

# Ex-Knicks star Oakley sues Dolan, MSG over removal from game

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NEW YORK (Reuters) - Former New York Knicks basketball star Charles Oakley has filed a defamation lawsuit against team owner James Dolan, stemming from Oakley's forcible, televised removal from a game at Madison Square Garden in February.

The civil lawsuit seeking compensatory and punitive damages over the ejection and its aftermath deepens a long feud between Dolan and Oakley, a fan favorite who played power forward for the Knicks from 1988 to 1998 and has faulted Dolan's leadership of the team.

Madison Square Garden Co and MSG Networks Inc, both of which Dolan serves as executive chairman, were also named as defendants in the lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

The defendants did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Oakley's case arose from his ejection from his courtside seat at a Feb. 8 Knicks game after a run-in with security.

Manhattan prosecutors later filed misdemeanor assault and trespass charges against Oakley. They agreed to drop the charges last month, so long as the 19-year National Basketball Association veteran stayed out of trouble for six months and agreed not to trespass at the Garden.

In his complaint, Oakley, 53, accused Dolan of treating him like a "common criminal" by directing his removal from the game, and then launching a "coordinated and defamatory" public campaign accusing him of abusive behavior and alcoholism.

"By propagating these blatant lies about Mr. Oakley, Defendants Dolan and MSG have caused irreparable harm to his name and career," in a "transparent attempt to denigrate his standing among Knicks fans," the complaint said.

"As he did throughout his playing career, Mr. Oakley has refused to walk to the bench in shame," the complaint added.

Oakley's claims also include libel, slander, assault and battery, false imprisonment, and discrimination based on his perceived alcoholism.

"Mr. Oakley filed this lawsuit out of principle and his desire to hold Mr. Dolan accountable for his actions," Oakley lawyer Douglas Wigdor said in a statement.

Wigdor also represents more than 20 current and former Fox News employees pursuing unrelated bias and retaliation lawsuits against their former employer.

The Knicks had a reputation for toughness and grittiness during Oakley's tenure, including in 1994 when they lost to the Houston Rockets in the NBA finals. Their last winning season was in 2012-2013.