

Ex-Microsoft boss Ballmer to buy LA Clippers for \$2 bn

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Clippers fans Kitty Siu (L) and Alvy Chen wear tee shirts calling for Donald Sterling to sell the Los Angeles Clippers on April 29, 2014 at Staples Center in Los Angeles, California

Former Microsoft chief Steve Ballmer will buy the Los Angeles clippers basketball team for an NBA record \$2 billion, he announced in a statement Thursday.

The NBA is forcing the the family of Donald Sterling to sell the team because of racist comments he made.

Sterling's wife said in a statement issued with Ballmer that she had agreed the sale. But Donald Sterling could still oppose the deal.

The price tag for a team that has never won a championship would set an NBA record. It would mark a massive financial return for Sterling on a club he purchased in 1981 for just \$12 million.

In the joint statement, Shelly Sterling said she was acting as sole trustee of the family, which owns the team, although a lawyer for her husband said he had to sign off on the deal.

"I am delighted that we are selling the team to Steve, who will be a terrific owner," Shelly Sterling said in the statement.

Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft from 2000 until this year, said he loves basketball and will do "everything in my power to ensure that the Clippers continue to win—and win big—in Los Angeles."

The deal was reached Thursday night after a bidding war, news reports said.

But attorney Bobby Samini said as he left Donald Sterling's home: "There's been no sale. There can be no sale without Donald's signature," the Los Angeles Times reported.

Earlier, another attorney for Donald Sterling, Maxwell Blecher, said there would be no sale "unless the NBA does something about the illegal charges they have filed against him and so far we've heard nothing to indicate that will occur."



Blake Griffin of the Los Angeles Clippers draws a foul while driving to the hoop to score under pressure from Jermaine O'Neal (#23) and Harrison Barnes (#40) of the Golden State Warriors on May 3, 2014 in Los Angeles

- Sterling opposed-

Donald Sterling is to appear before the NBA board of governors Tuesday, when the other 29 owners are to vote on whether to terminate his ownership.

"The league on Tuesday has a guillotine over Mr Sterling's head," Blecher said. "They will confiscate his team illegally, and if they don't want a lawsuit challenging that conduct, they need to let us know before

Tuesday."

Blecher insisted the league has no grounds to act against Sterling because the remarks for which he has been sanctioned—telling his girlfriend not to bring blacks to Clippers games—came in a private conversation that was recorded without his permission, which is a crime in California.

"Under California law, that recording cannot be used for any purpose in any proceeding except for impeachment," Blecher said.

The comments were posted on entertainment website TMZ in April, sparking a firestorm that prompted the NBA to act against Sterling.

In addition, Blecher indicated Sterling would not meekly accept the league's condemnation.

"He's not consenting to paying a \$2.5 million fine or to be banished from the stadium for the rest of his life," Blecher said.



Former Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer attends a press conference in Berlin, on November 7, 2013

"These are draconian remedies that exceed anything that anyone has ever done in any professional sport."

Blecher said Sterling will attend Tuesday's board meeting since league rules say he would surrender his rights if he fails to appear.

Sterling and his advisers have not taken any legal action against the NBA so far because he "did not want to interfere with Mrs Sterling's effort to try to arrange a sale of the team," the lawyer added.

The Los Angeles Times said Ballmer beat at least two other bidders for the Clippers. A group including former NBA player Grant Hill had offered \$1.2 billion and a group led by entertainment mogul David

Geffen bid \$1.6 billion, the newspaper said.

The previous highest price ever paid for an NBA team was \$550 million paid for the Milwaukee Bucks in April.

The most paid for a North American professional sports franchise was the \$2.1 billion paid for baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers in 2012 by a group led by NBA great Magic Johnson.

Any deal must be approved by three quarters of the NBA's other owners.

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