

The Mississippi Jury Verdict Reporter

The Most Current and Complete Summary of Mississippi Jury Verdicts

July 2026

Statewide Jury Verdict Coverage

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Truck Negligence - A trucker lost his heavy cargo (steel trusses) after losing control in a road rage incident with a phantom driver – the plaintiff (also a trucker) crashed into the debris field from the cargo loss that now blocked the highway before crashing as well into the defendant's truck and in the process sustained a multi-level disc injury – the trucker who crashed sued the trucker who lost his load for failing to secure the cargo and not diffusing the road rage incident

Smith v. Blair Logistics, 25-9

Plaintiff: Paul V. Ott, William L.

Morton, III and Rocky Wilkins,

Morgan & Morgan, Jackson and Noah

Sanford, *Sanford Law Office*, Collins

Defense: David C. Dunbar and

Robert Jamison Barefield,

DunbarMonroe, Ridgeland

Verdict: \$589,000 for plaintiff

assessed 85% to the defendant

Court: **Covington**

Judge: Stanley Sorey

Date: 7-16-26

Mack Smith, a trucker, was carrying a load of steel trusses on the evening of 8-27-24 for Blair Logistics. He traveled on U.S. 49 in a rural portion of Covington County, MS. The road has two lanes in each direction and is separated by a median. The speed limit is 65 mph. The roadway is not lit in this location. It was 8:46 p.m. and the sun had set. It was dark.

Smith became involved in a road rage incident with the phantom driver of a white pick-up. The phantom would pass Smith, change

lanes and slow down in front of Smith. Smith would then speed up and pass. This cat and mouse game happened several times. On the third time the phantom pulled in front of Smith and slowed down, Smith couldn't stop in time. He lost control of his big rig. Smith's truck jack-knifed, he ran off the road and his cargo load spread across the highway. The large steel trusses blocked the road.

The plaintiff in this case, Ronald Smith (no relation to Mack) was also operating a big rig on U.S. 49. He came upon the scene which was all caught on his forward-facing dash cam. The trusses suddenly appeared in front of him on the road. There was no warning. Ronald struck the trusses. This caused his truck to veer off the road and it then went on to collide with Mack's tractor-trailer.

Ronald subsequently treated in Florida (his home) for multi-level cervical and lumber disc injuries. That has primarily included an L4-5 disc injury with radiating pain to his lower extremities. His care has included several ESI injections.

In this lawsuit Ronald sued Mack (using first names for ease of exposition as they are both Smiths) and his employer Blair Logistics. The liability theory had several elements. The first was that the load was not properly secured. The plaintiff's truck safety expert, Paul Herbert, Quincy, CA, was also critical of Mack for not driving defensively and failing to manage the road rage driver.

Historical Mississippi Verdicts

Truck Negligence - A little boy was badly burned when his family's station wagon was rear-ended by a trucker and it burst into flames – a federal jury awarded the boy a then-personal injury record verdict of \$800,000 in 1975 (almost \$5,000,000 in 2026 dollars), and a year later his cousin (also burned in the same crash) took a \$500,000 award in a separate trial

Brown v. Watkins Motor Lines,

Plaintiff: Chuck McRae, Jackson

Verdict: \$800,000 for plaintiff

Federal: **Biloxi**

Judge: Harold Cox

Date: September 24, 1975

The Brown family from Texas was returning home after a family visit in Alabama. They traveled on U.S. 90 near Pascagoula early on the morning of July 7, 1974. William Brown was driving a station wagon. His son, Billy Joe, age 3, was a passenger. So too was a cousin, Gary, age 2.

William slowed down to turn into a Pak-a-Sak convenience store near the AL-MS state line. A moment later the station wagon was rear-ended by James Smith who was driving a tractor-trailer for Watkins Motor Lines. The station wagon caught fire and the family jumped out. Billy Joe and Gary were both pulled from the burning car. A moment later the car exploded.

While Billy Joe and Gary had both escaped certain death, both suffered severe burns. Billy Joe had burns to 65% of his body and ultimately lost his left hand. Billy Joe (through his father) advanced a case to trial a year later against the trucking firm.

A federal jury in Biloxi (Judge Cox



McRae's Supreme Court portrait

on the bench) returned a verdict for Billy Joe in the sum of \$800,000. The trial lasted eight days and was described as very emotional. This was reported as a then-Mississippi record in a personal injury (non-death case). The trucking firm paid it and McRae took a one-third contingency fee of \$266,666. The raw \$800,000 verdict would represent almost \$5,000,000 in 2026 dollars.

A year later in September of 1975 the case of Gary came to trial. It was again heard in Biloxi before Judge Cox. McRae represented the plaintiff. The jury's verdict was \$500,000. The trial was unusual as it was the first time in a federal case in Mississippi that a "video deposition" had been played. This was a novelty at the time, the boy's Houston burn doctor testifying remotely rather than having to travel in person to Biloxi.

The trucking firm paid the judgment that was entered on the verdict.

At this juncture Judge Cox had concerns about the attorney fee. He was upset apparently McRae had taken the contingency fee in the first case (\$266,666) and was prepared to take another \$166,500 in Gary's case. Sua sponte Judge Cox decided that was too much. He set the fee at 15%.

McRae took an appeal (the organization of the case was complicated by the appointment of a guardian in two states) and the 5th Circuit ruled in 1979. It reversed and concluded Judge Cox had no authority to act in this

fashion and could not force a remedy on the parties when they didn't seek it. The underlying order was vacated and the appeal dismissed. See *Brown v. May*, 596 F.2d 129 (5th Cir. 1979).

The colorful McRae (he served on the Mississippi Supreme Court from 1991 to 2004) and who was well-known for riding a motorcycle, recalled this case in 2026 (51 years later) when his portrait was presented at Mississippi's high court. He described the then largest PI verdict before this case was \$125,000 and he'd refused a \$500,000 offer for Billy Joe before taking the case to trial and being awarded \$800,000.

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