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11 **SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA**
12 **COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

13 JOHNATHAN “MAC” WILLIAMSON, an
14 individual,
15 Plaintiff,
16 v.
17 CHINA BASIN BALLPARK COMPANY
18 LLC, a Delaware Limited Liability Company,
19 and DOES 1 through 20, inclusive,
20 Defendants.

Case No.

**COMPLAINT FOR PREMISES
LIABILITY AND NEGLIGENCE**

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

21 Plaintiff alleges:

INTRODUCTION

22 1. Plaintiff JOHNATHAN “MAC” WILLIAMSON (“Plaintiff”) is a professional
23 baseball player, who played for the San Francisco Giants. In April 2018, Plaintiff was one of the
24 best power hitters in Major League Baseball (“MLB”). On April 24, 2018, Plaintiff was
25 seriously injured when he crashed over an on-field bullpen mound and collided headfirst into the
26 left field line wall while running to catch a fly ball at Oracle Park (then AT&T Park) (“Park”) in
27 San Francisco. Plaintiff seeks to recover damages arising from his concussion-related injuries.
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1 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

2 7. Jurisdiction and venue are proper in this Court because the conduct described
3 herein, and the resulting harm suffered by Plaintiff, occurred within the City and County of San
4 Francisco, and Defendant CBBC’s principal place of business is within the City and County of
5 San Francisco.

6 **FACTS**

7 **The Park**

8 8. In the mid-1990s, the voters of San Francisco authorized the building of the Park
9 – a new downtown sports and outdoor events venue in San Francisco. On information and
10 belief, CBBC at all times relevant owned, operated, controlled, possessed, leased, managed,
11 maintained, and was involved in the design of, the Park.

12 9. The construction of the Park (which cost more than \$357 million) was privately
13 financed by CBBC. On information and belief, as part of the financing, CBBC sold personal
14 Charter Seat Licenses, which permitted the holder to purchase tickets for a specific seat to the
15 variety of events held at the Park, both baseball and non-baseball related.

16 10. On information and belief, CBBC signed a 66-year lease for the land with the
17 Port of San Francisco. According to the term sheet for the lease, “CBBC shall be responsible for
18 all costs of constructing and operating the ballpark project.”

19 11. The Giants at all times relevant played their home games at the Park.

20 12. CBBC’s purpose was to operate the Park for multiuse purposes. In addition to
21 Giants games, the Park has hosted numerous football games (including, e.g., an annual college
22 football bowl game (2002-13), home to the XFL’s San Francisco Demons (2001), home of the
23 annual East-West Shrine Game (until 2006), and interim home for Cal’s football team (2011)),
24 professional soccer matches, the AMA Supercross Championship (2003-11), numerous concerts
25 (2001-19), and even Kanye West’s proposal to Kim Kardashian (2013).

26 13. In designing the Park, CBBC decided to include on-field bullpens when used for
27 baseball games.

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1 14. It has long been known that bullpen mounds on the field of play create an
2 unreasonable risk of harm. For instance, in 1977, Baltimore Orioles’ manager Earl Weaver
3 famously had his team forfeit a game in Toronto during a pennant race due to safety concerns
4 with the on-field bullpen mounds.

5 15. Prior to building the Park, CBBC knew, or at a minimum should have known,
6 that placing bullpens on the field of play was a safety hazard for players. But as the late Peter
7 Magowan, who was Chairman and CEO of CBBC at the time, stated: “We wanted all the seats
8 to face the pitcher, like at Wrigley and at Seals Stadium. We wanted bullpens on the field, like
9 in Wrigley. Wrigley Field was built in 1912 but it had it all: great seats, seats that faced the
10 pitcher, quirky features.”

11 16. To make matters worse, CBBC located the on-field bullpen mounds so that they
12 were abutting the left field line and right field line walls, increasing the risk that a player who
13 fell over either mound would collide with the wall and be seriously injured. CBBC also failed to
14 incorporate any safety features, such as a warning track around the mounds like there are in
15 front of the outfield walls. On information and belief, the bullpen mounds at the Park were also
16 higher than normal pitcher’s mounds.

17 17. Baseball as a whole recognized the safety hazard: In 1989, there were 15 MLB
18 parks that had on-field bullpens; by 2000, there were only eight; and by 2018, CBBC was one of
19 only three parks. With the exception of San Diego’s Petco Park (built in 2004), Oracle Park was
20 the last park designed with on-field bullpens. (In 2012, Petco Park moved its one on-field
21 bullpen to behind the outfield wall mostly for player safety issues.)

