

Trials Group Of The Year: King & Spalding

By Jack Karp

Law360 (February 14, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- King & Spalding LLP's trial team successfully defended drugmaker Boehringer Ingelheim in the first trial over claims alleging Zantac contributed to patients' cancer, as well as Johnson & Johnson in its first post-bankruptcy win in talcum powder litigation, making the firm one of the 2024 Law360 Trials Groups of the Year.

That success is due, in part, to the fact that King & Spalding evolved as a litigation shop and has always had an "oversized, primary focus" on trials and disputes work, according to Mike Stenglein, a partner who chairs the firm's global construction and engineering disputes practice.

"Litigation has been the breadwinner of the firm for many, many years," Stenglein said.

The more than 550 lawyers under the firm's trial and global disputes umbrella handle product liability and mass torts, traditional business litigation, and international disputes, and are based in offices across the globe, according to partner Andrew T. Bayman, co-leader of the firm's product liability and mass torts practice group.

Those attorneys try a lot of cases and have plenty of trial experience, in part as a result of the many trials usually involved in the mass tort cases the firm takes on, said Bayman, who focuses on product liability and mass torts.

"I don't know of any big firm that tries as many cases per year as we do," he told Law360. "It's very much a focus of the firm."

That focus helped King & Spalding score major courtroom victories last year, including winning a complete defense verdict in the first of hundreds of trials over claims that Zantac, Boehringer Ingelheim's heartburn medication, increases the risk of cancer.

Jurors in Chicago — a "very plaintiff-friendly jurisdiction," according to Bayman, who is lead counsel for Boehringer Ingelheim in the litigation — found in May that the pharmaceutical company wasn't responsible for an Illinois woman's colon cancer, following a three-week trial.

"When you have a plaintiff in a courtroom suffering from cancer, and you have a product that has been



removed from the market, those are very, very challenging facts," he said.

But the firm's attorneys were able to put on a "very compelling science case" that, although trace amounts of a carcinogen were found in Zantac, they were not enough to cause the plaintiff's cancer, according to Bayman.

The firm also scored Johnson & Johnson's first post-bankruptcy victory in sprawling talcum powder litigation in April, when a Florida state court jury took just one day to find the company's talcum baby powder had not been shown to have caused a woman's ovarian cancer.

The defense the firm put on for J&J in that case involved an alternative-cause argument centered on the fact that the woman who died worked for 40 years as a biochemist in a community college lab that was found to have asbestos in its ceiling tiles, according to King & Spalding partner Will Stute, who worked on the case.

"So those are very difficult circumstances in very difficult jurisdictions with very sympathetic plaintiffs. These are difficult cases to win," Stute said about that case, as well as two others he handled with King & Spalding attorneys before he joined the firm.

"We were very proud of this last defense verdict, and I'm very proud of the last three results in the last three cases that I have tried, which have resulted in zero dollars to the plaintiffs," he added.

The firm's trial successes haven't been limited to the U.S.

A transatlantic King & Spalding team won a \$900 million settlement in March for Colombia's state-owned Refineria de Cartagena, or Reficar, in multijurisdictional cases in the U.K., the Netherlands and Texas.

An International Chamber of Commerce tribunal had awarded Reficar \$1 billion in arbitration against Chicago Bridge & Iron Co. over a refinery project plagued by delays and cost overruns. Global engineering giant McDermott International Ltd., which owns CB&I, filed restructuring proceedings in the U.K., Netherlands and Southern District of Texas that would have had the effect of discharging the award.

After a first-of-its-kind, six-day trial in the U.K. that questioned whether rights in global insolvency proceedings were inconsistent with the U.K.'s obligations to enforce international arbitration awards, McDermott agreed to settle the dispute for \$900 million, including preferred shares that amounted to 19.9% of its common equity.

Getting an equity stake in a parent company that wasn't a subject to the judgment "is unheard of," according to Stenglein.

"We did that through this cross-office, cross-discipline, round-the-world process, and to me, that's a perfect example of how we work," he said.

That cross-jurisdictional and cross-discipline cooperation is a big reason for the firm's success, according to London-based King & Spalding partner Sarah Y. Walker, who specializes in international commercial dispute resolution.

"BigLaw isn't confined by jurisdictions. Our clients have problems all over the world, and our clients look to us to resolve those problems all over the world," Walker said. "We've had a lot of success this year for international clients."

Walker pointed out that the firm recently successfully represented two defendants against fraud charges in a 12-week trial that began in April in the Commercial Court in London.

The underlying yearslong dispute concerned the misappropriation of oil trading profits worth more than \$349 million.

"The challenge for us was to try and get as many documents out of the other side as we could. And that was a real key part of our strategy — and a successful part — because there were a lot of damaging documents that we got literally on the eve of trial," Walker explained. "They resisted and resisted, and in the end had to produce them. And they basically undermined the claim throughout."

King & Spalding has found itself in high demand as a result of wins like that, according to Stenglein, who said the firm took active ongoing cases away from three of its biggest competitors in 2024.

"The clients came to us and said, 'We've heard about you, we know what you do, we know you've had these results. We had somebody file a \$1 billion, \$2 billion counterclaim or claim against us. We want you to handle it for us,'" Stenglein said. "That's pretty cool."

"We're having the most success that we've ever had," he added.

--Additional reporting by Celeste Bott, Carolina Bolado and Joyce Hanson. Editing by Covey Son.