

The Tennessee Jury Verdict Reporter

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Statewide Jury Verdict Coverage

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(ligament) and a SLAP tear of his shoulder – the jury awarded the plaintiff \$1.25 million (\$995,000 in non-economic damages) but rejected the imposition of punitive damages *Cook v. DET Distributing et al*, 20-476
Plaintiff: Chauncey Fuller and Annie Perry, *Bart Durham Injury Law*, Nashville
Defense: Brian F. Walhart, Nashville, Thomas P. Mannion, Cleveland, both of *Lewis Brisbois*, Amie A. Vague, *Lightfoot Franklin & White*, Birmingham and E. Reynolds Davies, Jr., *Spicer Rudstrom*, Nashville
Verdict: \$1,250,000 for plaintiff less 10% comparative fault
Court: **Davidson**
Judge: C. David Briley
Date: 8-21-26

Melissa Wilson had a busy day at work on 4-23-19. She worked in sales

for the Nashville based, DET Distributing. The company distributes spirits and beer in Tennessee. It does a lot too. The company website indicates they push 9.8 million cases of booze every year.

Wilson's job was to call on commercial consumers of alcohol. On this date she visited a variety of Nashville area bars including, Pour House, Music City Bar & Grill and Rebar at the Dam, among others. She'd make deliveries, restock supplies and otherwise communicate with the customers. Wilson would also have a drink or two (it's the alcohol business after all) at some (but not all) of her stops.

The workday for Cook was mostly done. She had driven by DET Distributing provided commercial van to the home of her sister's

boyfriend. Wilson had a few glasses of wine there. Wilson left that residence was heading home. She traveled on Stewart Ferry's Pike and was preparing to



The plaintiff's Jeep Grand Cherokee after the collision

Truck Negligence - A sales person for a alcohol distributing company was driving drunk after a day of work (making calls, stocking supply and having a drink or two along the way) crashed into the plaintiff leaving him with a mild TBI, a C6-7 compression fracture, broken wrist, thumb injury

Historical Tennessee Verdicts

Products Liability - The plaintiff suffered severe burns (70% of his body and hospitalized for 164 days) after an acetylene cylinder tank exploded – almost ten years later (and after losing a first trial that was reversed on appeal), the plaintiff prevailed and took \$6.5 million which would be in the range of \$15,000,000 in 2026

Hurt v. Coyne Cylinder, 87-2004

Plaintiff: T. Robert Hill, *Hill Boren*, Jackson and Ralph E. Chapman, *Chapman Lewis Swan*, Clarksdale, MS
 Defense: Robert L. Green, *Neely Green Fargarson Brooke*, Memphis
 Verdict: \$6,516,504 for plaintiffs
 Federal: **Memphis**
 Judge: Jerome Turner
 Date: August 5, 1994

David Hurt, age 53, was working at his seed company in Halls, TN on August 30, 1985. He had a cylinder tank filled with acetylene. It was manufactured by Coyne Cylinder and then filled by Liquid Air. While Hurt was working nearby, the tank exploded. The tank flew some 75 feet and the explosion was heard for miles. Hurt was engulfed in the flames and sustained burns to 70% of his body. He was hospitalized for 164 days and incurred medical bills of \$467,356. He underwent numerous skin graft repairs.

Hurt sued Coyne Cylinder and Liquid Air in Lauderdale Circuit Court. They removed to federal court. Hurt alleged the cylinder had inadequate safeguards that made it subject to explode. He was also critical of the Liquid Air warnings on the tank.

The case was first tried to a Memphis jury in 1989. A defense

verdict was returned. Hurt appealed and cited instruction error in applying DOT regulations in this case. Liquid Air also appealed that it should have prevailed by directed verdict.

The Sixth Circuit issued its opinion in March of 1992. It found instruction error and reversed for a new trial. The court (Judge Boggs writing) also held that Liquid Air should have been dismissed. *See Hurt v. Coyne Cylinder*, 951 F.2d 1319 (6th Cir. 1992). The retrial was conducted over two weeks in the summer of 1994.

The jury found for Hurt and awarded him damages of \$6,016,504. His wife (Elizabeth) took \$500,000 more for her consortium interest. The verdict totaled \$6,516,504. That would be in the range of \$15,000,000 in 2026 dollars. Coyne Cylinder appealed the verdict but subsequently withdrew the appeal and the case was satisfied.

