





Journalist sues NFL, alleging discrimination and racially charged statements by NFL owners



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Veteran sports journalist Jim Trotter has filed a discrimination and retaliation lawsuit against the NFL and the NFL Network, alleging that he lost his job earlier this year as an NFL Network reporter after challenging the league and its commissioner, Roger Goodell, about its lack of diversity in coaching and management.

Trotter filed the federal lawsuit Tuesday in New York seeking damages and an “award of equitable relief necessary to force the NFL to remedy and change its discriminatory and retaliatory practices.” He is represented by the Wigdor law firm, which also has represented former Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores in his racial discrimination lawsuit against the NFL.

His 53-page-complaint also accuses two NFL owners of making racially charged statements in 2020 – Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones and Buffalo Bills owner Terry Pegula, which they denied Tuesday.

What were the allegations against Jones and Pegula?

In August 2020, Trotter said he was on the field before the Hall of Fame game between the Cowboys and Pittsburgh Steelers when he said he asked why NFL teams have so few Black decision makers.

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According to the lawsuit, Jones finally responded: “If Blacks feel some kind of way, they should buy their own team and hire who they want to hire.”

Jones responded with a statement.



About a month later, in September 2020, another NFL Media reporter described a conversation he had with Pegula about social activism by NFL players and support for Black Lives Matter. According to Trotter's complaint, this reporter shared his account of this conversation in a Zoom meeting with other NFL Media employees. The reporter alleged then that Pegula said that "If the Black players don't like it here, they should go back to Africa and see how bad it is."

Trotter, who is Black, said he objected to these comments but said he was told not to mention Jones' comments on-air and that Pegula's alleged comments were "swept under the rug" by the league.

Pegula also issued a statement Tuesday.

"The statement attributed to me in Mr. Trotter's complaint is absolutely false," Pegula said. "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."

What is the NFL's response?

The NFL also issued a statement that said it takes his concerns seriously but strongly disputes his specific allegations.

"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," the statement said. "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. The NFL has made significant strides in improving diversity and inclusion and, while we acknowledge there is always more work to be done, we are committed to continuing that progress."

Trotter's confrontation with Goodell

Trotter publicly challenged Goodell during a "State of the League" press conference before the Super Bowl in February, noting the NFL's "deplorable" record on hiring, retaining and advancing Black leaders across the organization.



According to Trotter's complaint, the day after he challenged Gooden in February, Trotter's direct supervisor asked one of Trotter's colleagues, "Why does Jim keep bringing this up?"

In March, another executive asked Trotter if he was "in alignment" with the NFL, according to the complaint. Trotter's complaint said he responded that he was "not in alignment with a newsroom that does not have Black representation in decision-making positions."

A few weeks later, his agent was told Trotter's contract wasn't being renewed. Trotter since has been hired by The Athletic.

His complaint notes that out of 32 teams, there are only three head coaches who identify as Black and there never has been a Black majority owner in the league. It says that in the NFL Media newsroom, there are no Black managers, no Black copy editors and no Black full-time employees on the news desk.

"I hope this lawsuit leads to real change across the league and in the newsroom," Trotter said in a statement. "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."

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