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Cowboys ordered to cough up cash

The football team lost a bid to stop a \$26,000 worker's compensation settlement.

AUSTIN (AP) — The Dallas Cowboys, who just agreed to pay \$35 million to football star Deion Sanders, Thursday lost a bid to stop a former wide receiver from getting a \$26,500 worker's compensation settlement.

The Texas Supreme Court turned down an appeal from the Dallas Cowboys Football Club Ltd. in a case involving Scott Randall Ankrom, whose knee was injured in a 1989 exhibition game against the Denver Broncos.

The Dallas Cowboys argued in court documents that the case "is a vitally important one to every sports franchise in the state of Texas and indeed every employer in the state of Texas."

The case arose after Ankrom, who left professional football before the beginning of the 1991 season, was awarded worker's compensation benefits by the state.

The Dallas Cowboys' worker's compensation carrier, Gulf Insurance Co., appealed the worker's compensation award in state district court in Dallas.

Ankrom and Gulf Insurance agreed to settle for \$26,500. But the Cowboys intervened in the case, alleging that Ankrom had breached his contract.

The Cowboys said Ankrom's contract

specified that any money he was paid during a time he was entitled to worker's compensation benefits was to be considered an advance payment of such benefits.

It said the Cowboys were to be reimbursed for such an advance payment through the later worker's compensation award.

The Cowboys said Ankrom played a little in 1989 and not at all in 1990, but that he was paid his full salary for both years.

The Dallas district court ruled for the Cowboys, awarding the club \$26,500 plus more than \$20,000 in attorney fees.

But the 5th Court of Appeals in Dallas reversed that decision in March, saying the Cowboys didn't properly file their claim with a state commission while Ankrom's case was being considered there.

It was reported at the time that the ruling could hurt a subsequent effort by Cowboys owner Jerry Jones to recover about \$1 million awarded 16 other former players because of insurance settlements or worker's compensation claims.

Neither a Cowboys spokesman nor a lawyer representing the football club immediately returned telephone calls Thursday from The Associated Press.

The Supreme Court last month rejected the Cowboys' appeal of the 5th Court ruling.

On Thursday, it reaffirmed that decision. Ankrom, now a San Antonio businessman, said he didn't want to comment on the matter until he received official notification from the Supreme Court.

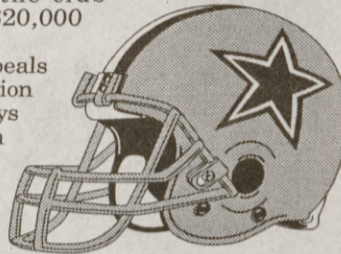
In appealing to the Supreme Court, the Cowboys' lawyers said the 5th Court decision "would destroy basic contract rights between employers and employees as well as bind parties to an exclusive administrative remedy even when the remedy is patently inadequate, incomplete and insufficient."

The football club said it had used administrative procedures, it only would have been able to get a fraction of what it believed it was due.

"In addition, the Dallas Court of Appeals would materially affect the contract between the players and the clubs of every professional sports franchise in this state," the Cowboys said.

Ankrom's lawyer responded that it was untrue to say the administrative remedy was inadequate, and wrong to cast the matter as a breach-of-contract lawsuit rather than a worker's compensation case.

Ankrom's lawyer argued that the football team "in essence, confiscated" his worker's compensation benefits.



Jones earns bucks by bucking system

The Dallas Cowboy owner has defied the NFL by signing deals with unofficial league merchandisers.

IRVING, Texas (AP) — The National Football League's tight-knit system for marketing more than \$3 billion a year in licensed merchandise and dividing profits could fall into anarchy as a result of a challenge from the owner of the Dallas Cowboys.

In recent weeks, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has defied the NFL — and gloated about it. Jones signed deals with PepsiCo Inc. and Nike Inc., which are competitors with official league soft drink Coca-Cola and NFL licensee Reebok International Ltd. Estimates have put the value of each deal around \$2.5 million a year, Pepsi for 10 years, Nike for seven.

Asked whether more deals are in the works, such as a much-rumored alliance with American Express Co., Jones replied: "Stay tuned this week." Jones apparently can skirt the league rules by making the Nike and Pepsi deals with Texas Sta-

dium, which he also owns, and not with his team. He is one of only three NFL owners in that favorable position, along with Robert Kraft of the New England Patriots and Wayne Huizenga of the Miami Dolphins.

Some team owners have said publicly that Jones is hurting the league by putting his own interests first. The issue is sure to be raised at an owners' meeting Tuesday in Atlanta.

Unless the league regains control, analysts say they expect the marketing of pro football to change — and fast.

"I think right now as we speak there's a lot of NFL teams going to the drawing board and looking to see what they can do," said Brandon Steiner, owner of New York-based Steiner Sports Marketing. "We may see more deals this season, and for sure next season."

Jones wants to change the league's revenue-sharing system, which dates back to the creation of NFL Properties in 1963. All 30 pro football teams run their equipment licensing through NFL Properties and split the royalties evenly — about \$3.5 million per team a year.

The NFL is a marketing powerhouse, analysts say, with

more licensed merchandise sales each year than baseball, basketball or hockey, according to the Licensing Letter, a publication which tracks licensing agreements.

"The NFL is the most well-oiled, well-run sports marketing machine in America today. It is consistent, it delivers a good product, it is effective and efficient," said Nye Lavalle, chairman and managing director of Dallas-based Sports Marketing Group.

"This takes a big chunk out of their armor. I really puts a crack in the foundation of the NFL, and what they offer sponsors ..."

Steiner said companies that don't want to sponsor the whole league — or those whose competitors do — now may start approaching individual teams instead. And that cuts into the exclusivity of the NFL, he said.

"That is a nightmare when you're working from NFL Properties' standpoint," Steiner said. Spokesmen for both Coke and Reebok say Jones' actions

don't lessen the value of their NFL sponsorship, which comes from being able to use the logos of all 30 teams.

However, any hint of change in the revenue-sharing system raises fears that football could degenerate into the kind of mess that has enveloped baseball and create imbalances among the teams.

"This takes a big chunk out of their armor. I really puts a crack in the foundation of the NFL, and what they offer sponsors ..."

— Brandon Steiner
owner of New York-based Steiner Sports Marketing

"So many other sports like baseball have turned into total anarchy, and that's what you want to prevent," Lavalle said.

Analysts also say fans likely would be turned off by deals that raise doubts about whether teams are trying to subvert the \$37.1 million salary cap. Questions arose last week when, days after completing the deal with Nike, the Cowboys signed Deion Sanders — a major Nike client — to a contract that could be worth up to \$35 million.

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