

# Clippers Feel Heat Over Kawhi Leonard Salary Cap Scandal

**The LA Clippers are facing fresh scrutiny. Reports suggest owner Steve Ballmer is at the centre of a salary cap scandal involving Kawhi Leonard.**

Allegations point to a \$28 million payment to Kawhi Leonard. This payment is linked to a “no-show job” through a bankrupt company that Clippers owner Ballmer invested in.

## Allegations Against Ballmer and the Clippers

Pablo Torre claimed that the Clippers channelled payments through Aspiration. This company, now bankrupt, was reportedly funded in part by Ballmer. Torre said that Leonard was paid via an endorsement deal, which was questionable in nature.

The league reacted quickly. NBA spokesman Mike Bass confirmed that an investigation had begun. “The league was aware of this morning’s media report regarding the LA Clippers and is commencing an investigation,” he stated. This announcement has drawn attention across the sports world and [online sports betting](#) circles, where Leonard’s future is of high interest.

## The Aspiration Connection

Documents allegedly obtained by Torre suggest Ballmer invested \$50 million in Aspiration through his personal LLC on 14 September 2021. Weeks later, the Clippers announced a \$300 million partnership with the firm. The agreement included jersey sponsorships and naming rights connected to the team’s new arena.

In April 2022, Leonard signed a four-year, \$28 million endorsement deal through his LLC, KL2 Aspire. This came nine months after signing a maximum four-year, \$176.3 million player contract with the Clippers ([22.95](#)). A clause within the documents suggested the deal would be voided if Leonard left the Clippers. Torre also claimed Leonard could decline Aspiration’s requests yet still be paid.

An alleged Aspiration employee told Torre the payment “was to circumvent the salary cap.” This statement sparked further debate, as it implied deliberate wrongdoing.

## Clippers’ Firm Denial

The Clippers rejected the allegations outright. “Neither Mr. Ballmer nor the Clippers circumvented the salary cap or engaged in any misconduct related to Aspiration,” they said in a

statement quoted by ESPN. “Any contrary assertion is provably false.” The team added that its relationship with Aspiration ended in the 2022-23 season when the company defaulted.

Furthermore, the team insisted Ballmer and the organisation only learned of Aspiration’s alleged misconduct once the federal probe was announced. “The team and Mr. Ballmer stand ready to assist law enforcement in any way they can,” the statement continued.

## **Legal Trouble for Aspiration**

Aspiration filed for bankruptcy in March 2025. Its co-founder, Joe Sanberg, pled guilty to wire fraud charges involving \$248 million. The company remains under federal investigation for fraud. This development has fuelled speculation about the legitimacy of its deals with Leonard and the Clippers.

The NBA’s 2023 collective bargaining agreement outlines strict penalties for cap circumvention. These include fines of up to \$7.5 million, forfeited draft picks, voided player contracts and suspensions for staff. Such measures underline the seriousness of the current investigation.

## **Clippers’ Further Response**

In a follow-up statement, the team emphasised: “The notion that Steve invested in Aspiration in order to funnel money to Kawhi Leonard is absurd.” They argued that sponsorship deals between teams and their players are standard practice.

“... There is nothing unusual or untoward about team sponsors doing endorsement deals with players on the same team,” the Clippers said. They insisted Leonard’s deal was separate and independent. “The Clippers take NBA compliance extremely seriously, fully respect the league’s rules, and welcome its investigation related to Aspiration.”

## **NBA History of Salary Cap Violations**

This is not the first controversy in league history. In 2000, the Minnesota Timberwolves were penalised for an illegal contract arrangement with Joe Smith. The NBA stripped the team of five first-round picks, fined them \$3.5 million and suspended head coach Kevin McHale and owner Glen Taylor. Smith’s contract was also voided.

The Clippers themselves are no strangers to league investigations. They were fined \$50,000 in May 2019 for tampering after then-coach Doc Rivers compared Leonard to [Michael Jordan](#) while Leonard was still with Toronto Raptors.

That same year, the NBA investigated allegations that Leonard’s camp made improper requests during free agency. These included ownership stakes, private flights, housing, and guaranteed endorsement income. Another \$50,000 fine followed in November 2019 for inconsistent public comments about Leonard’s health.

## Previous Legal Challenges

In 2020, the Clippers faced another lawsuit. Johnny Wilkes alleged he was promised \$2.5 million by consultant Jerry West for helping secure Leonard's signing. The Clippers denied wrongdoing, and the lawsuit was dismissed.

Leonard has since signed multiple deals with the team. His latest contract, worth \$153 million over three years, was finalised in January 2024 and runs through 2027.

The team is also fighting a 2024 lawsuit by former strength coach Randy Shelton. He alleged wrongful termination after raising concerns about Leonard's health management. This added yet another layer of legal challenges around Leonard's time with the Clippers.

## What Comes Next

The NBA's investigation will be crucial. If the Clippers are found guilty of circumvention, they could face severe penalties similar to past cases. Until then, speculation will continue.

The Clippers remain firm in their stance. They continue to back both Ballmer and Leonard while pledging cooperation with investigators. Meanwhile, fans and analysts wait for clarity, aware that this case could alter the team's trajectory.

**WordPress Tags:** LA Clippers, Kawhi Leonard, Steve Ballmer, NBA salary cap, salary cap circumvention, Aspiration fraud, NBA investigation, Minnesota Timberwolves scandal, online sports betting, Doc Rivers