

LANDMARK SETTLEMENT APPROVED IN NFL PLAYERS' DISABILITY BENEFITS CLASS CASE

Court clears the way for a new chapter in how former players' disability claims are reviewed.

MONTGOMERY, AL (October 21, 2026) – A federal judge in Baltimore has granted final approval to a nationwide class action settlement challenging the use of race-based adjustments in testing used for disability determinations in NFL player benefit plans.

Following a nearly four-hour final approval hearing, U.S. District Judge Julie Rebecca Rubin approved the Rule 23(b)(2) settlement class, clearing the way for the rescoring of former NFL players who may have been affected by race norming.

The case centers on a testing adjustment known as “race norming,” which altered neurocognitive scores based on a player's race. Although the Plans directed physicians in 2021 to stop using race-based adjustments when evaluating players for cognitive impairment, prior decisions were not revisited.

As part of the settlement negotiated by Beasley Allen attorneys Dee Miles, Rebecca Gilliland, and Leon Hampton, along with co-counsel Thomas O. Sinclair of Sinclair Law Firm, qualifying players' prior evaluations will be reassessed using a race-neutral approach.

“Today's ruling permanently ends a practice that disadvantaged non-white former NFL players seeking disability benefits,” said Dee Miles, Principal at Beasley Allen. “For years, race-based adjustments could make it more difficult for players to qualify for benefits. With the Court's approval, those discriminatory standards are gone, and players will be evaluated under a fair process that treats every player equally.”

Filed largely under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), the lawsuit sought system-wide relief to address the impact of race-based adjustments on disability benefit determinations.

The settlement establishes a process for reviewing prior claims and permanently eliminates the use of race norming in future eligibility determinations for neurocognitive disability benefits.

“This is an important victory for former players and another step toward ensuring disability benefits are administered fairly,” Miles added. “We are proud of this result and grateful to the players who stepped forward to challenge this practice. Their efforts helped bring about a lasting change that will benefit former players for years to come.”

The Court did not address any award of attorney fees, costs, or class representative awards, but any amounts awarded will be in addition to payments flowing to the players and will not impact or diminish class benefits.

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