22 18. Consistent with this trend, the Chicago Cubs moved the on-field bullpens at
23 Wrigley Field (which opened in 1914 and is the second oldest ballpark in Major League
24 Baseball) following the 2016 season due to player safety concerns.

25 19. Even after the Park was completed in 2000, CBBC was repeatedly put on notice
26 of the bullpen mound safety hazard each time a player fell over it. Examples prior to Plaintiff’s
27 collision include:
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- 1 • In 2014, Toronto Blue Jays left fielder Michael Saunders falling over the bullpen mound while chasing a fly ball and the ball hitting him in the head;
- 2 • In 2016, Washington Nationals right fielder Bryce Harper falling over the right field bullpen mound while making a catch;
- 3 • In 2016, the Giants' own Hunter Pence falling over the right field bullpen mound and making a catch while flat on his back;
- 4 • In 2017, Colorado Rockies left fielder Stephen Cardullo falling over the left field bullpen mound after making a running catch;
- 5 • In 2017, the Giants' own Eduardo Nunez stumbling over the left field bullpen mound while making a catch.

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10 20. Despite these multiple red-flag warnings, and in conscious disregard of player
11 safety, CBBC failed to eliminate the on-field bullpens at the Park or take any steps to minimize
12 the risk of injury posed by them.

13 **The Collision**

14 21. The Giants selected Plaintiff in the third round of the 2012 MLB draft. After
15 working his way up the minors as one of the Giants' top outfield prospects and being out for a
16 year due to surgery, Plaintiff made his MLB debut in 2015. Over the next two seasons, Plaintiff
17 split time between the Giants and their Triple-A affiliate in Sacramento.

18 22. Toward the end of the 2017 season, Plaintiff sought out the services of Doug
19 Latta, one of the foremost hitting instructors in the game today, known throughout baseball as
20 "the swing whisperer." Mr. Latta has helped remold numerous MLB players (many late in their
21 careers) into All-Stars.

22 23. Mr. Latta dramatically transformed Plaintiff's swing and the results were
23 immediate and profound. After continuing to work with Mr. Latta in the offseason, Plaintiff
24 emerged in spring training as one of the best hitters in baseball. Due to a crowded roster of
25 veteran outfielders, the Giants did not immediately call him up to play. However, after Plaintiff
26 started the year hitting .487 in Triple-A, on April 20, 2018 the Giants promoted him back to the
27 big leagues. During the first five games back with the Giants, Plaintiff hit .316 with three home
28 runs.

1 24. On the fateful day of April 24, 2018, the Giants were playing the Washington
2 Nationals at Oracle Park. Plaintiff went 2-for-4 at the plate. In the fifth inning, with the score
3 tied 3-3, he chased a fly ball heading down the left field foul line, running over 100 feet at a full
4 sprint in an attempt to make the catch and get his team out of the inning. Plaintiff was tracking
5 the ball the entire time it was in the air and unable to look down. As he crossed into foul
6 territory, he crashed over the bullpen mound just as he was about to make the catch, colliding
7 violently headfirst with the left field line wall without the ability to brace himself.



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21 25. Plaintiff immediately clutched his head with both hands and laid on the ground
22 stunned, dazed, and confused. The impact was so strong that fans seated in the area and the
23 hitter all grimaced in horror.

24 26. Beginning that evening, Plaintiff started feeling groggy. The following day, he
25 also began feeling dizzy, disoriented, and nauseous. The Giants put him through the concussion
26 protocol, which he failed. As a result, he was placed on the 7-day concussion injured list.

27 27. Following a rehab assignment, the Giants recalled Plaintiff in late May. Based
28 upon his pre-injury performance, Plaintiff was promoted to starting left fielder for the Giants,
relegating three-time All-Star Hunter Pence to the bench. Unfortunately, with his post-

1 concussion symptoms continuing, Plaintiff was unable to return to form and his numbers were
2 poor. As a result, in late June, the Giants optioned Plaintiff to Triple-A, where he continued to
3 struggle with vision problems, nausea and fatigue. When Plaintiff's symptoms continued
4 throughout the summer, he was again diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome and took off
5 the rest of the season to rehab. Thereafter, even though many of Plaintiff's symptoms had
6 dissipated, he continued to experience vision problems, bouts of vertigo-like symptoms, motion
7 sickness, and other symptoms as well.

