

LEGAL SERVICES

Heisman winner Bo Jackson wages legal war with Scottsdale company

BY MIKE SUNNUCKS
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Ongoing legal battles with former Heisman Trophy winner and two-sport star Bo Jackson have pushed a Native American-owned Scottsdale company into bankruptcy.

Valerie Marie LittleChief's N'Genuity Enterprises and Vincent "Bo" Jackson – who starred in both the National Football League and Major League Baseball – have battled for several years in the courts. The Scottsdale company, which makes food products for the U.S. military, restaurants, food service operations and casinos, had partnered with Jackson going back to 2001. By 2009, the relationship had soured and Jackson asked to be removed from marketing campaigns.

Attorneys for Jackson and LittleChief did not comment for this story.

N'Genuity filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in late July, citing Jackson's continued lawsuits as one of the driving reasons.

"The company cannot afford another round of litigation with Jackson, which would undoubtedly be followed by another round," LittleChief wrote in documents filed with the U.S. Bankruptcy

Court in Phoenix.

The former running back and outfielder has alleged mismanagement and nepotism, and contends he was squeezed out of the decision-making. The relationship soured further when a likeness of the former Auburn University and Oakland Raiders star began doing advertisements for Chick-fil-A.

N'Genuity sued Chick-fil-A in 2011 over ads featuring Jackson. He turned around and sued the Scottsdale company, seeking \$17 million in damages.

In that case, the court ended up awarding Jackson \$500,000 in damages and 49 percent of the company.

N'Genuity first filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2011, also citing lawsuits with Jackson. The company emerged from that bankruptcy in 2013, only to refile last month.

Jackson's civil lawsuit also has targeted LittleChief, other N'Genuity principals and other businesses they own. A U.S. Bankruptcy Court filing by Jackson's attorneys claims the latest Chapter 11 was filed to avoid potential damages N'Genuity might owe as a result of civil lawsuits.

Jackson also has challenged N'Genuity's hiring of Gallagher & Kennedy PA attorney John Clemency in its most recent bankruptcy case.

SPORTS BUSINESS

Coyotes owners hope new deals will boost values, confidence

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The Arizona Coyotes are hoping a new naming-rights deal and changes in arena concessions will bolster the bottom line for the struggling National Hockey League franchise.

The team sold the naming rights for its Glendale arena to Gila River Casinos. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Coyotes Executive Vice President Mike Humes said the Gila River tribe wanted the arena name to promote all of its business and development ventures, not just its three casinos; so it will be called Gila River Arena. He said the NHL did not object to the deal.

Humes said the team also is hoping for big increases in concessions and merchandise sales this season. The new Coyotes owners changed concessionaires last season, ditching Aramark in favor of Levy Restaurants.

Levy and the Coyotes did not have time to make major changes before last season started, but will embark on some for the upcoming NHL campaign, Humes said. The Coyotes inked a 15-year deal with Levy last year.

Among the changes are 36 new con-

cession service points, including 16 new smaller portable stands and carts. There also will be video message boards with prices and promotions. The team is working to diversify its concessions menu beyond typical stadium fare and wants to partner with more local restaurants.

"You're going to see dramatic improvements," said Humes, adding the team is hoping for 20 to 30 percent revenue growth from concessions.

Humes expects even bigger growth in merchandise sales. The team is partnering with Jacksonville, Florida-based Fanatics Retail Group to renovate the team shop at the Glendale arena and handle merchandise sales.

The team changed its name from the Phoenix Coyotes to Arizona Coyotes earlier this summer, which could help propel merchandise sales. Humes said the team could see as much as a 400 percent increase this season. Part of that effort also includes more merchandise stands within the Gila River Arena.

The Coyotes' new owners acquired the team from the National Hockey League last summer and did not have time to institute many changes for the 2013-14 season. They also now have longer-term deals in place with Fox Sports Arizona and Ticketmaster.

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