

Bridgeport Baseball Brawl Leads to \$940,000 Verdict for Injured Catcher

By Christian Nolan

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Jose Offerman Christian Abraham

A federal jury in Bridgeport has awarded \$940,000 to a former minor league catcher who claimed he was struck in the head with a baseball bat by former Major League all-star Jose Offerman during a bench-clearing brawl.

The brawl broke out during a 2007 minor league game between the Long Island Ducks and the Bridgeport Bluefish.

Offerman had hit a home run in the very first at-bat of the game off of Bridgeport starter and former Major Leaguer Matt Beech. The next time Offerman came up, Beech hit him with a pitch in the leg. Offerman believed he was hit intentionally for his previous home run and charged the

mound with bat in hand. Bridgeport catcher Johnathan Nathans tried to intervene and he claims that Offermans's bat struck him in the back of the head by the ear, causing a concussion.

"He was the one guy who didn't leave the field that night on his own power," said one of Nathans' lawyers, Craig Smith, of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder. Nathans was taken to the hospital and treated for his concussion.

Smith, however, explained that Nathans never fully recovered from the blow. He said Nathans, who is now an attorney in Maine, has a nerve injury in his inner ear that his doctors now say is permanent. "It's a sort of nonstop feeling of seasickness," said Smith. "He has resulting headaches and constant nausea. He's able to do a lot mainly because of his fortitude. Nobody would want to be in John Nathans skin because of this injury."

Nathans sued Offerman and the Long Island Ducks, of the independent Atlantic League, for assault and battery.

Following a trial in U.S. District Court in Bridgeport before Judge Warren Edginton, a jury found Offerman liable for assault and awarded Nathans damages in the amount of \$940,000. The jury did not find Offerman liable for battery. Also, the jury decided that the Long Island Ducks were not responsible in any way for the incident. Eileen Becker, of Loughlin Fitzgerald, represented the Ducks.

Offerman's lawyer, Frank Riccio, II called the verdict "curious" because of the decision to find Offerman liable for assault but not the battery. He interprets the jury's decision to mean that Offerman caused fear of being struck with a bat but did not actually strike him.

All in all, he said his client felt some vindication. "I will tell you Mr. Offerman was very happy to finally have his day in court on this issue," said Riccio. "He's always taken the position that he didn't hit Mr. Nathans with that bat."

Though the plaintiffs initially sought \$4.8 million, Smith said his client was still pleased to come away with nearly \$1 million. He said he will seek in post-trial motions to have his client's medical bills of about \$75,000 added on to the verdict.

"For my client, it was never about the money it was about Jose Offerman stepping up to the plate and taking some responsibility for this," said Smith.