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Ex-SF Giants Player Blames Ballpark For Severe Concussion

By **Hailey Konnath**

Law360 (November 10, 2020, 7:17 PM EST) -- Former San Francisco Giants outfielder Jonathan "Mac" Williamson on Tuesday hit the owner and operator of Oracle Park with a suit in California state court claiming the ballpark's poorly placed bullpen caused him to sustain a career-devastating injury.

Williamson was playing left field during the April 2018 game against the Washington Nationals when he crashed into the bullpen mound while running after a foul ball at full speed, according to his complaint. He then hit the left field line wall head first, he says.

The resulting concussion ended his career and left him with lifelong maladies including vision problems, nausea, sleeping troubles and mood swings, he says.

"My life hasn't been the same since suffering the injury," he said in a statement.

And it all could've been avoided had China Basin Ballpark Co. LLC, which owns San Francisco's stadium, placed the bullpens where they belonged: off the field of play, Williamson says.

"Everyone's career ends at some point, but to have it taken from me because the bullpen mounds were unnecessarily placed on the field is very hard to cope with," Williamson said during a press call Tuesday.

According to the suit, CBBC knowingly put players at risk by placing the bullpens on the field despite knowing they were potentially dangerous. Numerous other players had previously plowed into the mounds, but the ballpark still left them on the field, Williamson contends.

Major League Baseball has recognized the hazard on-field bullpens pose, and Oracle Park was one of just three parks that still had them in 2018, Williamson said.

After the collision, former CBBC and Giants Managing General Partner Peter Magowan apologized to Williamson for the injury and admitted that the bullpens shouldn't have been on the field, according to the suit. The bullpens have since been moved to behind the outfield wall, where they should've been all along, Williamson says.

Randy Erlewine, Williamson's lawyer, said in a statement Tuesday that the injury "should've never happened."

"We believe that CBBC's decision to use on-field bullpens, and its failure later to move them, put his and other players' careers in jeopardy," Erlewine said.

Williamson is alleging negligence, claiming that CBBC "acted willfully and with conscious disregard for [his] safety." He's seeking unspecified damages, court costs and attorney fees.

The Giants said in a statement Tuesday that the MLB and its clubs "have a long-standing practice of addressing claims arising from player injuries through the collectively bargained grievance process and the workers' compensation system."

"Williamson's claims are properly resolved through the grievance or workers' compensation process, not through the courts," the Giants said.

CBBC couldn't be immediately reached for comment Tuesday.

Williamson was drafted by the Giants in 2012 and made his MLB debut in 2015, according to the complaint. In the five games he played in 2018 before his injury, Williamson batted .316 and hit three home runs for the Giants, according to the suit.

But after his injury, his performance tanked and he was sent back to the minor leagues and eventually missed most of the season because of his post-concussion symptoms, Williamson said. Today, he's an unsigned free agent.

"I'm left wondering if tomorrow will be better," Williamson said during the press call. "If tomorrow I'll get my life back. Unfortunately, that day has yet to come, and my life in baseball has effectively come to an end."

Williamson is represented by R. Scott Erlewine and Michael D. Levinson of Phillips Erlewine Given & Carlin LLP.

Counsel information for the ballpark operator wasn't immediately available Tuesday.

The case is Jonathan Williamson v. China Basin Ballpark Co. LLC, case number not available, in the Superior Court for the State of California, County of San Francisco.

--Editing by Brian Baresch.