

## NFL reporter Jim Trotter sues league for racial discrimination



By [Ben Strauss](#)

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Jim Trotter, a former reporter for NFL Network, sued the league and its media arm on Tuesday, alleging racial discrimination and retaliation after his contract was not renewed earlier this year. Trotter, who is Black, was employed by the league for five years and repeatedly spoke publicly and privately about the NFL's diversity issues, including the lack of Black head coaches and executives at NFL Network.

Ahead of this year's Super Bowl, Trotter asked Commissioner Roger Goodell at a nationally televised press conference about the NFL Network's lack of Black executives. Months later, his contract was not renewed.

"The NFL has claimed it wants to be held accountable regarding diversity, equity and inclusion," Trotter said in a statement distributed by his lawyers at Wigdor LLP. "I tried to do so, and it cost me my job. I'm filing this lawsuit because I can't complain about things that are wrong if I'm unwilling to fight for what is right."

The NFL said in a statement: "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."

Trotter is now a columnist at the Athletic, the sports website owned by the New York Times. The Times first reported the lawsuit.

According to the complaint, Trotter said he was given every indication that his contract would be renewed until after the press conference with Goodell, during which he pointedly asked the commissioner why no Black person had ever held a position of power at NFL network. It was the second consecutive Super Bowl press conference in which Trotter asked a similar question.

Afterward, according to the complaint, a supervisor asked Trotter if he was "in alignment with the NFL." He replied that he was not in alignment with a newsroom that did not include Black decision-makers. His agent was informed soon afterward that his contract would not be renewed.

Trotter filed the 53-page complaint in federal court in Manhattan. It alleges several other instances in which he raised concerns about attitudes within the league and troubling comments made by league officials. Trotter, according to the complaint, asked Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones why there weren't more Black people in decision-making roles in the NFL.

"If Blacks feel some kind of way, they should buy their own team and hire who they want to hire," Jones replied. Trotter alleges that he wanted to mention the incident on TV but was instructed not to by superiors.

Also according to the complaint, Terry Pegula, owner of the Buffalo Bills, once said in reference to player protests against racial injustice, "If the Black players don't like it here, they should go back to Africa and see how bad it is."

Pegula issued a statement Tuesday, calling Trotter's allegation "absolutely false." "I am horrified that anyone would connect me to an allegation of this kind," he said.

The Cowboys did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Trotter is seeking damages to be determined at trial, as well as an investigation into the league's hiring and retention of Black people at all levels of business. He is represented by the same law firm as Brian Flores, a Black and Hispanic coach, who last year sued the league for discriminatory hiring practices in head coaching searches.

"The NFL's treatment of Mr. Trotter is consistent with a documented history of silencing, retaliating against and 'blackballing' Black men who speak out about such conduct," the complaint states.