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Jury Awards \$200,000 After Boy Suffers Concussion From Fall at Hockey Match

The family of then-8-year-old Aaron Friedman sued the management at Webster Bank Arena at Harbor Yard after the boy fell from a railing while giving high-fives to players heading onto the ice for a hockey match. The boy suffered a concussion, among other injuries. A jury has [awarded](#) \$200,000.

By **Robert Storage** | December 17, 2018



Webster Bank Arena in Bridgeport, Photo: Google

A Bridgeport jury **has awarded \$200,000** to the family of a then 8-year-old boy who suffered a brain injury after a fall from the railing of the **Webster Bank Arena** at Harbor Yard during a Bridgeport Sound Tigers hockey match.

The six-person jury rendered its verdict Dec. 7 in Bridgeport Superior Court in favor of Wilton residents David and Laure Friedman, parents of Aaron Friedman, who is now 13 years old.

According to an amended **Oct. 24 lawsuit**, Aaron was with other young fans leaning on a railing to greet the players who took to the ice during a match in November 2013. The railing, though, gave way, causing Aaron to fall backward five feet below.

Chris **Mattei**, the Bridgeport-based attorney for the family, told the Connecticut Law Tribune on Monday that Aaron “landed on his back and then hit his head on the surface floor.” Mattei said there was a thin rubber mat covering a concrete surface. No one else was injured during the incident, said Mattei, an attorney with Bridgeport-based **Koskoff Koskoff & Bieder**.

Aaron suffered several injuries, most notably a concussion, from which he still has ramifications five years later, Mattei said.

In court papers, the defendant, Harbor Yard Sports & Entertainment, which is responsible for the arena, put the blame on Aaron and his parents. Mattei, though, said the blame lies squarely on management.

“They [management] encouraged fan/player interaction above a tunnel that was only secured by a railing,” Mattei said. “There was testimony at trial from the senior vice president [of the facility] that they encouraged fans to give high fives. What was implicit in that testimony was that kids would be putting their

weight on the railing, as that was the only way to reach the players. They failed to properly maintain and secure the railing in place.”

While the jury—which heard eight days of testimony—took just three hours to find in favor of the plaintiffs, the defendants put the blame on the family in court filings.

In those papers, the defense, represented by Patrick Mullins of the Trumbull-based Cotter, Cotter & Mullins, wrote: “The plaintiff was himself contributorily negligent in at least one, if not more than one of the following respects: He failed to make reasonable use of his own senses and facilities; he failed to use that degree of care that an ordinarily prudent person would have exercised for his own safety ...; he used the premises in a manner beyond the intended use; he failed to use that degree of care required of a child of similar age, judgment and experience in that situation.” The defense also wrote that the injuries to Aaron were caused “by his parents failing to adequately supervise” him.

Mullins, who has until Jan. 6 to appeal to the Connecticut Appellate Court, did not respond to a request for comment Monday.

Mattei said he isn’t sure what swayed the jury to rule in the family’s favor, but said Aaron spoke briefly to the jury, introducing himself. In addition, his parents also testified at trial, as did Aaron’s neurologist and neuropsychologist. Aaron’s parents, Mattei said, “both testified about the sequence of events leading to the injury and of the care and recovery involved in their child’s life. They also talked about how difficult it has been for him and the strides he has made.”

The neurologist, Mattei said, told the jury that he diagnosed Aaron with persistent post-concussion syndrome. That, Mattei explained, is a situation

where the concussion doesn't heal normally. Problems associated with post-concussion syndrome include headaches and [sleep](#) disturbances, both of which Aaron has to this day, Mattei said. In addition, the boy has shown cognitive deficits, which are a change in [brain function](#).

Aaron's long-term prognosis is not clear, Mattei said.

"There have not been that many studies done with mild trauma brain injury in children," Mattei noted. "He has made substantial progress, but it still struggling."