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NFL Sued by Fired Journalist Over Racial Bias, Diversity

By Bernie Pazanowski

- **Court:** S.D.N.Y.
- **Track Docket:** No. 1:23-cv-8055

Award-winning football journalist Jim Trotter sued the National Football League Tuesday, claiming he was fired from a job with the league for challenging it and Commissioner Roger Goodell's poor record on race discrimination and the lack of diversity in the league.

This suit follows on the heels of a suit filed by former Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores, accusing the sports league of discrimination in its hiring practices.

Trotter's complaint says that after working for the NFL for five years, he was fired, because he "repeatedly called out the NFL for refusing to address long-standing, systemic and institutional discrimination within coaching ranks, within the NFL league office and within the NFL Media newsroom," including at a state of the league press conference in February 2023, which led to his dismissal.

The complaint also says that Trotter, who is Black, witnessed discriminatory and hostile conduct by his employers—including by NFL team owners—that went entirely unchecked. For example, he said he heard the owner of the Buffalo Bills, Terry Pegula, say that if "Black players don't like it here, they should go back to Africa and see how bad it is."

Trotter said he complained about Pegula's comment and other incidents of discrimination he witnessed while working for the NFL but no investigation or remedial action was taken. He also noted the lack of Black people in leadership positions in the league when 60 to 70% of its players are Black.

Trotter claimed violations of 42 U.S.C. §1981, which protects against discrimination in contracting by nongovernmental entities, and New York civil rights laws. He seeks equitable relief in the form of a court-ordered monitor to review NFL policies and practices and to implement changes "with respect to the hiring, retention and advancement of Black people throughout all levels of the NFL organization and hierarchy, including in the NFL Media newsroom, the NFL league office and within NFL teams."

According to the New York Times, an NFL spokesman said in a statement that the league takes Trotter's "concerns seriously, but strongly dispute his specific allegations, particularly those made against his dedicated colleagues at NFL Media."

Wigdor LLP represents Trotter.

The case is Trotter v. Nat'l Football League, S.D.N.Y., No. 1:23-cv-8055, complaint filed 9/12/23.

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Documents

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