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Judge Rules Against Football Helmet Manufacturer

By **KEN BELSON**

A jury in Colorado has found that Riddell, the country's largest helmet manufacturer, was at fault for failure to adequately warn players wearing their football helmets about the dangers of potential concussions.

The company was ordered to pay several million dollars in damages to a 22-year-old man who was injured in 2008 while playing high school football.

The award, which came from the jury in Las Animas County District Court in Trinidad, Colo., early Saturday morning, is a rare victory for those injured while wearing football helmets. It could provide a prelude to a parallel case brought by N.F.L. retirees, who have also sued the company.

According to the verdict, Riddell is responsible for \$3.1 million, or 27 percent of \$11.5 million in damages that were awarded to Rhett Ridolfi, who sustained a head injury and was paralyzed on the left side of his body during a football drill in 2008.

Several of Ridolfi's coaches were also found to be negligent, but will not have to pay damages.

The jury, however, rejected claims related to claims that there were design defects in Riddell's helmet.

"While disappointed in the jury's decision not to fully exonerate Riddell, we are pleased the jury determined that Riddell's helmet was not defective in any way," the company said in a statement. "We are confident that the jury would have reached a different conclusion had the Court not erroneously excluded the testimony of our warnings expert.

"We intend to appeal this verdict, and we remain steadfast in our belief that Riddell designs and manufactures the most protective football headgear for the athlete."

A similar case is set to begin in Los Angeles in a few weeks.

In the N.F.L. case, more than 4,000 retired players and their spouses have sued the league claiming that the league knew about the long-term health risks associated with repeated concussions and head trauma.

Riddell has been named in the same lawsuit, which has been consolidated in federal court in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Last week, a United States District Court judge heard the league's motion to dismiss the case, as well as a motion by Riddell to be severed from the suit. The judge is expected to rule by summer.

Most helmet manufacturers follow safety standards set by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment, or Nocsae. Critics have accused the industry-supported association for not setting more rigorous safety standards and having too many conflicts of interest to be considered an unbiased arbiter.