

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS
EASTERN DIVISION**

HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS
INTERNATIONAL, INC.,

Plaintiff,

v.

THE PARTNERSHIPS and
UNINCORPORATED ASSOCIATIONS
IDENTIFIED ON SCHEDULE “A,”

Defendants.

Case No. 24-cv-10355

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Harlem Globetrotters International, Inc. (“Harlem Globetrotters” or “Plaintiff”) hereby brings the present action against the Partnerships and Unincorporated Associations identified on Schedule A attached hereto (collectively, “Defendants”) and alleges as follows:

I. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This Court has original subject matter jurisdiction over the claims in this action pursuant to the provisions of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1051, *et seq.*, 28 U.S.C. § 1338(a)–(b) and 28 U.S.C. § 1331.

2. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391, and this Court may properly exercise personal jurisdiction over Defendants since each of the Defendants directly targets business activities toward consumers in the United States, including Illinois, through at least the fully interactive e-commerce stores¹ operating under the seller aliases identified in Schedule A attached hereto (the “Seller Aliases”). Specifically, Defendants have targeted sales to

¹ The e-commerce store URLs are listed on Schedule A hereto under the Online Marketplaces.

Illinois residents by setting up and operating e-commerce stores that target United States consumers using one or more Seller Aliases, offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois, accept payment in U.S. dollars and/or funds from U.S. bank accounts, and, on information and belief, have sold products using infringing and counterfeit versions of Plaintiff's federally registered trademarks to residents of Illinois. Each of the Defendants is committing tortious acts in Illinois, is engaging in interstate commerce, and has wrongfully caused Plaintiff substantial injury in the State of Illinois.

II. INTRODUCTION

3. This action has been filed by Plaintiff to combat e-commerce store operators who trade upon Plaintiff's reputation and goodwill by offering for sale and/or selling unauthorized and unlicensed products, including merchandise, apparel, and accessories, using infringing and counterfeit versions of Plaintiff's federally registered trademarks (the "Counterfeit Products"). Defendants create e-commerce stores operating under one or more Seller Aliases that are advertising, offering for sale, and selling Counterfeit Products to unknowing consumers. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases share unique identifiers, establishing a logical relationship between them in that Defendants' counterfeiting operation arises out of the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants attempt to avoid and mitigate liability by operating under one or more Seller Aliases to conceal both their identities and the full scope and interworking of their counterfeiting operation. Plaintiff is forced to file this action to combat Defendants' counterfeiting of its registered Harlem Globetrotters trademarks, as well as to protect unknowing consumers from purchasing Counterfeit Products over the Internet. Plaintiff has been and continues to be irreparably damaged through consumer confusion, dilution,

and tarnishment of its valuable trademarks as a result of Defendants' actions and seeks injunctive and monetary relief.

III. THE PARTIES

Plaintiff

4. Harlem Globetrotters International, Inc. is a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Nevada, having its principal place of business at 155 Technology Parkway, Suite 100, Peachtree Corners, Georgia, 30092.

5. The Harlem Globetrotters are an American exhibition basketball team that originated in Chicago, Illinois in the 1920s. From early on, the Harlem Globetrotters blended basketball with showmanship and talent, earning the team influence, recognition, and representation for African American athletes.

6. The Harlem Globetrotters rose to fame through impressive exhibition wins. Notably, in 1948, the Harlem Globetrotters defeated the Minneapolis Lakers, which had been deemed one of the best basketball team in the country. The team's victories likewise assisted in accelerating the integration of the National Basketball Association (the "NBA") when Harlem Globetrotters Chuck Cooper and Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton became the first black player to be drafted in the NBA and the first black player to sign an NBA contract, respectively. Today, more than 750 men and women have played for the Harlem Globetrotters team.

7. Since the 1950s, the Harlem Globetrotters have done many international tours in 124 countries and territories, on six continents, and before more than 148 million fans. Over the years, the team's exhibition games have become known for their mix of show basketball, athleticism, theater and comedy. Most recently, the Harlem Globetrotters are conducting their 2024 World Tour.

