

SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS OF WEST VIRGINIA

Brian Caldwell v. Newtown Energy, Inc.

No. 13-0015 · No. No. 13-0015 · Decided June 10, 2014

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia affirmed a Workers’ Compensation Board of Review decision awarding Brian Caldwell 12% permanent partial disability for cervical and shoulder injuries sustained while working as an underground coal miner. The court held that the impairment rating was supported by the only medical evidence and was consistent with the applicable American Medical Association Guides and West Virginia regulations.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per Curiam; Chief Justice Robin J. Davis; Justice Brent D. Benjamin; Justice Margaret L. Workman; Justice Menis E. Ketchum; Justice Allen H. Loughry II
JURISDICTION	West Virginia
DECIDED	June 10, 2014
DOCKET	No. 13-0015
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Claimant appealed the West Virginia Workers’ Compensation Board of Review’s affirmance of a 12% permanent partial disability award.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Board of Review’s decision was upheld unless it was in clear violation of a constitutional or statutory provision, clearly resulted from erroneous conclusions of law, or was based on a material misstatement or mischaracterization of the evidentiary record.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published memorandum decision; the opinion states that no substantial question of law was presented.
PARTIES	Brian Caldwell v. Newtown Energy, Inc.

TOPICS

- workers compensation
- appellate procedure
- administrative law
- standard of review
- remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

workers compensation

administrative law

appellate procedure

employment law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Caldwell was entitled to an additional 2% permanent partial disability award for his cervical injury based solely on the impairment rating initially calculated under the American Medical Association's Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment.
2. Whether West Virginia Code of State Rules §§ 85-20-64.1, 85-20-64.2, and 85-20-E were invalid or conflicted with West Virginia Code § 23-4-6(i).

HOLDINGS

1. Caldwell was not entitled to a permanent partial disability award greater than 12% for his cervical and shoulder injuries because the only impairment evidence supported the 12% rating.
2. Caldwell failed to establish that West Virginia Code of State Rules §§ 85-20-64.1, 85-20-64.2, or 85-20-E were invalid or in conflict with West Virginia Code § 23-4-6(i).

KEY QUOTATIONS

"For the foregoing reasons, we find that the decision of the Board of Review is not in clear violation of any constitutional or statutory provision, nor is it clearly the result of erroneous conclusions of law, nor is it based upon a material misstatement or mischaracterization of the evidentiary record." (2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Brian Caldwell, an underground coal miner, was struck by a falling rock on August 3, 2010. The claims administrator held the claim compensable for a concussion, neck sprain, head injury, and shoulder and upper-arm sprain. Dr. Paul Bachwitt assigned 8% impairment for Caldwell's cervical injury after adjusting his medical-guides rating to comply with West Virginia's impairment rules, and 4% for the shoulder injury, resulting in a combined 12% whole-person impairment rating.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The claims administrator granted Caldwell a 12% permanent partial disability award based on an independent medical evaluation. The Workers' Compensation Office of Judges affirmed that decision, and the Board of Review affirmed the Office of Judges. Caldwell appealed to the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, which affirmed the Board's final order.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- *Gore v. Insurance Commissioner of West Virginia*, No. 11-0612, 2013 WL 1286071, at *5 (Mar. 28, 2013)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA FILED SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS June 10, 2014 RORY L. PERRY II, CLERK SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS BRIAN CALDWELL, OF WEST VIRGINIA Claimant Below, Petitioner vs.) No. 13-0015 (BOR Appeal No. 2047573) (Claim No. 2011031489) NEWTOWN ENERGY, INC., Employer Below, Respondent MEMORANDUM DECISION Petitioner Brian Caldwell, by William B. Gerwig III, his attorney, appeals the decision of the West Virginia Workers' Compensation Board of Review.

Newtown Energy, Inc., by H. Dill Battle III, its attorney, filed a timely response. This appeal arises from the Board of Review's Final Order dated December 11, 2012, in which the Board affirmed an August 24, 2012, Order of the Workers' Compensation Office of Judges.

In its Order, the Office of Judges affirmed the claims administrator's July 21, 2011, decision granting Mr. Caldwell a 12% permanent partial disability award. The Court has carefully reviewed the records, written arguments, and appendices contained in the briefs, and the case is mature for consideration. This Court has considered the parties' briefs and the record on appeal.