Auto Negligence - A young teacher suffered the loss of her leg (above the knee) after an auto collision

Bigham v. Miller

Plaintiff: Robert E. Cooper, Chattanooga
 Defense: J. F. Atchley and George Westerburg, Cleveland
 Verdict: \$40,000 for plaintiffs
 Court: **Hamilton**
 Judge: Frank Chamlee
 Date: November 9, 1950

Magdalene Bigham, age 27, was a passenger in a car with husband (David) in September of 1949. They traveled on Lee Highway near Ooltewah. A heavy rain was falling. The oncoming Nellie Miller spun out in the rain and struck the Bigham vehicle. It was a terrific collision and some eight persons went to the hospital. Bigham ultimately had her right leg amputated above the knee.

Bigham, described in the report as an attractive school teacher (this was 1950 after all) alleged negligence by Miller. She prevailed at a 1950 jury trial in Chattanooga and took \$30,000 in damages. Her husband took \$10,000 more for his consortium interest. The verdict totaled \$40,000 which would be in the range of \$500,000 today. The case was affirmed on appeal the next year.

Her husband, interestingly, later a member of the rock-a-billy group, The Four Roses and was a back-up vocalist for several big name acts of the era including Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison.

A Notable Mississippi Verdict

Defamation - A lawyer (the plaintiff) for a Memphis personal injury law firm alleged that after quitting his job, the firm's principal defamed him in an email to a defense lawyer involved in a case, that email indicated the plaintiff lacked integrity, practiced with "sheer incompetence" and the principal lawyer was "embarrassed to have ever been affiliated" with the plaintiff – the plaintiff also alleged breach of contract in failing to pay earned bonuses – the verdict was mixed, the plaintiff prevailing on the defamation count but he lost on the contract claim

Myatt v. Reaves Law Firm, 3:25-65

Plaintiff: William B. Ryan and Janelle C. Osowski, *Donati Law*, Memphis, TN

Defense: Wesley T. Evans, *Reaves Law Firm*, Memphis, TN

Verdict: \$245,000 for plaintiff

Federal: **Oxford, Mississippi**

Judge: Robert P. Chamberlin

Date: 9-10-26

Jody Myatt graduated from law school at Texas Tech in 2003 and was licensed in Texas. Thereafter he spent time as a JAG lawyer. He became licensed in Mississippi in 2016. Myatt took a job with the Memphis-based The Reaves Law Firm in February of 2023. The law firm's principal is Henry Reaves.

Myatt had a melded compensation package. He was paid a base \$95,000 per annum salary to work plaintiff's personal injury cases. There was also a convoluted bonus structure that provided additional compensation on cases that settled in which Reaves was involved. Myatt spent his first three months in the Memphis office

before working remotely from his home in Oxford.

In December of 2024, Reaves removed Myatt from a significant case that was nearing settlement. Myatt believed he'd been so removed in an effort by the law firm to avoid paying him a bonus. Myatt made a decision to resign.

Myatt gave the law firm two weeks notice of his separation on 1-13-25. Reaves immediately terminated him. Reaves also sent an email to attorney Dawn Davis Carson (she was defending the big case upon which Myatt was removed) and he had observations about Myatt.

Reaves wrote to Carson and said about Myatt, that,

Dawn,

This matter is resolved. There are no fee disputes.

Jody was fired from RLF due in part to his lack of integrity and failure to meet RLF standards as an attorney. He was an attorney on payroll and had no contractual right to any fees from any case I had him work as an employee.

His current actions, reaffirm that we made the right decision firing him.

I took this case from Jody because of his sheer incompetence, prior to mediation.

Jody is currently misrepresenting himself and attempting to mislead others.

He in no way reflects the Reaves Law Firm. I try to give fellow veterans an opportunity when no one else will, sometimes it doesn't work out. I'm embarrassed to have ever been affiliated with a man of such low character.

If Jody Myatt continues with these tactics, there will be ramifications.

Best,

Henry E. Reaves III, Esq.

The email from Henry Reaves to Dawn Carson

(1) he was fired because of a lack of integrity,

(2) Reaves removed Myatt from the case because of "sheer incompetence,"

(3) He originally hired Myatt because he likes to help veterans, but he was now "embarrassed to have ever been affiliated with a man of such low character." It's not clear how Myatt learned of the email but ultimately he did.

Myatt filed suit against The Reaves Law Firm two months later and advanced two claims. The first was breach of contract. He alleged that the law firm failed to pay him earned bonuses on the contract (\$55,000) plus \$7,500 in salary.

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