8. Throughout their history, the Harlem Globetrotters have made frequent appearances in popular culture. The Harlem Globetrotters cartoon show on CBS earned some of the highest ratings in the history of Saturday morning television, and the team also had their own live action Saturday morning variety show, The Harlem Globetrotters Popcorn Machine, while appearing numerous times on the popular and long-running ABC's Wide World of Sports. In 1982, the team received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

9. For nearly a century, the Harlem Globetrotters have been committed to enriching communities. In 2022, the “*Harlem Globetrotters: Play It Forward*” television show premiered, which celebrates the historic franchise by showcasing the new generation of players and coaches both on and off the court. In its inaugural 2022-23 season, the show earned a daytime Emmy® nomination, two Cynopsis Awards for Best Platform Geared to Diverse Sports Interests and Athletes for Social Good TV Special or Episodes, and 11 national Telly Awards.

10. Products sold under the Harlem Globetrotters brand include sports gear, backpacks, apparel, and accessories (collectively, the “Harlem Globetrotters Products”). Harlem Globetrotters Products are distributed and sold to consumers throughout the United States, including in Illinois, through authorized retailers and the harlemglobetrotters.com website and shop.harlemglobetrotters.com webpage.

11. Plaintiff incorporates a variety of distinctive marks in the design of its various Harlem Globetrotters Products. As a result of its long-standing use, Plaintiff owns common law trademark rights in its trademarks. Plaintiff has also registered its trademarks with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Harlem Globetrotters Products typically include at least one of Plaintiff's registered trademarks. Plaintiff uses its trademarks in connection with the marketing

of its Harlem Globetrotters Products, including the following marks which are collectively referred to as the “HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks.”

Registration No.	Trademark
5986330	HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS
5478778	
6092438	
2052581	

3286735	
5478777	
5478914	
4112767	HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS 4 POINTS
542473	GLOBETROTTERS

4273026	GLOBETROTTER NATION
3191929	GLOBIE
1269464	MAGIC CIRCLE
662372	MAGICIANS OF BASKETBALL
4504808	MAGIC PASS
4990306	GREAT ASSIST
2183611	GOODWILL AMBASSADORS
2193275	AMBASSADORS OF GOODWILL

12. The above U.S. registrations for the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are valid, subsisting, in full force and effect, and many are incontestable pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1065. The registrations for the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks constitute *prima facie* evidence of their validity and of the Plaintiff's exclusive right to use the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1057(b). True and correct copies of the United States Registration Certificates for the above-listed HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are attached hereto as **Exhibit 1**.

13. The HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are exclusive to Plaintiff and are displayed extensively on the Harlem Globetrotters Products and in Plaintiff's marketing and promotional materials. The Harlem Globetrotters brand has been extensively promoted and advertised at great expense. In fact, over the years, Plaintiff, or third parties on Plaintiff's behalf, has expended millions of dollars in advertising, promoting, and marketing featuring the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks, as well as significant time and resources. As a result, products bearing the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are widely recognized and exclusively associated by consumers, the public, and the trade as being products sourced from Plaintiff.

14. The HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are distinctive when applied to the Harlem Globetrotters Products, signifying to the purchaser that the products come from Plaintiff and are manufactured to Plaintiff's quality standards. Whether Plaintiff manufactures the products itself or contracts with others to do so, Plaintiff has ensured that products bearing the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are manufactured to the highest quality standards.

15. The HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are famous marks, as that term is used in 15 U.S.C. § 1125(c)(1), and have been used by Plaintiff for many years. The innovative marketing and product designs of the Harlem Globetrotters Products have enabled the Harlem Globetrotters' brand to achieve widespread recognition and fame and have made the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks some of the most well-known marks in the world. The widespread fame, outstanding reputation, and significant goodwill associated with the Harlem Globetrotters brand has made the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks valuable assets of Plaintiff.

16. Plaintiff operates an e-commerce website where it promotes and sells genuine Harlem Globetrotters Products at the harlemglobetrotters.com website and shop.harlemglobetrotters.com webpage. The harlemglobetrotters.com website and shop.harlemglobetrotters.com webpage feature proprietary content, images, and designs exclusive to Plaintiff.