The facts and legal arguments are adequately presented, and the decisional process would not be significantly aided by oral argument. Upon consideration of the standard of review, the briefs, and the record presented, the Court finds no substantial question of law and no prejudicial error.

For these reasons, a memorandum decision is appropriate under Rule 21 of the Rules of Appellate Procedure. Mr. Caldwell worked as an underground coal miner for Newtown Energy, Inc. On August 3, 2010, he was struck by a falling rock.

The claims administrator held the claim compensable for a concussion with loss of consciousness, neck sprain, other and unspecified injury to the head, and sprain of an unspecified site of the shoulder and left upper arm. Paul Bachwitt, M.D., performed an independent medical evaluation of Mr. Caldwell and determined that he had reached his maximum degree of medical improvement with respect to his orthopedic injuries.

Dr. Bachwitt determined that Mr. Caldwell had 10% whole person impairment for his 1 cervical injuries under the American Medical Association's Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment (4th ed. 1993). He then adjusted this rating to 8% impairment to fit within Cervical Category II of West Virginia Code § 85-20-E (2006). Dr. Bachwitt also found that Mr. Caldwell had 4% whole person impairment for his shoulder injury under the American Medical Association's Guides, which he combined with Mr. Caldwell's cervical impairment for a 12% combined whole person impairment rating.

On July 21, 2011, the claims administrator granted Mr. Caldwell a 12% permanent partial disability award based on Dr. Bachwitt's report. On August 24, 2012, the Office of Judges affirmed the claims administrator's decision.

The Board of Review affirmed the Order of the Office of Judges on December 11, 2012, leading Mr. Caldwell to appeal. The Office of Judges concluded that Mr. Caldwell was entitled to an 8% permanent partial disability award for his cervical spine pursuant to West Virginia Code of State Rules § 85-20-E and a 4% permanent partial disability award for his left shoulder injury.

It based this determination on the independent medical evaluation of Dr. Bachwitt. The Office of Judges noted that there was no dispute over Mr. Caldwell's 4% permanent partial disability for his shoulder injury. The Office of Judges found that Dr. Bachwitt's adjustment of his cervical impairment recommendation to fit within West Virginia Code of State Rules § 85-20-E was proper.

The Office of Judges determined that there was no evidence contrary to Dr. Bachwitt's impairment recommendation and no other impairment rating in the record. The Board of Review adopted the findings of the Office of Judges and affirmed its Order.

On appeal, Mr. Caldwell argues that he is entitled to an additional 2% permanent partial disability award for his cervical injury based exclusively on Dr. Bachwitt's impairment recommendation under the American Medical Association's Guides. Mr. Caldwell argues that West Virginia Code of State Rules §§ 85-20-64.1, 85-20-64.2, and 85-20-E (2006) are invalid and in conflict with West Virginia Code § 23-4-6(i) (2005).

We agree with the conclusions of the Board of Review and the findings of the Office of Judges. Mr. Caldwell had not shown that he is entitled to any greater than a 12% permanent partial disability award for his cervical and shoulder injuries. Dr. Bachwitt provided the only evidence of Mr. Caldwell's whole person impairment, and his rating was consistent with the American Medical Association's Guides and West Virginia Code of State Rules §§ 85-20-64 and 85-20-E.

Mr. Caldwell's request for an additional permanent partial disability award is inconsistent with this Court's holding in *Gore v. Insurance Commissioner of West Virginia*, No. 11-0612, 2013 WL 1286071, at *5 (Mar. 28, 2013), and he has not demonstrated that Dr. Bachwitt's impairment rating was invalid.

For the foregoing reasons, we find that the decision of the Board of Review is not in clear violation of any constitutional or statutory provision, nor is it clearly the result of erroneous conclusions of law, nor is it based upon a material misstatement or mischaracterization of the evidentiary record.

Therefore, the decision of the Board of Review is affirmed. 2 Affirmed. ISSUED: June 10, 2014
CONCURRED IN BY: Chief Justice Robin J. Davis Justice Brent D. Benjamin Justice Margaret

L. Workman Justice Menis E. Ketchum Justice Allen H. Loughry II 3

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