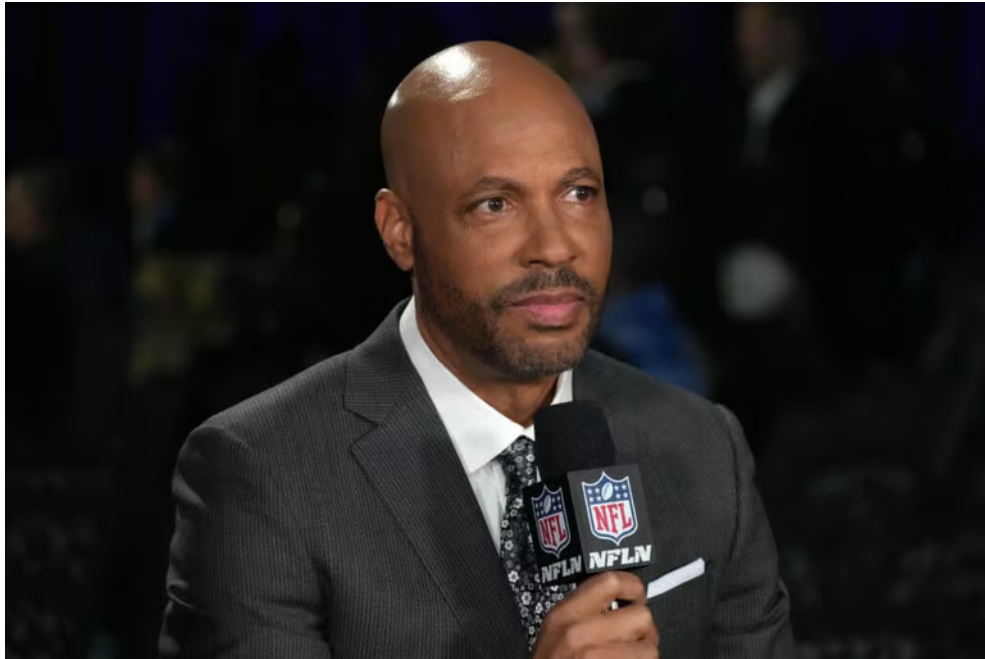


Jim Trotter, NFL reporter for The Athletic, files retaliation lawsuit against the league



By Richard Deitsch 2h ago

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Jim Trotter, a longtime [NFL](#) writer and reporter who joined *The Athletic* earlier this year as a columnist, filed a retaliation lawsuit Tuesday against the NFL and the NFL Network. Trotter, an NFL Media employee from 2018 to 2023, alleges his contract was not renewed because, in part, he challenged NFL commissioner Roger Goodell and others in the league regarding the NFL's lack of diversity at the league office.

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In a 53-page complaint filed in federal court in Manhattan, Trotter said he called out the NFL for refusing to address what he described as “long-standing, systemic and institutional discrimination within coaching ranks, within the NFL league office and within the NFL Media newsroom.”

“For having the integrity and courage to stand up to the NFL,” the complaint reads, “Mr. Trotter lost his job.”

The complaint includes a timeline of events that Trotter says led up to his contract not being renewed. Trotter alleges that Sandra Nunez, an NFL vice president of talent management, told his agent last November that she “could not envision any reason why (Trotter’s) contract would not be renewed.” The following February, at Goodell’s annual Super Bowl press conference, Trotter publicly challenged Goodell about the league’s efforts around diversity, equity and inclusion, just as he had one year before at the same event. The next day, the complaint alleges, Trotter’s direct supervisor asked one of his colleagues, “Why does Jim keep bringing this up?”

Three weeks later, on March 1, the lawsuit says Trotter was asked if he was “in alignment” with the NFL. Trotter replied that he was “not in alignment with a newsroom that does not have Black representation in decision-making positions.” Over the ensuing days, Trotter alleges he reported to Nunez that he was not being given assignments. On March 24, Nunez informed Trotter’s agent that his contract would not be renewed.

In the complaint, Trotter “seeks equitable relief to force the NFL to remedy and change” its practices, including “a court-ordered monitor to review the NFL’s policies and/or practices and implement necessary changes with respect to the hiring, retention and advancement of Black people throughout all levels of the NFL organization.”

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An NFL spokesperson told *The Athletic* in a statement: “We share Jim Trotter’s passion for quality journalism created in and supported by a diverse and inclusive environment. We take his concerns seriously, but strongly dispute his specific allegations, particularly those made against his dedicated colleagues at NFL Media. Mr. Trotter’s departure from NFL Media was one of many difficult decisions — similar to decisions recently made by many other media organizations — to address a challenging economy and a changing media environment. Jim was one of many employees who were unfortunately affected by these business decisions. We appreciate Jim’s five years of service at NFL Media and wish him much success in his new role.”

Said Trotter in a statement: “I hope this lawsuit leads to real change across the league and in the newsroom. It is on the backs of a majority Black player population that owners have made billions, and those players deserve to have someone who shares their cultural and life experiences at the table when decisions are being made about how they are being covered.”

Trotter is represented by the same law firm as Brian Flores, an assistant coach with the [Vikings](#) and former [Dolphins](#) head coach who is suing the league and several teams over alleged racist hiring practices for coaches and general managers. Trotter said his alleged experience with discrimination and retaliation was not limited to his contract not being renewed. Per the complaint: “Throughout his employment, Mr. Trotter witnessed and observed discriminatory and/or hostile conduct by his employers — including by NFL team owners — that went entirely unchecked as a matter of standard operating procedure.”

For example, the lawsuit alleges that during a September 2020 NFL Media video meeting, an unidentified NFL Media reporter described a conversation he had with Terry Pegula, owner of the [Buffalo Bills](#). The reporter alleges Pegula, discussing player protests against racial injustice, said that, “If the Black players don’t like it here, they should go back to Africa and see how bad it is.” The lawsuit says that Trotter raised complaints about this remark but no action was taken.

“The statement attributed to me in Mr. Trotter’s complaint is absolutely false,” Pegula said in a statement. “I am horrified that anyone would connect me to an allegation of this kind. Racism has no place in our society and I am personally disgusted that my name is associated with this complaint.”

Trotter, 60, joined NFL Media five years ago as a contributor to NFL Network and NFL.com in a multitude of roles. Before working as a columnist and reporter for NFL Media, Trotter worked as a national NFL reporter for ESPN, a senior writer for Sports Illustrated, and an NFL beat writer and columnist for The San Diego Union-Tribune. He was hired by *The Athletic* in April. As the lawsuit proceeds, Trotter will focus on a range of other sports in his reporting and commentary for *The Athletic*.

“Jim Trotter is one of the most esteemed voices in sports journalism, and has delivered fearless reporting and perspective over nearly three decades,” said *The Athletic*’s executive editor Steven Ginsberg. “He’ll continue to write best-in-class commentary as a member of our opinion desk. We’re proud to call him a colleague here at *The Athletic*.”

(Photo: Kirby Lee / USA Today)

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Richard Deitsch is a media reporter for The Athletic. He previously worked for 20 years for Sports Illustrated, where he covered seven Olympic Games, multiple NCAA championships and U.S. Open tennis. Richard also hosts a weekly sports media podcast. Follow Richard on Twitter [@richarddeitsch](#)

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