8 28. The concussion caused a steep decline in Plaintiff's performance level and
9 effectively ended Plaintiff's Major League Baseball career.

10 **The Aftermath**

11 29. Meanwhile, on June 3, 2018 – six weeks after Plaintiff's collision and resulting
12 concussion – the Giants hosted their annual "Until There's A Cure Day." While the players were
13 on the field before the game participating in the event, Mr. Magowan, who helped design the
14 field on behalf of CBBC, apologized to Plaintiff for the collision and said he felt responsible for
15 his injuries as well as other injuries due to the on-field bullpen mounds since the Park opened in
16 2000.

17 30. Despite Plaintiff's collision in 2018, numerous other prior incidents, and Mr.
18 Magowan's apology, CBBC still failed to move the on-field bullpens after the 2018 season.
19 Such inaction led to the Giants' Steven Duggar falling over the right field bullpen mound and
20 injuring his wrist in April 2019, almost exactly a year after Plaintiff's crash. San Diego Padres
21 outfielder Wil Myers and Dodgers outfielder Chris Taylor also fell over the same mound in
22 2019.

23 31. In response to Mr. Duggar's injury, then Giants' Manager Bruce Bochy
24 remarked: "***It's dangerous. These guys are focused on catching the ball. They're running full***
25 ***speed. It was a scary moment, to be honest.***" (emphasis added). Giants' broadcaster Mike
26 Krukow took it a step further and told the Giants' flagship radio station KNBR: "Oh I was
27 angry. I was hot about it. We all were. We saw a horrific injury last year with what happened to
28 Mac Williamson."

1 32. The Giants’ *own players* even acknowledged the unnecessary risk they regularly
2 faced by having the bullpens on the field:

- 3 • “Getting the bullpens off the field would be a great thing. *For 10 years, I’ve seen*
4 *guys face plant going down the line* It’s just not smart to me to have the
5 bullpens right there by the foul line. If the bullpens went to right center, I
6 personally would not be opposed to it.” Buster Posey, Catcher (emphasis added)
- 7 • “*I’ve seen people get hurt and for me, it’s just a matter of time before we see a*
8 *more serious injury*. So I think it’s probably a good idea to move those out of the
9 way. And if it changes the dimensions . . . well, obviously, it’s not gonna get any
10 worse.” Brandon Belt, First Baseman (emphasis added)
- 11 • “*We saw it with [Plaintiff Mac Williamson] last year. It can be a safety hazard. I*
12 think Triples Alley would be a reasonable place to put it.” Brandon Crawford,
13 Shortstop (emphasis added)

14 33. In an interview with *The Sporting News* in 2019, former Giants second baseman
15 Scooter Gennett was asked what his favorite memory of Oracle Park was prior to joining the
16 team in a trade that year. In response, he retorted: “Well it’s definitely not running after a fly
17 ball in foul territory, tripping on the bullpen mound and the ball hitting the backside of my
18 glove.” In that same article, a Nationals relief pitcher opined: “You see some of these guys go
19 over there and it gets pretty ugly. It just seems like an unnecessary risk.”

20 34. Other players echoed similar concerns. Following his fall over the bullpen mound
21 at the Park, Mr. Taylor said: “It would be nice if they got a bullpen like everyone else, behind
22 the outfield.” His teammate and three-time Cy Young award-winner Clayton Kershaw went a
23 step further and exclaimed: “Let’s clean it up out here. It’s a brand-new ballpark, or relatively
24 new. *So they should have thought about it.*” (emphasis added).

25 35. Immediately after Mr. Cardullo fell over the bullpen mound, the Rockies’
26 television announcers and former major league players Jeff Huson and Ryan Spilborghs vented:
27 “That’s why you just flat hate that the mounds are in play. *This is dangerous, you want to lose a*
28 *player who’s making a semi-routine play in foul ground?*” (emphasis added).

 36. Following the 2019 season, CBBC *finally* moved the bullpens to behind the
outfield wall.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

Premises Liability

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3 37. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation stated
4 above.

