

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

NHL ENTERPRISES, L.P.,

Plaintiff,

v.

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

Defendants.

Case No. 25-cv-05174

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff NHL Enterprises, L.P. (“NHLE” 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 (collectively, the “Seller Aliases”). Specifically, Defendants have

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

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 and continue to sell 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 using infringing and counterfeit versions of one or more of the trademarks owned and/or licensed by Plaintiff (the "Counterfeit NHL Products"). Plaintiff is a member of the Coalition to Advance the Protection of Sports logos ("CAPS"), which is administered by Trademark Management LLC ("TML"). Plaintiff has established a comprehensive program of trademark protection and enforcement, which includes Plaintiff's collaboration with CAPS. In particular, CAPS has created an extensive anti-counterfeiting program for Plaintiff, which includes regularly investigating suspicious e-commerce stores and enforcing Plaintiff's trademark rights to prevent the sale of Counterfeit NHL Products.

4. Defendants create e-commerce stores operating under one or more Seller Aliases that are advertising, offering for sale and selling Counterfeit NHL Products to unknowing consumers. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases share unique identifiers, establishing a logical relationship between them and demonstrating 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 operations. Plaintiff is forced to file these actions to combat Defendants' counterfeiting of the trademarks owned or licensed by Plaintiff, as well as to protect unknowing consumers from purchasing Counterfeit NHL Products over the Internet. Plaintiff has been irreparably harmed 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

NHL Enterprises L.P.

5. Plaintiff NHLE is a Delaware limited partnership having a principal place of business at One Manhattan West, 395 Ninth Avenue, New York, New York.

6. The National Hockey League ("NHL") is an unincorporated association that operates a professional ice hockey league consisting of thirty-two (32) member clubs (the "NHL Teams"), including the 2015 Stanley Cup Champion Chicago Blackhawks. The NHL has existed since 1917 and has consistently attracted a large public following, both in the United States and worldwide.

7. NHLE is the exclusive national United States licensee of the famous and distinctive trademarks of the NHL (including names, logos, symbols, emblems, uniform designs, uniform trade dress colors, and other identifying indicia associated with the NHL) ("NHL League Trademarks"), and is authorized by the NHL to enforce the rights in the NHL League Trademarks. In addition, NHLE is the exclusive national United States licensee of the famous and distinctive trademarks of the NHL Teams collectively (including names, logos, symbols, emblems, uniform

designs, uniform trade dress colors, and other identifying indicia associated with the NHL Teams) (“NHL Team Trademarks,” and, together with the “NHL League Trademarks,” the “NHL Trademarks”). NHLE is authorized by the NHL Teams to enforce the rights in the NHL Team Trademarks. The NHL Trademarks include, but are not limited to, those that are the subject of valid and subsisting trademark registrations on the Principal Register of the United States Patent and Trademark Office and those that the NHL and the NHL Teams have adopted and used in commerce throughout the United States, including in Illinois. In particular, NHLE is the exclusive United States licensee of and is authorized to enforce over one hundred (100) United States federal trademark registrations for NHL League Trademarks in a variety of classes and for a variety of different goods and services, including, without limitation, for apparel such as jerseys, shirts, caps, and other products in international class 25. Among the NHL League Trademarks are the word

mark “NHL” (reg. no. 1,962,135) and the NHL Logo:  (reg. no. 3,248,499). A non-exhaustive list of the NHL Trademarks, registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office and currently in use in commerce, includes the following:

Registration Number	Trademark
1,962,135 4,631,182	NHL
2,422,903 4,686,827 4,767,415	STANLEY CUP
1,678,612	

3,248,499	
5,165,350	
2,395,418	
4,677,429	
3,321,071	ANAHEIM DUCKS
7,767,574	
1,718,316	BRUINS
3,517,481	
1,675,926	SABRES
1,675,182	
1,961,454	FLAMES

1,961,457	
2,500,591	HURRICANES
2,243,540	
1,671,824	BLACKHAWKS
1,671,825	
3,147,743	COLORADO AVALANCHE
2,186,175	
2,442,977	BLUE JACKETS
3,360,130	
4,645,960	
1,807,615	
4,229,559	RED WINGS
1,694,497	
1,567,617	OILERS

1,566,457	
2,008,813	FLORIDA PANTHERS
5,238,138	
1,753,976	KINGS
1,718,268	
2,886,754	WILD
2,488,712	
2,432,973	CANADIENS
2,345,607	
2,364,958	NASHVILLE PREDATORS
4,199,753	
1,662,564	DEVILS
1,685,399	
1,722,053	NEW YORK ISLANDERS

1,694,498	
1,603,394	RANGERS
1,560,478	
1,959,122	OTTAWA SENATORS
2,242,808	
1,736,680	PHILADELPHIA FLYERS
1,681,277	
2,521,439	PITTSBURGH PENGUINS
2,521,438	
1,769,354	SHARKS
3,525,214	
6,487,799	SEATTLE KRAKEN
6,450,361	
1,672,658	ST. LOUIS BLUES