17. Plaintiff has expended substantial time, money, and other resources in developing, advertising, and otherwise promoting the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks. As a result, products bearing the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are widely recognized and exclusively associated by consumers, the public, and the trade as being high-quality products

sourced from Plaintiff. Plaintiff is a multi-million-dollar operation and the Harlem Globetrotters Products have become among the most popular of their kind in the world.

The Defendants

18. Defendants are individuals and business entities of unknown makeup who own and/or operate one or more of the e-commerce stores under at least the Seller Aliases identified on Schedule A and/or other seller aliases not yet known to Plaintiff. On information and belief, Defendants reside and/or operate in the People's Republic of China or other foreign jurisdictions with lax trademark enforcement systems, or redistribute products from the same or similar sources in those locations. Defendants have the capacity to be sued pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 17(b).

19. On information and belief, Defendants, either individually or jointly, operate one or more e-commerce stores under the Seller Aliases listed in Schedule A attached hereto. Tactics used by Defendants to conceal their identities and the full scope of their operation make it virtually impossible for Plaintiff to discover Defendants' true identities and the exact interworking of their counterfeit network. If Defendants provide additional credible information regarding their identities, Plaintiff will take appropriate steps to amend the Complaint.

IV. DEFENDANTS' UNLAWFUL CONDUCT

20. The success of the Harlem Globetrotters brand has resulted in significant infringement and counterfeiting of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks. Consequently, Plaintiff maintains a robust intellectual property policing program and regularly monitors and enforces its rights in its trademarks and other intellectual property rights. In recent years, Plaintiff has identified many fully interactive, e-commerce stores offering counterfeit Harlem Globetrotter Products on online marketplace platforms such as Amazon, eBay,

AliExpress, Alibaba, Wish.com, Walmart, Etsy, DHgate, and Temu, including the e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases. The Seller Aliases target consumers in this Judicial District and throughout the United States. According to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (“CBP”) report, in 2021, CBP made over 27,000 seizures of goods with intellectual property rights (“IPR”) violations totaling over \$3.3 billion, an increase of \$2.0 billion from 2020. *Intellectual Property Rights Seizure Statistics, Fiscal Year 2021*, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (**Exhibit 2**). Of the 27,000 in total IPR seizures, over 24,000 came through international mail and express courier services (as opposed to containers), most of which originated from China and Hong Kong. *Id.*

21. Third party service providers like those used by Defendants do not adequately subject new sellers to verification and confirmation of their identities, allowing counterfeiters to “routinely use false or inaccurate names and addresses when registering with these e-commerce platforms.” **Exhibit 3**, Daniel C.K. Chow, *Alibaba, Amazon, and Counterfeiting in the Age of the Internet*, 40 NW. J. INT’L L. & BUS. 157, 186 (2020); *see also* report on “Combating Trafficking in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods” prepared by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans (Jan. 24, 2020), attached as **Exhibit 4** and finding that on “at least some e-commerce platforms, little identifying information is necessary for a counterfeiter to begin selling” and recommending that “[s]ignificantly enhanced vetting of third-party sellers” is necessary. Counterfeiters hedge against the risk of being caught and having their websites taken down from an e-commerce platform by preemptively establishing multiple virtual storefronts. **Exhibit 4** at p. 22. Since platforms generally do not require a seller on a third-party marketplace to identify the underlying business entity, counterfeiters can have many different profiles that can appear unrelated even though they are commonly owned and operated. **Exhibit 4** at p. 39. Further,

“E-commerce platforms create bureaucratic or technical hurdles in helping brand owners to locate or identify sources of counterfeits and counterfeiters.” **Exhibit 3** at 186–87.

22. Defendants have targeted sales to Illinois residents by setting up and operating e-commerce stores that target United States consumers using one or more Seller Aliases, offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois, accept payment in U.S. dollars and/or funds from U.S. bank accounts, and, on information and belief, have sold Counterfeit Products to residents of Illinois.

