of cross-examination and preparation for that," he said. "If I was an athlete, it's sort of a 240-heartbeat minute for seven or eight hours. It was very intense, very exhilarating, but very intense."

His proudest moment:

Sprange noted that while working on the three cases — the Reficar case, the Arcadia case and the Alamos Gold case — he was working with about 35 colleagues. Sprange said he probably spent about 24 weeks in hearings working with "the whole diverse range of colleagues within the firm," he said.

"That's fabulous," Sprange said. "It means the practice is doing well, the firm's doing well, you're learning a great deal and you're getting to work with a bunch of really bright, hardworking people."

Why he's an international arbitration attorney:

Sprange didn't mince words when explaining why he's an international arbitration attorney.

"It's the best," said. "The cases are nearly always high value. It's very sector agnostic, so you can do oil and gas one day, technology the next day, pharma then the day after that."

"It's very international," Sprange added. "It's very rare that it's just New York law or U.K. law. It's usually involving one or two areas of law at the same time. You've usually got arbitrators and judges from all kinds of jurisdictions, and it's very contentious. There's a lot of money at stake, so it's very hard fought. It's exciting. You've got a lot of unique features coming together."

What motivates him:

"Fear of failure," Sprange said with a chuckle. "I think most of us actually don't have very big egos. It's very competitive, and you want to do the best you can for your clients ... you're driven to make sure that the absolute best case is put forward to satisfy your clients so that they come back to you, and do your team proud."

--As told to Caroline Simson. Editing by Drashti Mehta.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2024 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

All Content © 2003-2024, Portfolio Media, Inc.