1,675,177	
5,258,559	LIGHTNING
4,078,123	
2,397,769	MAPLE LEAFS
5,408,059	
956,683	CANUCKS
2,196,649	
5,630,279	VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS
5,303,326	
1,768,704	CAPITALS
3,499,833	
2,476,485	WINNIPEG JETS
4,230,995	

The above U.S. registrations for the NHL Trademarks are valid, subsisting, in full force and effect, and many are incontestable pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1065. The registrations for the NHL Trademarks constitute *prima facie* evidence of their validity and of NHL's or the NHL Teams' exclusive right to use their respective NHL Trademarks pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1057(b). True and correct copies of the Federal Trademark Registrations for the above NHL Trademarks are attached hereto as **Exhibit 1**.

8. The NHL's professional hockey league and NHL Trademarks are widely known to and enormously popular with both sports fans and the general public. NHLE has promoted and advertised the NHL, the NHL Teams and NHL Trademarks extensively for many years. NHL Trademarks are among the most renowned and immediately recognizable marks in professional sports today. As a result of substantial advertising, promotion and media attention, and NHLE's extensive licensing and sponsorship program for a wide variety of goods and services, NHL Trademarks have acquired secondary meaning and represent significant goodwill of great value to the NHL, NHLE and the NHL Teams.

9. Millions of fans have attended NHL games and related events, enjoyed television and radio broadcasts of NHL games and related events, and purchased merchandise bearing NHL Trademarks to identify with their favorite NHL Teams. Millions visit <NHL.com>, the official NHL website, as well as the official websites of the individual NHL Teams, which prominently display, and in many cases are accessed by, domain names containing, NHL Trademarks.

10. A significant aspect of NHLE's business and resulting revenues has been for many years, and continues to be, the merchandising and licensing of the NHL Trademarks. NHLE has entered into numerous licensing agreements in the United States, authorizing use of NHL Trademarks on a wide variety of products, including apparel, caps, jewelry, toys, furniture,

pennants, and bags, among others (collectively, “NHL Products”). Retail sales revenue in 2023 of NHL Products was in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

11. NHLE, directly and through authorized licensees, has established and maintained high standards of quality for NHL Products, and continues to maintain stringent quality control over licensees and other authorized users of NHL Trademarks.

12. In supervising licensees, NHLE provides licensees and licensed product manufacturers with specifications setting forth extensive details with respect to use of NHL Trademarks, including specifications relating to typeface and typography, colors, official uniform scripts, graphic designs, materials, workmanship, and quality. All NHL Products are reviewed under these strict quality control procedures.

13. As a result of the extensive use of NHL Trademarks, not only in connection with the NHL’s well-known hockey games and related events, but also in connection with a wide variety of licensed merchandise sold and/or rendered in the United States and abroad, as well as widespread use in connection with a broad array of sponsorship activities spanning diverse industries, such trademarks have for many decades, and long prior to any use made by Defendants, functioned as unique identifiers and synonyms in the public mind for NHLE, the NHL, and the NHL Teams. As a result, NHL Trademarks are famous and possess significant goodwill of great value to the NHL, the NHL Teams and NHLE.

14. To protect NHL Trademarks from infringement, dilution, disparagement, and misappropriation, NHLE, in collaboration with CAPS, has established a comprehensive program of trademark protection, including regularly investigating suspicious e-commerce stores identified in proactive Internet sweeps and reported by consumers.

The Defendants

15. 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, 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).

16. 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 operations make it virtually impossible for Plaintiff to learn 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

17. The fame of the NHL Trademarks and the success of Plaintiff's athletic brand and affiliated variety of products, including apparel, caps, jewelry, toys, furniture, pennants, and bags, among others (defined above as "NHL Products"), has resulted in significant counterfeiting of NHL Trademarks. TML administers CAPS on behalf of its members, including Plaintiff NHLE. CAPS has created an extensive anti-counterfeiting program, which includes regularly investigating suspicious e-commerce stores identified in proactive Internet sweeps and reported by a variety of informants in response to the significant counterfeiting of NHL Trademarks. In recent years, CAPS, on behalf of its members, has identified numerous fully interactive e-commerce stores including those 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 2020.² 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.³

18. Counterfeiters “routinely use false or inaccurate names and addresses when registering with these Internet platforms,” that do not require sellers to verify their identities.⁴ Counterfeiters hedge against the risk of being caught and having their websites taken down from an e-commerce platform by preemptively establishing multiple virtual store-fronts.⁵ 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.⁶ Further, “E-commerce platforms create bureaucratic or technical hurdles in helping brand owners to locate or identify sources of counterfeits and counterfeiters.”⁷

19. 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

² See *Intellectual Property Rights Seizure Statistics, Fiscal Year 2021*, U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

³ *Id.*

⁴ See 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), 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.