23. Defendants concurrently employ and benefit from substantially similar advertising and marketing strategies. For example, Defendants facilitate sales by designing the e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases so that they appear to unknowing consumers to be authorized online retailers, outlet stores, or wholesalers. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases look sophisticated and accept payment in U.S. dollars and/or funds from U.S. bank accounts via credit cards, Alipay, Amazon Pay, and/or PayPal. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases often include content and images that make it very difficult for consumers to distinguish such stores from an authorized retailer. Plaintiff has not licensed or authorized Defendants to use any of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks and none of the Defendants are authorized retailers of genuine Harlem Globetrotters Products.

24. Many Defendants also deceive unknowing consumers by using the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks without authorization within the content, text, and/or meta tags of their e-commerce stores to attract various search engines crawling the Internet looking for websites relevant to consumer searches for Harlem Globetrotters Products. Other e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases omit using HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks

in the item title to evade enforcement efforts, while using strategic item titles and descriptions that will trigger their listings when consumers are searching for Harlem Globetrotters Products.

25. E-commerce store operators like Defendants commonly engage in fraudulent conduct when registering the Seller Aliases by providing false, misleading, and/or incomplete information to e-commerce platforms to prevent discovery of their true identities and the scope of their e-commerce operation.

26. E-commerce store operators like Defendants regularly register or acquire new seller aliases for the purpose of offering for sale and selling Counterfeit Products. Such seller alias registration patterns are one of many common tactics used by e-commerce store operators like Defendants to conceal their identities and the full scope and interworking of their counterfeiting operation, and to avoid being shut down.

27. Even though Defendants operate under multiple fictitious aliases, the e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases often share unique identifiers such as templates with common design elements that intentionally omit any contact information or other information for identifying Defendants or other Seller Aliases they operate or use. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases include other notable common features such as use of the same registration patterns, accepted payment methods, check-out methods, keywords, advertising tactics, similarities in price and quantities, the same incorrect grammar and misspellings, and/or the use of the same text and images. Additionally, Counterfeit Products for sale by the Seller Aliases bear similar irregularities and indicia of being counterfeit to one another, suggesting that the Counterfeit Products were manufactured by and come from a common source and that Defendants are interrelated.

28. E-commerce store operators like Defendants are in constant communication with each other and regularly participate in QQ.com chat rooms and through websites such as sellerdefense.cn and kuajingvs.com regarding tactics for operating multiple accounts, evading detection, pending litigation, and potential new lawsuits.

29. Counterfeiters such as Defendants typically operate under multiple seller aliases and payment accounts so that they can continue operation despite Plaintiff's enforcement. E-commerce store operators like Defendants maintain off-shore bank accounts and regularly move funds from their financial accounts to off-shore accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court to avoid payment of any monetary judgment awarded to Plaintiff. Indeed, analysis of financial account transaction logs from previous similar cases indicates that offshore counterfeiters regularly move funds from U.S.-based financial accounts to offshore accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court.

30. Defendants are working in active concert to knowingly and willfully manufacture, import, distribute, offer for sale, and sell Counterfeit Products in the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants, without any authorization or license from Plaintiff, have jointly and severally, knowingly, and willfully used and continue to use the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks in connection with the advertisement, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit Products into the United States and Illinois over the Internet.

31. Defendants' unauthorized use of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks in connection with the advertising, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit Products, including the sale of Counterfeit Products into the United States, including Illinois, is likely to

cause and has caused confusion, mistake, and deception by and among consumers and is irreparably harming Plaintiff.

COUNT I
TRADEMARK INFRINGEMENT AND COUNTERFEITING (15 U.S.C. § 1114)

32. Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates by reference the allegations set forth in the preceding paragraphs.

33. This is a trademark infringement action against Defendants based on their unauthorized use in commerce of counterfeit imitations of the federally registered HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks in connection with the sale, offering for sale, distribution, and/or advertising of infringing goods. The HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks are highly distinctive marks. Consumers have come to expect the highest quality from Harlem Globetrotters Products offered, sold, or marketed under the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks.

34. Defendants have sold, offered to sell, marketed, distributed, and advertised, and are still selling, offering to sell, marketing, distributing, and advertising products using counterfeit reproductions of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks without Plaintiff's permission.

