

Ex-Manchester United chief Woodward pitched Eagle Football role

Ed Woodward, the former Manchester United chief, has been approached about joining the vehicle which owns stakes in clubs including Crystal Palace and Olympique Lyonnais.

Sky News has learnt that Mr Woodward, who left Old Trafford in 2022, a year after United's involvement in the ill-fated European Super League project, is being lined up as an independent director of Eagle Football Holdings as it prepares to list in the US.

Sources said on Thursday that it was not certain that Mr Woodward's appointment would go ahead, but confirmed that he had been approached about his first mainstream football directorship since ending his long stint at the former Premier League champions.

Mr Woodward spent 17 years at Old Trafford, having played a key role in the Glazer family's debt-fuelled takeover of the club in 2005.

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Eagle Football, which is controlled by the American businessman John Textor, is expected to file confidentially with US regulators for an initial public offering in the next fortnight.

The vehicle owns a 45% stake in Crystal Palace, which it has been trying to sell for months but may now retain as a result of the club's improved performance in English football's top flight.

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Last summer, Sky News revealed that Eagle Football had hired investment banks including Stifel and TD Cowen to advise on the IPO, with Bloomberg News adding this week that UBS is also working on the deal.

The Eagle Football board is understood to have added Mr Textor's former FuboTV colleague Alex Bafer, the Trilith Studios president and chief executive Frank Patterson and

finance executive Sam Lynn as directors in recent weeks.

Its lenders are currently represented on the board, although these directors are expected to step down in the event of the company becoming publicly traded.

If the IPO proceeds, Eagle Football is expected to try to raise several hundred million dollars at a valuation of more than \$2bn.

The vehicle also owns the Brazilian champions Botafogo, RW Molenbeek in Belgium and FC Florida.

Last year, Mr Textor held talks about buying Everton FC, but was eventually outbid by the AS Roma owner, Dan Friedkin.

Had he been successful, Mr Textor would have had to complete the sale of his Palace stake under Premier League ownership rules.

Raine Group, which handled the sale of Chelsea in 2022 and a minority stake in Manchester United to Sir Jim Ratcliffe the following year, has been overseeing the potential disposal of Eagle Football's Crystal Palace stake.

A number of parties have expressed serious interest, including a group advised by the football financier Keith Harris.

However, a transaction is not thought to be imminent.

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In the past, Mr Textor has spoken about his belief that public ownership of football teams provides fans with greater transparency about the running of their clubs.

He has described this as the democratisation of ownership – an issue likely to be at the heart of a bill on football regulation when it is reintroduced to parliament by the new Labour government.

If Eagle Football's filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission proceeds in the coming weeks, its stock would be expected to commence trading several months later.

Mr Textor could not be reached for comment, while Mr Woodward did not respond to a request for comment on Thursday.