⁵ *Id.* at p. 22.

⁶ *Id.* at p. 39.

⁷ Chow, *supra* note 4, at p. 186-87.

U.S. bank accounts, and, on information and belief, have sold Counterfeit NHL Products to residents of Illinois.

20. Defendants concurrently employ and benefit from substantially similar advertising and marketing strategies. For example, Defendants facilitate sales of Counterfeit NHL Products 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, wholesalers, or other legitimate businesses offering Genuine NHL Products including, in many instances, by copying the layouts, terms of service, legal notices and/or contact information found on the websites of Plaintiff's authorized online retailers, or other legitimate businesses offering Genuine NHL Products. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases appear 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 or other retailers selling genuine NHL Products. On information and belief, Plaintiff has not licensed or authorized Defendants to use any of the NHL Trademarks, and none of the Defendants are authorized retailers of NHL Products and are not actually selling genuine NHL Products.

21. Many Defendants also deceive unknowing consumers by using one or more NHL 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 NHL Products. Other e-commerce stores operating under Seller Aliases omit using NHL 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 NHL

Products. On information and belief, those Defendants that do not use NHL Trademarks in searchable text do so in an effort to avoid detection of their Counterfeit NHL Products.

22. 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 one from learning their true identities and the scope of their e-commerce operation.

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

24. 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 NHL Products for sale by the Seller Aliases bear irregularities and indicia of being counterfeit that are similar among Counterfeit NHL Products offered by other Seller Aliases, suggesting that the Counterfeit NHL Products were manufactured by and come from a common source and that Defendants are interrelated.

25. 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.

26. Counterfeiters such as Defendants typically operate under multiple seller aliases and payment accounts so that they can continue operation in spite of 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 off-shore counterfeiters regularly move funds from U.S.-based financial accounts to off-shore accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court.

27. Defendants are working to knowingly and willfully import, distribute, offer for sale, and sell Counterfeit NHL Products in the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants, without any authorization or license from Plaintiff, have knowingly and willfully used and continue to use one or more of the NHL Trademarks in connection with the advertisement, distribution, offering for sale, and/or sale of the Counterfeit NHL Products into the United States and Illinois over the Internet.

28. Defendants' unauthorized use of one or more NHL Trademarks in connection with the advertising, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit NHL Products, including 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)

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

30. This is a trademark infringement action against Defendants based on their unauthorized use in commerce of counterfeit or infringing imitations of one or more NHL Trademarks in connection with the sale, offering for sale, distribution, and/or advertising of infringing goods. NHL Trademarks are highly distinctive marks. Consumers have come to expect the highest quality from NHL Products sold or marketed under the NHL Trademarks.

31. Defendants have sold, offered to sell, marketed, distributed and advertised, and are still selling, offering to sell, marketing, distributing and advertising products using counterfeit or infringing reproductions of one or more NHL Trademarks without Plaintiff's permission or consent.

32. Plaintiff is the exclusive national United States licensee of the NHL Trademarks. The U.S. Registrations for NHL Trademarks (Exhibit 1) are in full force and effect. On information and belief, Defendants have knowledge of Plaintiff's rights in the NHL Trademarks, and are willfully infringing and intentionally using counterfeits or infringements of one or more NHL Trademarks. Defendants' willful, intentional and unauthorized use of one or more NHL Trademarks is likely to cause and is causing confusion, mistake, and deception as to the origin and quality of the counterfeit or infringing goods among the general public.

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

34. 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 NHL Trademarks.

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

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

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

37. Defendants' promotion, marketing, offering for sale, and/or sale of the Counterfeit NHL 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 as to the origin, sponsorship, or approval of Defendants' Counterfeit NHL Products by Plaintiff.

38. By using one or more NHL Trademarks on the Counterfeit NHL Products, Defendants create a false designation of origin and a misleading representation of fact as to the origin and sponsorship of the Counterfeit NHL Products.

39. Defendants' false designation of origin and misrepresentation of fact as to the origin and/or sponsorship of the Counterfeit NHL 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.

40. 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 Plaintiff and its NHL Trademarks.

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 any of the NHL Trademarks or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof in any manner in connection with the distribution, promotion, marketing, advertising, offering for sale, or sale of any product that is not a NHL Product or is not authorized by Plaintiff to be sold in connection with NHL Trademarks;
 - b. passing off, inducing, or enabling others to sell or pass off any products as NHL Products or any other products produced by Plaintiff that are not Plaintiff's, or not produced under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff and approved by Plaintiff for sale under the NHL Trademarks;
 - c. committing any acts calculated to cause consumers to believe that Defendants' Counterfeit NHL 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 NHL 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 NHL 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, Temu and DHgate (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 NHL 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 NHL 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 NHL 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 9th day of May 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Justin R. Gaudio

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