35. Plaintiff is the exclusive owner of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks. Plaintiff's United States Registrations for the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks (**Exhibit 1**) are in full force and effect. On information and belief, Defendants have knowledge of Plaintiff's rights in the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks and are willfully infringing and intentionally using counterfeits of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks. Defendants' willful, intentional, and unauthorized use of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks is likely to cause and is causing confusion, mistake, and deception as to the origin and quality of the Counterfeit Products among the general public.

36. Defendants' activities constitute willful trademark infringement and counterfeiting under Section 32 of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1114.

37. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law, and if Defendants' actions are not enjoined, Plaintiff will continue to suffer irreparable harm to its reputation and the goodwill of its well-known HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks.

38. The injuries and damages sustained by Plaintiff have been directly and proximately caused by Defendants' wrongful reproduction, use, advertisement, promotion, offering to sell, and sale of Counterfeit Products.

COUNT II
FALSE DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN (15 U.S.C. § 1125(a))

39. Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates by reference the allegations set forth in the preceding paragraphs.

40. Defendants' promotion, marketing, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit Products has created and is creating a likelihood of confusion, mistake, and deception among the general public as to the affiliation, connection, or association with Plaintiff or the origin, sponsorship, or approval of Defendants' Counterfeit Products by Plaintiff. By using the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks in connection with the sale of Counterfeit Products, Defendants create a false designation of origin and a misleading representation of fact as to the origin and sponsorship of the Counterfeit Products.

41. Defendants' false designation of origin and misrepresentation of fact as to the origin and/or sponsorship of the Counterfeit Products to the general public involves the use of counterfeit marks and is a willful violation of Section 43 of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1125.

42. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law and, if Defendants' actions are not enjoined, Plaintiff will continue to suffer irreparable harm to its reputation and the goodwill of its Harlem Globetrotters brand.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against Defendants as follows:

- 1) That Defendants, their affiliates, officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, confederates, and all persons acting for, with, by, through, under or in active concert with them be temporarily, preliminarily, and permanently enjoined and restrained from:
 - a. using the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof in any manner in connection with the distribution, marketing, advertising, offering for sale, or sale of any product that is not a genuine Harlem Globetrotters product or is not authorized by Plaintiff to be sold in connection with the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks;
 - b. passing off, inducing, or enabling others to sell or pass off any product as a genuine Harlem Globetrotters product or any other product produced by Plaintiff, that is not Plaintiff's or not produced under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff and approved by Plaintiff for sale under the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks;
 - c. committing any acts calculated to cause consumers to believe that Defendants' Counterfeit Products are those sold under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff, or are sponsored by, approved by, or otherwise connected with Plaintiff;
 - d. further infringing the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks and damaging Plaintiff's goodwill; and

- e. manufacturing, shipping, delivering, holding for sale, transferring, or otherwise moving, storing, distributing, returning, or otherwise disposing of, in any manner, products or inventory not manufactured by or for Plaintiff, nor authorized by Plaintiff to be sold or offered for sale, and which bear any of Plaintiff's trademarks, including the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks, or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof;
- 2) Entry of an Order that, upon Plaintiff's request, those with notice of the injunction, including, without limitation, any online marketplace platforms such as eBay, AliExpress, Alibaba, Amazon, Wish.com, Walmart, Etsy, DHgate, and Temu (collectively, the "Third Party Providers") shall disable and cease displaying any advertisements used by or associated with Defendants in connection with the sale of counterfeit and infringing goods using the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks;
- 3) That Defendants account for and pay to Plaintiff all profits realized by Defendants by reason of Defendants' unlawful acts herein alleged, and that the amount of damages for infringement of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks be increased by a sum not exceeding three times the amount thereof as provided by 15 U.S.C. § 1117;
- 4) In the alternative, that Plaintiff be awarded statutory damages for willful trademark counterfeiting pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1117(c)(2) of \$2,000,000 for each and every use of the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS Trademarks;
- 5) That Plaintiff be awarded its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs; and
- 6) Award any and all other relief that this Court deems just and proper.

Dated this 15th day of October 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Justin R. Gaudio

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