

SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS

Barth v. Bank of America, N.A.

351 S.W.3d 875 (Tex. 2011) · No. No. 10-0659 · Decided August 26, 2011

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Texas held that the plaintiff's naming of Bank of America Corporation was a misnomer rather than misidentification because Bank of America, N.A. was the entity involved and was not misled. The court concluded that the jury's liability findings could support the judgment against Bank of America, N.A., reversed the court of appeals, and remanded for consideration of other issues.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Texas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per Curiam
JURISDICTION	Texas
DECIDED	August 26, 2011
DOCKET	No. 10-0659
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Barth sued under the name Bank of America Corporation, while Bank of America, N.A. answered that it had been incorrectly named. After the evidence closed, the trial court granted a trial amendment correcting the misnomer, but the jury questions referred to Bank of America Corporation. The trial court rendered judgment against Bank of America, N.A.; the court of appeals reversed and rendered judgment for the bank. The Supreme Court of Texas granted Barth's petition for review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published and precedential
PARTIES	Jerry L. Barth v. Bank of America, N.A.

TOPICS

- pleadings
- civil procedure
- appellate procedure
- corporate law
- commercial litigation

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the plaintiff's use of Bank of America Corporation rather than Bank of America, N.A. constituted misnomer or misidentification.
2. Whether the jury's liability findings referring to Bank of America Corporation supported the trial court's judgment against Bank of America, N.A.

HOLDINGS

1. The naming error was misnomer, not misidentification, because the correct party was involved in the litigation and Bank of America, N.A. was not misled.
2. The jury's answers referring to Bank of America Corporation were applicable to Bank of America, N.A. and supported the judgment against Bank of America, N.A.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Misidentification—the consequences of which are generally harsh—arises when two separate legal entities exist and a plaintiff mistakenly sues an entity with a name similar to that of the correct entity.” (876)

“A misnomer occurs when a party misnames itself or another party, but the correct parties are involved.” (877)

“Courts generally allow parties to correct a misnomer so long as it is not misleading.” (877)

“Nothing in the record suggests that the jury could possibly have been confused, and its answers must be taken to be applicable to Bank of America, N.A.” (877)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Barth sued Bank of America Corporation, but Bank of America, N.A. answered that it had been incorrectly named. At trial, Bank of America, N.A.'s corporate representative testified that Bank of America National Association was the entity involved in the dispute, and no evidence established that Bank of America, Bank of America, N.A., and Bank of America Corporation were different entities. The trial court permitted a trial amendment correcting the misnomer, and the jury found liability while referring to Bank of America Corporation.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The trial court entered judgment against Bank of America, N.A. on jury findings identifying Bank of America Corporation as liable. The court of appeals reversed and rendered, concluding that the verdict did not support the judgment. The Supreme Court of Texas reversed the court of appeals and remanded for consideration of other issues raised by Bank of America, N.A.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The case was remanded to the Texas Court of Appeals for consideration of the other issues raised by Bank of America, N.A.

CASES CITED

- Enserch Corp. v. Parker, 794 S.W.2d 2, 4 (Tex. 1990)
- Chilkewitz v. Hyson, 22 S.W.3d 825, 828 (Tex. 1999)
- In re Greater Houston Orthopaedic Specialists, Inc., 295 S.W.3d 323, 325 (Tex. 2009) (per curiam)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

351 S.W.3d 875 (2011) Jerry L. BARTH, Petitioner, v. BANK OF AMERICA, N.A., Respondent. No. 10-0659. Supreme Court of Texas. Decided August 26, 2011. *876 Gilberto Hinojosa, Gilberto Hinojosa & Associates PC, Brownsville, TX, Carlos Escobar, Escobar Law Firm, PLLC, McAllen, TX, for Jerry L. Barth. Michael D. Conner, Eric Scott Lipper, Michael F. Hord Jr., Eric Mettenbrink, Hirsch & Westheimer, P.C., Houston, TX, for Bank of America, N.A.

PER CURIAM. Jerry L. Barth sued "Bank of America Corporation". Bank of America, N.A. answered, asserting that it had been, in its words, "incorrectly named". At trial, the witnesses referred simply to "Bank of America", with one exception: Bank of America, N.A.'s corporate representative testified, in response to a question by Bank of America, N.A.'s counsel regarding the "actual entity [involved in the dispute] that we're here over today", that it was "Bank of America National Association".

Bank of America Corporation was not mentioned in the evidence. During the jury charge conference after the close of the evidence, the trial court granted Barth a trial amendment to correct the misnomer, but the liability questions submitted to the jury and answered in Barth's favor all referred to Bank of America Corporation.

The trial court rendered judgment against Bank of America, N.A. on the verdict. The court of appeals reversed and rendered, holding that the verdict does not support the judgment. 352 S.W.3d 7 (Tex. App.-Corpus Christi 2010).

We disagree. Bank of America, N.A. argues that this is a case of misidentification, not misnomer. The argument, contrary to Bank of America, N.A.'s own answer in the trial court, is clearly wrong. We have explained: A misnomer differs from a misidentification. Enserch Corp. v. Parker, 794 S.W.2d 2, 4 (Tex.1990). Misidentificationthe consequences of which are generally harsharises

when two separate legal entities exist and a plaintiff mistakenly sues an entity with a name similar to that of the correct entity.

Chilkewitz v. Hyson, 22 S.W.3d 825, 828 (Tex.1999). A misnomer occurs when a party misnames itself or another party, but the correct parties are involved. *Id.* *877 (noting that "[m]isnomer arises when a plaintiff sues the correct entity but misnames it"). Courts generally allow parties to correct a misnomer so long as it is not misleading.

In *re Greater Houston Orthopaedic Specialists, Inc.*, 295 S.W.3d 323, 325 (Tex. 2009) (per curiam) (footnote and citations omitted). Bank of America, N.A. agrees that it has not been misled. This is a clear case of misnomer. Bank of America, N.A. also argues that the jury findings of Bank of America Corporation's liability support a judgment only against Bank of America Corporation.

But there was no evidence at trial that Bank of America, Bank of America, N.A., and Bank of America Corporation were different entities, and Bank of America, N.A.'s representative testified that Bank of America, N.A. was the entity involved in the dispute. Nothing in the record suggests that the jury could possibly have been confused, and its answers must be taken to be applicable to Bank of America, N.A.

Accordingly, we grant Barth's petition for review, and without oral argument, TEX. R. APP. P. 59.1, reverse the court of appeals' judgment and remand the case to that court for consideration of other issues raised by Bank of America, N.A.