

NEWS & INSIGHTS

LIGHTFOOT CLIENT BELL SPORTS WINS DEFENSE JURY VERDICT IN \$20 MILLION BICYCLE HELMET PRODUCT LIABILITY LAWSUIT

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In a verdict rendered late on September 1, a jury in the Circuit Court of Tallapoosa County, Alabama, found in favor of Lightfoot, Franklin & White LLC client Bell Sports, Inc., in a product liability lawsuit seeking more than \$20 million in compensatory and punitive damages. After a two-week trial and deliberating for four hours, the jury sided with Bell Sports, a sports equipment manufacturer based in California, on all claims that a bicycle helmet made by the company failed to protect a woman involved in an accident.

“We are very pleased for Bell Sports that the jury made this determination,” said Lightfoot partner **Harlan Prater**, who served as lead trial counsel for Bell Sports. “The facts of the case clearly showed that the design of our client’s helmet was not at fault, and it is gratifying to see the jury accepted our evidence.”

The lawsuit arose out of a 2012 bicycle accident in Jackson’s Gap, Alabama. A husband and wife visiting from Florida were riding down a hill when a dog darted out in front of them. The 60-year-old woman went over her handlebars and hit her head on the road. She suffered a catastrophic traumatic brain injury, which left her with ongoing cognitive and physical impairments. Her life care plan was valued at \$5 million to \$7 million.

The woman was wearing a bicycle helmet manufactured by Bell Sports, and the couple asked for \$20 million in compensatory and punitive damages. The lawsuit claimed the helmet should have had more protective EPS on the portion covering the back-right side of the woman’s head where she struck the road.

At trial, Prater and the Lightfoot team were able to show that the woman’s head and helmet both impacted the ground simultaneously, meaning the helmet was likely not secured properly and moved when she went over the handlebars, exposing part of her head. The jury also saw evidence that the Bell Sports helmet was tested for impacts on and below the regulated test line, and that the woman’s injury occurred below that test line.

“This is a very sad case and situation, but it was clear that the Bell Sports helmet was a good, safe design and did not cause the plaintiff’s injuries, which the jury recognized,” said Prater.

In addition to Prater, members of the Lightfoot trial team included partner **John G. Thompson** and associate **Benjamin S. Willson**.

Prater is available for interviews. A copy of the verdict pleading and the original complaint are also available.