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MVP: Bernstein Litowitz's John Rizio-Hamilton

By **Mike Curley**



Law360 (November 3, 2026, 4:00 PM EST) -- John Rizio-Hamilton of Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann LLP worked to secure a $120 million settlement for investors over alleged conflicts of interest in the sale of Viacom securities and a $37.5 million recovery in a securities fraud class action against Silvergate Capital Corp., earning him a spot as one of the 2026 Law360 Class Action MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment this year:

Rizio-Hamilton said his biggest win this year was the Viacom action, in which he led litigation and trial teams representing investors against Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs and Wells Fargo. The investors alleged the underwriters had concealed a conflict of interest involving Archegos Capital Management, and sold their Viacom holdings as Archegos fell apart, leaving investors holding the bag as those securities cratered.

This case involved "such a clear injustice," Rizio-Hamilton told Law360, that was perpetuated by large banks against ordinary investors, and involved unique and challenging legal questions for which there was not a lot of precedent.

Those issues included disclosure duties for an investment bank that has both a prime brokerage and a capital markets division, which Rizio-Hamilton said were arguably separate, and what banks are required to disclose in offerings, as well as the technical, but important, issue of when disclosure duties attach.

Without a lot of precedent, the team had to find cases that touched on the issue, if not directly, and reason from them, digging deep into regulations, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission guidance and commentary, to argue to the court on the "arcane" issues of when to disclose.

"Any legal team can say, 'This is the controlling precedent and it says, 'X,'" he said. "But because we didn't have that, we had to go back to first principles, really extend ourselves deep into the research,

build a strong factual record that aligned with the principles we were advancing as much as possible, and then package that and explain that in a way that was persuasive."

His biggest challenge this year:

Rizio-Hamilton said securing class certification in a lawsuit from investors against Exxon was his biggest challenge, as it was a hard-fought process that involved extensive discovery to show the connection between whistleblower reports and the company's statements and the stock price.

The case alleged Exxon misrepresented the value of oil and natural gas assets in the Permian Basin, and the share prices fell after federal regulators began looking into the valuations.

Rizio-Hamilton said he and his team had to trace through records and depositions on how the company forced its data scientists and engineers to make false assumptions about how much oil they could bring out, and how that led to false production goal statements made to the investing public.

That voluminous, technical and factual record led to the class certification, Rizio-Hamilton said, giving credit to his team, many of whom were also on the Viacom case.

Facing off against well-financed and highly skilled attorneys adds to the challenge, he said.

"We go up against these huge companies," Rizio-Hamilton said. "They're so powerful, they have so many resources and so much money to spend on their defense, and they hire these amazing law firms."

His proudest moment this year:

Besides the Viacom and Exxon cases, Rizio-Hamilton said his proudest moment was securing recovery for his clients in the Silvergate case, particularly after the cryptocurrency bank went bankrupt.

The suit alleged Silvergate misled investors about the strength of its compliance, anti-money-laundering and customer ID programs and its liquidity, when its controls were so lax as to enable criminal activity.

When it all unraveled and the bank collapsed, the investors got wiped out, Rizio-Hamilton said, and he and his team worked to secure recovery from a limited pool of insurance.

"It was our job to recover as much money for them as we could, but we had a very limited pool of insurance, and we had a bank in bankruptcy," he said. "We had very limited resources to recover from. You can't get blood from a stone."

So the team got creative, he said, and figured out how to obtain insurance from Silvergate's directors and officers insurance, as well as the underwriter defendant and Silvergate itself.

"That's a very rare thing to be able to accomplish, particularly in getting money effectively from the bankrupt entity in a bankruptcy," he said. "We were able to get very creative and very resourceful and very scrappy, and string together a series of recoveries from these different sources to produce what I think is the best outcome for the shareholders in a very challenging situation."

He added he wanted to give credit to his team, saying he's fortunate to work with some of the most outstanding lawyers in the field, such Bernstein Litowitz's Rebecca E. Boon, Alec Coquin, Shane Avidan and Jonathan D. Uslaner, and their work is just as important to the wins he was able to secure this year.

Why he's a class action attorney:

Rizio-Hamilton said he got his start in local news, as a reporter in Brooklyn, and through that lens got to see attorneys doing interesting work that motivated him to apply to Brooklyn Law School.

While clerking for judges after graduating, he said he got to work on class actions, which sparked an interest, and after he finished his clerkship, he decided he didn't want to defend large companies, and landed at Bernstein Litowitz.

He said its complex civil and class action practice appealed to him, as did the fact it was a smaller firm that got to "play offense," with a mission aligned with his worldview and the public interest focus that had driven him during law school.

While there, he said, he got to work on headline-grabbing cases, some against the largest companies in the world, and it seemed like important work, so he became hooked on the practice.

"I felt like we were on the right side of the 'V' for me," he said. "And we get to represent the smaller person — the pension fund, the investor for firefighters or teachers — against the larger, corporate interest that, in one way or another, has harmed them."

What motivates him:

Being part of a team that fights for a cause they believe in, and getting to play offense against big companies, while leaning into creativity and hard work, are among the things that motivate Rizio-Hamilton, he said.

"I'm so fortunate to be at my firm, because we have these great lawyers, we have these great paralegals and case managers, and we have a great support staff," Rizio-Hamilton said. "We bring something very unique to the fight from the plaintiff's side, which is, I think, the greatest collection of lawyers in our bar and the greatest overall firm and firm architecture in the bar. That enables us to fight the good fight against much larger opponents, and fight it really well."

His advice for junior attorneys:

Rizio-Hamilton said the biggest piece of advice he can give to young attorneys is to choose a firm that does work they believe in and that they want to be a part of.

"That will unlock so much opportunity and success for you, that I think it's priority number one, and, frankly, it's kind of nonnegotiable," he said. "If you're starting your career and you're trying to find the place where you can really contribute to something, you can have individual and group success, you've got to go to a place that feels right to you and motivates you — and for me, that was Bernstein Litowitz."

Second, he said, is there's no substitute for hard work, and new attorneys should embrace hard work, not be afraid of it, as it will improve their craft and the outcome of their cases.

Third, he said, is to lean into teamwork, which he said is key to getting results.

"I think you have to be an outstanding lawyer and a really good teammate at the same time," Rizio-Hamilton said. "Great lawyers who aren't great teammates don't achieve everything for their clients and themselves that they would otherwise achieve if they were great teammates."

Finally, he said that plaintiffs lawyers should be creative, not take no for an answer, and figure out solutions to overcome the obstacles the defense team is putting in front of them.

"You have to be like water and find a way around, over or through those obstacles, and that takes a lot of creativity," he said.

--As told to Mike Curley. Editing by Patrick Reagan.

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 2026 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 1,000 submissions.

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