

RODEO SCANDAL LAWSUITS SETTLED

By Ryan Osborne

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Two lawsuits over allegations that star calf ropers rigged a lucrative rodeo in Arlington last year by losing on purpose were dismissed this week, as undisclosed settlements were reached in each case.

But additional court records made available this month show how the controversy started, including details on a contentious spat between Tuf Cooper, one of the best and richest ropers in the world, and Cole Bailey, a part-time cowboy who sells cars at his family business in Oklahoma.

At one point, an infuriated Bailey told Cooper bluntly: “You’re a piece of crap,” according to a sworn affidavit signed by Bailey this summer.

In the affidavit, he accused Cooper of asking him to participate in the alleged scheme.

Cooper, a roping prodigy from a tradition-rich roping family in Decatur, has not returned requests for comment.

The 26-year-old is a three-time world champion who turned pro nine years ago. His older brothers are pro ropers, too, and their father, Roy Cooper, won eight world titles in the 1970s and 80s.

Tuf Cooper and Timber Moore, a top roper from Aubrey, were sued by RFD-TV Events, a rural media company, in

August.

The dispute stemmed from the company's The American Rodeo at AT&T Stadium on March 1, 2015. The one-day, independent event offered prizes of \$100,000 to winners of seven different rodeo competitions. But it also featured a bonus reward for cowboys who qualified for the event rather than those who were invited.

A qualifier was eligible to earn up to \$1 million from a side pot for winning any of the seven events.

Bailey, a qualifier, reached the roping finals of the event, along with Cooper and Moore, both invitees, and Reese Riemer, another qualifier.

In his affidavit, Bailey wrote that Cooper approached him before the final round of competition with an offer.

"Hey Cole, do you want to talk some business?" Cooper asked Bailey, according to the affidavit. "You know, I've talked to Timber. You know we can all leave here with money."

'A great deal'

Cooper, according to Bailey's affidavit, explained the plan this way: "You know, you and Reese rope first and then me and Moore. After y'all rope, we'll know what to do.

Timber and me let you or Reese win, one of you two wins the rodeo, and then we can just all split the money."

The idea, according to the affidavit, was to allow Bailey or Riemer to collect \$100,000 for winning the roping competition, and then take home a large chunk — or possibly all — of the \$1 million side pot. The grand total would then be split among the four ropers.

"I appreciate the offer," Bailey said he told Cooper, "but I can't and won't do it."

Bailey said Moore's father-in-law was with Cooper and told him, "Cole, you're making a mistake. This is a great deal." Moore was not quoted in Bailey's affidavit.

Before the final round, Bailey said he asked Riemer if he had heard of a plan to split winnings.

"You know, Cole," Riemer said, according to Bailey's affidavit, "that'd be a lot of money we could all split and walk outta here with."

Bailey declined again, according to his affidavit, and placed fourth in the event.

Riemer won with a time of 7.59 seconds. Cooper finished second, at 8.38 seconds, followed by Moore.

Another qualifier, Taylor Price, won the bronc riding competition, so he and Riemer split the \$1 million side pot.

"Words can't express what this can do for my life,"

Riemer [told RFD-TV](#) after the competition. "When I threw my hands up and looked at the clock — I'll remember that moment the rest of my life."

'Take the Jesus off your collar'

Afterward, Cooper approached Bailey and told him that he, Riemer and Moore would be splitting their winnings, according to the affidavit.

"At that time, and by his behavior and his words, I believed he approached me with the intent to ensure that I was not going to reveal to anyone the details of the Scheme and what had just transpired," Bailey wrote in the affidavit. "Cooper then implied that I made a mistake by not taking the opportunity to be split in on the money." Bailey didn't take well to his interaction.

"You know, you got a lot of people here that are looking

up to you,” he told Cooper. “I got a little boy at home that’s probably one day gonna look up to me. To think I could do something this sorry? You’re a piece of crap. You need to take the Jesus off your collar.”

Bailey’s comment likely referenced Cooper’s competition shirts, which are embroidered with the name “Jesus.”

RFD-TV Events, the operator of The American, soon heard rumors of a possible scandal.

A company representative contacted Bailey four days after the rodeo, and Bailey told the rep what he knew, according to his affidavit.

A short time later, RFD-TV stopped payment on Riemer’s winning check of \$517,000.

At some point, the Arlington Police Department looked into the incident, but the investigation was closed for lack of witness cooperation, said Lt. Chris Cook, police spokesman.

Riemer countered the stopped payment on his check by suing RFD-TV in federal court in February.

“There is simply no legal justification for their failure to pay him,” Riemer’s attorney, John Thomas, said at the time. “There is no evidence that Reese agreed to share the proceeds, and certainly no basis to suggest that he did anything wrong.”

Riemer in his lawsuit claimed that RFD-TV’s owner threatened him with prison time. Then, when the 2016 rodeo approached, the company used Riemer’s photo as a marketing tool, the lawsuit noted.

In August, RFD-TV filed a lawsuit in Tarrant County civil court against Moore and Cooper, outlining allegations of a “fix” at the 2015 rodeo.

It was unclear this week how the lawsuits were resolved. Rick Hagen, the attorney for Moore, could only release this comment: “The parties have resolved this dispute to each party’s satisfaction.”

Attorneys for RFD-TV and Riemer could not be reached. Cooper did not hire an attorney.

Cooper fame

A post linking to the Star-Telegram [story about the August lawsuit](#) was shared more than 1,000 times on the Spin To Win Rodeo Magazine’s [Facebook page](#). A good number of the 129 comments focused on Cooper.

Not only is he successful, he’s one of the sport’s most visible stars.

He holds sponsorships from Chevrolet and MGM Grand, and this year, he switched from the traditional Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) to the upstart Elite Rodeo Athletes (ERA) tour, a circuit with fewer rodeos but more prize money.

On Twitter, he [has](#) 51,000 followers, almost twice as many as any other ERA cowboy. More than 100,000 fans like his [Facebook page](#).

The one roper more popular than Cooper might be his brother-in-law, Trevor Brazile, a 23-time world champion. After The American rodeo in 2015, Cooper went on to finish fourth in the PRCA standings, earning more than \$211,000.

That summer, he and Bailey ran into each other at a rodeo in Montana.

“Hey, can I just talk to you for twenty seconds?” Cooper asked him, according to Bailey’s affidavit. “I just want to apologize to you and your family. It was never my

intention for this to be this big of a deal. I want to apologize if I caused you or your family any harm or stress over this deal.”

Bailey told him, “Man, you ain’t caused me no harm,” and the two parted ways.

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