

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
OHIO, WESTERN DIVISION

Darin Ruf v. The Cincinnati Reds

Ruf · No. 1:25-cv-00424 · Decided January 23, 2026

SUMMARY

The court grants Darin Ruf’s motion to remand his Ohio negligence action against the Cincinnati Reds to state court. It holds that Ruf’s premises-liability, vicarious-liability, and negligent hiring and supervision claims are not substantially dependent on interpreting the Major League Baseball collective-bargaining agreements and therefore are not preempted under section 301 of the Labor Management Relations Act. The excerpt addresses the asserted relevance of the CBAs’ grievance provisions, baseball rules and regulations, Safety and Health Advisory Committee provisions, and compensation provisions.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Western Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Douglas R. Cole
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Western Division
DECIDED	January 23, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-cv-00424
DISPOSITION	remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved to remand his state-law negligence action after Defendant removed it to federal court on the ground that the claims were completely preempted by § 301 of the Labor Management Relations Act. Plaintiff also sought attorneys' fees and costs under 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The removing defendant bears the burden of establishing federal subject-matter jurisdiction. Removal jurisdiction is assessed based on the facts existing at the time of removal, and doubts about the propriety of removal are resolved in favor of remand. The court considered the legal bases asserted in the notice of removal.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

TOPICS

subject matter jurisdiction

civil procedure

negligence

attorney fees

federalism

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

labor law

negligence

federal jurisdiction

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Ruf's Ohio negligence claims were completely preempted under § 301 of the Labor Management Relations Act such that removal to federal court was proper.
2. Whether adjudicating Ruf's negligence claims required interpretation of the parties' collective-bargaining agreements, incorporated Major League Baseball rules and regulations, safety-committee provisions, grievance provisions, or compensation provisions.
3. Whether Ruf was entitled to attorneys' fees and costs under 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c) because the Reds lacked an objectively reasonable basis for removal.

HOLDINGS

1. Ruf's negligence claims were independent of the collective-bargaining agreements and were not completely preempted under § 301 of the LMRA; therefore, the federal court lacked subject-matter jurisdiction and remand was required.
2. The identified provisions did not require interpretation to resolve Ruf's negligence claims. The baseball rules and regulations did not address the manner in which the tarp was stored; the Safety and Health Advisory Committee was advisory and did not establish a contractual standard of care; the grievance and safety-complaint provisions had no alleged application to Ruf's claim; and compensation provisions did not govern claims against the Reds for conditions at the stadium.
3. Ruf was entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs incurred as a result of the removal because the Reds lacked an objectively reasonable basis for removal.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“If the plaintiff’s claim neither requires contract interpretation nor arises from the substance of the collective-bargaining agreement, then the claim is “independent” of the agreement for § 301 purposes, and preemption does not apply.” (Opinion and Order, § A)

“Section 301 of the LMRA “preempts only state law claims that are substantially dependent on an analysis of a collective-bargaining agreement, not claims that only tangentially involve CBA provisions.”” (Opinion and Order, § B)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Darin Ruf, a professional baseball player, injured his knee on the sharp metal end of a tarp roller while attempting to catch a foul ball during a June 2, 2023, game at Great American Ball Park. An advertisement allegedly obscured the tarp roller and concealed the dangerous condition. Ruf sued the Cincinnati Reds under

Ohio negligence theories, including premises liability, vicarious liability, and negligent hiring, training, supervision, and retention.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Ruf filed negligence claims in the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas arising from injuries sustained during a baseball game. The Cincinnati Reds removed the action to the Southern District of Ohio, asserting federal-question jurisdiction based on LMRA § 301 preemption. The district court granted Ruf's motion to remand and ordered him to submit additional briefing documenting reasonable attorneys' fees and costs before the court determined the amount of the award.

DISPOSITION

remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The Clerk was ordered to remand the case to the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas. Ruf was ordered to submit, within fourteen days, additional briefing documenting his reasonable attorneys' fees and costs so the court could determine the appropriate award.

CASES CITED

- Eastman v. Marine Mech. Corp., 438 F.3d 544, 549 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Miller v. Adamo Grp., No. 1:22-cv-14, 2022 WL 1013090, at *3 (S.D. Ohio Apr. 5, 2022)
- Bennett v. MIS Corp., 607 F.3d 1076, 1087 n.11 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Total Quality Logistics, LLC v. Summit Logistics Grp., LLC, 606 F. Supp. 3d 743, 747 (S.D. Ohio 2022)
- Loc. 174, Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen & Helpers of Am. v. Lucas Flour, 369 U.S. 95, 104 (1962)
- Allis-Chalmers Corp. v. Lueck, 471 U.S. 202, 210-12 (1985)
- Adamo Demolition Co. v. Int'l Union of Operating Eng'rs Loc. 150, AFL-CIO, 3 F.4th 866, 873-74 (6th Cir. 2021)
- Lingle v. Norge Div. of Magic Chef, Inc., 486 U.S. 399, 410 (1988)
- DeCoe v. Gen. Motors Corp., 32 F.3d 212, 216 (6th Cir. 1994)
- Wheatley v. Marietta Coll., 48 N.E.3d 587, 605 (Ohio Ct. App. 2016)
- Rivet v. Regions Bank of La., 522 U.S. 470, 475 (1998)
- Long v. Bando Mfg. of Am., Inc., 201 F.3d 754, 757 (6th Cir. 2000)
- Shamrock Oil & Gas Corp. v. Sheets, 313 U.S. 100, 108-09 (1941)
- Coyne ex rel. Ohio v. Am. Tobacco Corp., 183 F.3d 488, 493 (6th Cir. 1999)
- Fox v. Parker Hannifin Corp., 914 F.2d 795, 800 (6th Cir. 1990)
- Livadas v. Bradshaw, 512 U.S. 107, 124 (1994)
- Williamson v. China Basin Ballpark Co. LLC, No. 20-cv-8056, 2021 WL 11669479, at *6-7 (N.D. Cal. July 28, 2021)

- *Brittingham v. GMC*, 526 F.3d 272, 278 (6th Cir. 2008)
- *Baltrusaitis v. Int'l Union, United Auto., Aerospace & Agric. Implement Workers of Am.*, 133 F.4th 678, 686-87 (6th Cir. 2025)
- *Stringer v. NFL*, 474 F. Supp. 2d 894, 914 (S.D. Ohio 2007)
- *Green v. Ariz. Cardinals Football Club LLC*, 21 F. Supp. 3d 1020, 1028 (E.D. Mo. 2014)
- *Bush v. St. Louis Reg'l Convention*, No. 4:16-cv-250, 2016 WL 3125869, at *4-5 (E.D. Mo. June 3, 2016)
- *Patrick v. NFL*, No. cv 23-1069, 2023 WL 6162672, at *5-6 (C.D. Cal. Sept. 21, 2023)
- *Powers v. Cottrell, Inc.*, 728 F.3d 509, 513, 515, 518 (6th Cir. 2013)
- *Martin v. Franklin Capital Corp.*, 546 U.S. 132, 133, 139-41 (2005)
- *A Forever Recovery, Inc. v. Twp. of Pennfield*, 606 F. App'x 279, 281 (6th Cir. 2015)
- *Stallworth v. Greater Cleveland Reg'l Transit Auth.*, 105 F.3d 252, 257 (6th Cir. 1997)

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