5 38. As the entity that at all times relevant owned, operated, controlled, possessed,
6 managed, leased, maintained, and helped design the Park, CBBC, as such, had a duty to exercise
7 ordinary care to avoid exposing players to an unreasonable risk of harm. CBBC both knowingly
8 and negligently violated that duty by including on-field bullpens, especially after having been
9 warned that they were a safety hazard to players, thus making any resulting injuries obviously
10 foreseeable. CBBC failed to heed that duty both when designing and building the Park.

11 39. CBBC further breached that duty by failing to eliminate the hazard, despite
12 knowing of numerous instances of players falling over the on-field bullpen mounds in the years
13 before Plaintiff's injuries.

14 40. In further breach of its duty, CBBC also increased the risk of a player getting
15 injured by jamming the mounds just inches from the foul lines on one side and abutting the left
16 field line and right field line walls on the other side, leaving hardly any room for a player to
17 break his fall or to avoid hitting the wall. Additionally, CBBC failed to implement a warning
18 signal of any type to alert players as to the on-field bullpen mounds when they were running full
19 speed while looking up to track the ball. The rest of the first and third baselines and the area in
20 the outfield parallel to the wall all have a warning track (a flat dirt area approximately 10 feet
21 wide designed to alert the player to an oncoming wall).

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41. In doing the things described above, CBBC failed to exercise ordinary care to avoid exposing players, such as Plaintiff, to an unreasonable risk of harm, particularly given the high probability and foreseeability of injury.

42. CBBC has moral blame given it opted for fan experience over player safety.

43. The bullpen mounds were not an open and obvious condition to a player chasing down a fly ball. Further, this dangerous condition was unavoidable.

44. As a direct result of the conduct described above, Plaintiff suffered damages in the form of lost wages, medical expenses, loss of future earnings, and pain and suffering in an amount according to proof but exceeding the jurisdictional minimum of this Court.

45. CBBC's acts described herein were malicious and oppressive. At all relevant times herein, CBBC acted willfully and with conscious disregard for Plaintiff's safety as well as the safety of other players. Further, CBBC's conduct subjected Plaintiff to cruel and unjust hardship in conscious disregard of his rights. Plaintiff is therefore entitled to punitive damages against CBBC in an amount appropriate to punish it and set an example.

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1 SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

2 **Negligence**

3 46. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation stated
4 above.

5 47. CBBC owed a duty of due care to Plaintiff but negligently violated this duty by
6 the conduct described above.

7 48. As a direct result of the conduct described above, Plaintiff suffered damages in
8 the form of lost wages, medical expenses, loss of future earnings, and pain and suffering in an
9 amount according to proof but exceeding the jurisdictional minimum of this Court.

10 49. CBBC's acts described herein were malicious and oppressive. At all relevant
11 times herein, CBBC acted willfully and with conscious disregard for Plaintiff's safety as well as
12 the safety of other players. Further, CBBC's conduct subjected Plaintiff to cruel and unjust
13 hardship in conscious disregard of his rights. Plaintiff is therefore entitled to punitive damages
14 against CBBC in an amount appropriate to punish it and set an example.

15 PRAYER FOR RELIEF

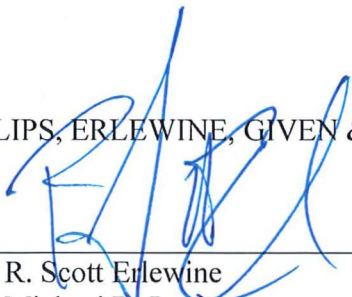
16 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment as follows:

- 17 1. For compensatory damages, according to proof but at least the jurisdictional
18 minimum;
- 19 2. For punitive and exemplary damages;
- 20 3. For pre-judgment interest, at the legal rate;
- 21 4. For costs of suit; and
- 22 5. For all such other and further relief as the Court may deem just, proper, and
23 equitable.

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25 Dated: November 10, 2020

PHILLIPS, ERLEWINE, GIVEN & CARLIN LLP

26
27 By: _____


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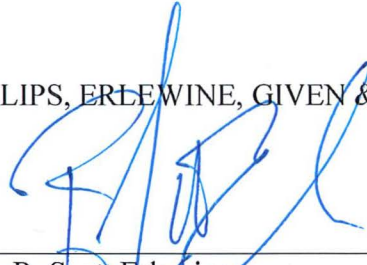
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DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff hereby demands a trial by jury of all issues so triable.

Dated: November 10, 2020

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