

## Rising Star: Steptoe & Johnson's Sarah Gordon

By Jack Queen

*Law360 (September 11, 2019, 3:23 PM EDT)* -- Steptoe & Johnson LLP's Sarah Gordon, fresh off of handling claims in the massive NFL concussion settlement, is now helping an AIG unit navigate coverage disputes in the fallout of a global cyberattack, earning her a spot among the insurance law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

### ***THE BIGGEST CASE OF HER CAREER:***

Gordon said she's had the good fortune of working many high-profile, high-exposure cases in recent years. But if forced to pick, she would choose her representation of insurance provider The Hartford as it navigated coverage of the NFL's historic concussion settlement. Her client amicably resolved its dispute with the league in 2018.

"That was challenging because of the scope. You had over 20,000 former NFL players and the insurance profile spanned decades. And part of our job was predicting and assessing future injuries over that large population, and this is an area where scientific study is ongoing with respect to head and neurological injuries," Gordon said.

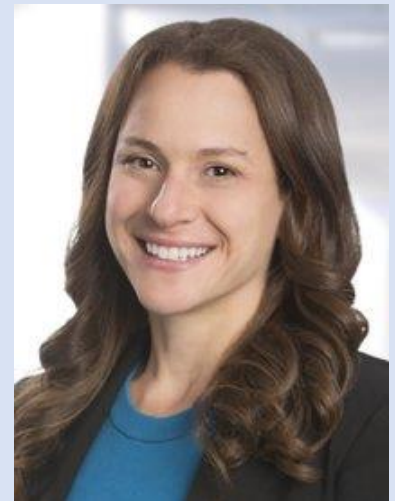
Gordon said the settlement covers 65 years, and that there's no limit to the amount of money the NFL could potentially have to pay. She noted that some public estimates have assessed the exposure at a billion dollars or more.

### ***HER PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY:***

One highlight from Gordon's career came early on, when she was an associate at Steptoe & Johnson litigating a reinsurance case.

"I once cross-examined a witness so effectively during a reinsurance arbitration that after the proceedings ended, the witness felt compelled to send the tribunal a letter to better explain his position," she said. "Apparently the cross-examination was so withering that he felt he hadn't really cleared his name well, so he sent a letter to the whole panel afterwards. That was definitely a unique experience for me."

**RISING**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
**STAR**



**Sarah Gordon**  
**Steptoe & Johnson LLP**

**Age:** 38

**Home base:** Washington, D.C.

**Position:** Partner

**Law school:** American University's Washington College of Law

**First job after law school:** Clerk in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia

#### **WHAT MOTIVATES HER:**

Personally, Gordon's wife and kids keep her going. Professionally, it's all about the thrill of helping clients tangled up in problems with no clear solution.

"I like nothing better than when a client calls with a problem they've been struggling with and we can look at it and come at it from a new angle and come up with a strategy that's creative and sufficiently aggressive to get them the best results possible," she said. "It's really satisfying when a client is faced with something that seems impossible or insurmountable to them and we're able to help them come up with a creative solution."

#### **WHY SHE'S AN INSURANCE ATTORNEY:**

Gordon said that one thing she enjoys about insurance law is that it keeps her litigation skills sharp, giving her plenty of opportunities to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses and make arguments in arbitration proceedings. But the wide range of the cases she gets to handle is another major draw.

"The diversity, breadth and evolving nature of the practice itself is really appealing. Virtually everything is impacted by insurance and reinsurance, so for me every case feels like an opportunity to learn about new industries or problems and develop the best arguments about how the facts should be applied to the existing body of case law," Gordon said.

"My docket has touched on so many headline issues: the NotPetya cyberattack, the concussion cases, some of the tallest buildings in the western part of the country. It's a very broad range."

#### **WHERE SHE THINKS INSURANCE LAW IS HEADING:**

Gordon said that the welter of data that has become available over the years has fundamentally changed the way companies and underwriters manage risk. She expects the trend to accelerate along with the pace of data collection.

"I think the amount of data that's available to insurance companies has been and probably will continue to increase tremendously. And that means insurance companies are going to have to assess what they will do with that additional information and how their underwriting and risk management processes will be impacted," Gordon said.

"What is relevant? How do you assess the information and make decisions based on it? I think that will be a challenge as more and more data become available on all aspects of our lives."

— *As told to Jack Queen*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 years old as of April 30, 2019, in order to be considered for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.*