

SPORTS

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CHULA VISTA SPORTS WRITER SUING THE NFL

BY JULIO RODRIGUEZ

A serious fight looms. Former San Diego Tribune journalist Jim Trotter is taking on the NFL.

Chula Vista's Trotter has filed a 53-page complaint in federal court against the NFL, alleging discriminatory and racist practices against people of color.

He said he intends to shed light on practices at the NFL Newsroom, where Trotter worked before asking Commissioner Roger Goodell one too many questions about racial inequalities at a press conference during the run up to the 2023 Super Bowl.

Trotter was fired.

It was not his first time challenging the NFL's racial culture. Though 55 percent of NFL players are black, its leadership is overwhelmingly white.

In August 2020 Trotter was taunted at the NFL's annual Hall of Fame exhibition game by Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones. Trotter was speaking to Cowboys Vice President of Player Personnel Will McClay about the lack of players being drafted from HBCUs and the lack of people of color in decision making positions.

Jones butted in, stating that players already received a large percentage of the league's revenue. "If Blacks feel some kind of way,

they should buy their own team and hire who they want to hire," Jones said.

In October 2021 Trotter was preparing to go on the television program "NFL Now" to discuss the Jon Gruden scandal. Gruden had sent multiple emails filled with racial, homophobic and misogynistic content. Trotter also wanted to discuss Jones' remark.

Trotter notified his direct supervisor, Ali Bhanphuri, director of NFL Media, that he intended to discuss Jones on air. Bhanphuri then notified his boss, Todd Sperry.

Sperry directed Mr. Trotter via text to, "refrain from discussing Jerry Jones until you, me and Ali have had a chance to discuss. Ali and I were discussing and wondering if there's any additional context around that quote?"

Trotter did not report on Mr. Jones' quote, but he did not agree with the decision.

Shortly after the Gruden incident, an email was sent out companywide from the NFL's HR department.

It said the NFL takes its values seriously and that HR leadership is ready to support them. Nothing was done.

Trotter left ESPN to join the NFL Media team in 2018, under the condition that he could report on player activism. He said he was assured he could pursue what he wanted to cover.

After two years with the NFL, Trotter signed a three-year contract extension through March 2023. After signing the contract, Trotter said he began to notice things he had not seen before. He noticed the lack of black people in the NFL Media newsroom and in decision making positions. He began to make inquiries about the number of black people working in the NFL.

Data Trotter collected demonstrated that the NFL lacked diversity. Only two Black people worked as in executive vice presidents. Total Black employees in league offices in New York, New Jersey, and Los Angeles was just 8 percent.

John Marvel, his supervisor, agreed, but he and Trotter seemed to be in the minority. Marvel reminded Trotter that NFL Media reports to the league office. He urged his friend Trotter to tread lightly.

In June of 2021 Marvel was fired and replaced with Bhanphuri. Trotter said he lost his ally. Bhanphuri directed Trotter not to report on racial issues in the NFL.

Trotter challenged NFL Executive Vice President Dasha Smith to hire a black manager for the news desk. Smith was not happy.

"Yes Jim," wrote. "You regularly make us aware of this. Hopefully you won't have to ask any more in the next year."

Two months later Smith asked Trotter if he was "in alignment" with the newsroom. Trotter said he was committed to his job, but not in alignment with newsroom racial practices.

"Yeah, Yeah, what I thought," she replied. "That's what I thought. You know, it's tough to go against corporate headwinds. Sometimes you have to compromise. Sometimes you have to pay the mortgage."

Trotter's contract was not renewed.

The NFL released a statement regarding Trotter's lawsuit:

"We share Jim Trotter's passion for quality Journalism created and supported by a diverse and inclusive environment. We take his concern seriously, but strongly dispute his specific allegations, particularly those made against his dedicated colleagues at NFL Media."

Trotter awaits his day in court.



JIM TROTTER

Jim Trotter Photo Courtesy of ESPN

"We are going to see more fruit."

LYNETTE ZECKUA, Cross-country coach

FIRM FOOTING



Photos Courtesy of SC Jaguars

REBUILDING X-COUNTRY TEAM RACING TOWARD FAST IMPROVEMENT

BY ZEKE WATSON

Southwestern College's Cross-Country program punches above its weight. It has a history of championships—12 by women, 15 by men. It also has the best graduation rate on campus and has sent scores of runners to elite universities.

Head Coach Lynette Zeckua said this year's team is strong. "Getting better, getting better, getting better," she said. "Visualize the goal you want to reach and then work for that goal because it's not going to come easy."

SC women and men place placed fourth at the San Diego XC Kickoff, and the women grabbed third in the Coach Downey XC Classic Women's 5k, scoring 92 points in a total time of 2:07:48.

Rasilia Thomas led the way and placed 21st in 24:37.5. Sofia Fajardo was 23rd in 24:56.4.

Jeffrey Salinas clocked in a 23:23.1, taking sixth overall among men.

"One thing I've gained from racing so much is I've learned to put 100 percent of my effort into a race," Salinas said. "We all run the same course. I try to pretend I am not that tired so when teammates see me, they can believe 'he's just like me, I can do it too.'"

Second-year runners set an example for the new runners in the program, said Thomas, a first-year athlete. They also provide knowledge of courses.

"The sophomores help us when it comes to races they had done last year," said Thomas. "What to look out for, what to be prepared for, what to train for and what to stretch for."

The 2022 Cross-Country team had only seven athletes, with just three returning for 2023. Zeckua said she is optimistic about the program's future now that she has 14 new runners.

"This is a new team," she said. "There are only three sophomores. Everybody else is a freshman. This is the first year. In our second year we are going to see more fruit."

Nov. 3 will start the postseason, which begins with the SoCal Regionals.



FAST COMPANY—

Cross-country standout Jeffrey Salinas leads the men's squad in what has been a promising rebuilding year. An influx of freshman are making their coach optimistic about a return for the championships.



Photo Courtesy of SC Jaguars

PLAYING CATCHUP—

Southwestern's offense has struggled to stay on the field and the exhausted defense has paid the price.

TOUGH YEAR ON THE GRID

Back-to-back blowouts contribute to a season of woes for football team

BY JULIO RODRIGUEZ

Just when things were bad, they got worse.

In the battle of fierce felines, the Saddleback College Bobcats mauled the Jaguars, 53-3.

The previous week's match was also a blowout loss at Long Beach, 65-14.

Southwestern started well, stopping the Bobcats run game early, forcing a three and out. It did not last.

The offensive line collapsed on a crucial third and nine. Saddleback Linebacker Enrique Amposta came around the edge and sacked SC quarterback Aleks Wojcik, forcing a punt.

Saddleback's offense picked apart the Jaguars defense with both run and pass. They struck first with a 42-yard pass from QB Trey Kukuk to WR Marques Carrillo Edgar.

With 30 seconds left in the first, the Jags ran a sweep to wide receiver Jovahn Young. He was pushed out and nearly dragged to the ground by his collar at Saddleback's 44-yard line. In frustration Young pushed Saddleback linebacker Tristian McMurphy into the small metal fence behind the Jags bench. Both players in the heat of the moment butted heads and squared up. Refs immediately threw flags and separated the sides.

The play brought back 15 yards due to an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on Young. All SC momentum evaporated.

A leaky offensive line left Wojcik little time for anything to develop down field. Same with the run. The defense just let Saddleback get whatever it wanted.

As things became for Southwestern there was more unwelcome news. With 11:32 left in the game Jags defensive tackle Keon Jackson was carried off the field with a lower leg injury. Next defensive end Andrew Sola went down with an apparent ankle injury.

A tough season limps along.