

# Neverland Never Paid

By Reg P. Wydeven  
March 18, 2006

In 1993, two MJ's got together to corroborate on a project: the King of Court, Michael Jordan, appeared in the King of Pop, Michael Jackson's music video for his hit 'Jam'. Jackson exposed his Airness's inability to dance, while Jordan showed up Jacko in a game of hoops.

Since filming the video, Jackson's albums have had poor sales and he was arrested and tried for child molestation. The Bulls, meanwhile, went on to win three more NBA championships. Maybe their differences in success are related to their management style.

Last week, the California Department of Industrial Relations fined Jackson nearly \$170,000 and placed a "stop work" order on Jackson's Neverland ranch, basically telling Jackson's employees to 'Beat It'. The DIR took these drastic actions because Jackson has been 'Bad' for failing to pay Neverland's employees since December and because he also allowed his workers' compensation coverage to lapse.

Jackson was fined more than \$100,000 for failing to pay his employees, whom he now owes over \$306,000. He was also fined \$69,000 - \$1,000 for each of Neverland's 69 employees - for letting his workers' compensation coverage lapse in January. The DIR issued the fines after investigating 47 complaints from Jackson's workers for failing to get paid.

If Jackson procures policy, he has 5 days to appeal the stop order and get clearance for employees to return to work. California investigators will continue monitoring the situation at Neverland to ensure employee safety. If Jackson fails to obtain a policy, the DIR will not allow him to maintain employees at Neverland and will shut down the ranch. Because Neverland has a zoo, the future of the animals is uncertain.

While Jackson is clearly no 'Thriller' as a boss, the Chicago Bulls are a rare breed of employer. Last season the Bulls learned that Eddy Curry, their 22-year-old 6'11" starting center and leading scorer, may be predisposed to hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. HCM is an excessive thickening of the heart, and is the same condition that killed the Boston Celtics' Reggie Lewis and Loyola Marymount University's Hank Gathers.

The Bulls suspected HCM after Curry experienced an irregular heartbeat and felt dizzy prior to a game. General Manager John Paxson asked Curry to take a DNA test to determine if he's genetically susceptible to the disease. Instead of fearing for his own health, Curry and his lawyer, Alan Milstein, refused the test because it invaded his privacy and wasn't required under the NBA's collective bargaining agreement.

Not wanting to put Curry's health at risk, Paxson refused to extend Curry's contract until he took the test. If Curry refused, the Bulls were willing to pay him the \$5 million owed him for the final year of his contract while keeping him on the bench. Then the team made a gesture unheard of in professional sports - the Bulls offered Curry \$400,000 annually for 50 years, or \$20 million, if the DNA test yielded bad results.

While Jackson failed to maintain insurance coverage, the NBA's insurance carrier refuses to insure Curry against a career-ending heart ailment. But that didn't deter the New York Knicks, who signed Curry to a six-year, \$60 million contract without requiring the DNA test.

The Bulls showed a lot of heart with their offer. I just hope Curry's is as strong.

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