

= 2015 NBL Canada Finals brawl =

The 2015 NBL Canada Finals brawl was an altercation that occurred prior to Game 7 of the year 's National Basketball League of Canada (NBL) Finals , between the Windsor Express and Halifax Rainmen on April 30 , 2015 . It led to the Rainmen 's forfeit of the deciding game and allowed the Express to win the championship by default . Windsor 's guard Tony Bennett , who participated in the brawl , said , " It 's a black eye not just for the league , but for basketball . "

After the Rainmen reached the site of the game hours early and began warming up , they were discovered by Express assistant coach Gerry Brumpton . Windsor head coach Bill Jones later entered the room to retrieve a ball and violence erupted between him and Halifax center Liam McMorow . This sparked a brawl between both the teams as a whole , causing police to arrive . The Rainmen eventually left the stadium and chose to not compete in Game 7 because of safety concerns .

The incident resulted in mass fines and several suspensions , most notably the lifetime ban of Rainmen coaches Josep Clarós and Pedro Monteiro from coaching in the NBL Canada . The league also fined the entire Halifax Rainmen organization , with charges totaling to \$ 90 @, @ 000 . Tony Bennett was the sole Express player to be fined and suspended . Many players , including Bennett , were reinstated into the league in the following season .

= = Background = =

Both teams had previously appeared in the NBL Canada Finals , with the Windsor Express being named the champions in the prior season by topping the Island Storm in seven games . The Halifax Rainmen appeared in the 2012 Finals , which was played in a best @-@ of @-@ five format , but dropped three games and lost to the London Lightning . Halifax finished the 2014 ? 15 regular season as the Atlantic Division champions and had the second @-@ best record in the league , behind only the Central Division winners , the Express . In the 2015 NBL Canada Playoffs , the Rainmen were coming off wins over the Moncton Miracles and Island Storm , 3 ? 1 and 4 ? 1 respectively . Windsor , on the other hand , had beaten the Mississauga Power 3 ? 1 and the Brampton A 's 4 ? 3 .

= = Series = =

The Rainmen entered the Finals series without playing a single game in 16 days and were defeated by Windsor in Game 1 , 104 ? 113 . Chris Commons led the Express with 33 points and 8 rebounds and Tony Bennett added 25 points . Halifax struggled with fouls in the first quarter , and point guard Cliff Clinkscales most notably committed three fouls in the first 12 minutes of the game . He would finish the contest with six penalties . By the end of the game , seven Rainmen players had committed over three personal fouls and the team totaled for 48 , allowing Windsor to get 55 free throw attempts . The Express , on the other hand , finished with 32 personal fouls . In the fourth quarter , Halifax 's Liam McMorow took a hard fall to his shoulder and was taken off the court with a stretcher . He would undergo a CT scan and MRI after feeling tingling in the injured area .

Halifax rallied in Game 2 , winning a road game at the WFCU Centre in Windsor . The Rainmen committed 37 personal fouls in the entire game , but their opponents allowed them to attempt 44 free throws despite committing only 31 .

The Rainmen followed up by ousting the Express in Game 3 at the Scotiabank Centre , their home arena . They were strongly benefited by their accurate free throw shooting , going 28 of 33 from the line ; previously , Halifax shot at about .600 on free throws .

However , Windsor tied the series back up with a 109 ? 105 road win in a foul @-@ filled Game 4 . A total of 71 fouls were called throughout the contest , and Seiya Ando , Kevin Young , and Liam McMorow were fouled out for the Rainmen in the final quarter . In turn , both teams often exchanged trash @-@ talk and officials were forced to separate members of the opposing sides on multiple occasions .

Halifax started off Game 5 at home on a low note , with Liam McMorrow committing four personal fouls in the first three minutes . Nevertheless , Halifax pulled away with the 125 ? 91 victory , putting them one win away from the title . Rainmen forward Forrest Fisher complained about Windsor , " They 're playing very physical , and at times a little bit dirty with sucker punches , and we started playing into their game (Friday) and that 's not us . A couple of us can play like that , myself included , and we came out tonight and I told them ' hey , let me take the hits , I 'm used to that . You guys play your normal game . ' We play the way we play , and it doesn 't matter how they play . " According to The Chronicle Herald , " the game featured several incidents that threatened to escalate into a full @-@ scale brawl . " The teams ' coaches would frequently have to break up skirmishes and confront officials for what they felt were bad calls .

In Game 6 of the series , the Express led by four points by the end of the first quarter , but the Rainmen responded with a 21 ? 9 run and led by 12 points at halftime . Windsor , however , entered the fourth quarter with a score of 85 ? 85 after dominating the third . In the third quarter , they shot 21 free throws . The Express kept it close in the final minutes of the game and held Halifax off to win the contest , 119 ? 112 , forcing a decisive Game 7 . Quinnel Brown led the way for Windsor with 30 points , 16 of them off free throws . After the game , Rainmen head coach Josep Clarós expressed his unhappiness with the calls made by the referees against his team . Clarós said that rather than protesting to the league , he would " send film to FIBA . " He commented on the officiating , " It 's ridiculous for a final of a professional league in Canada . " An anonymous referee later denounced the league 's policy regarding player fines and suspensions . He said , " So you could have a guy punch a guy in the face in Game 1 , get kicked out , and be playing in Game 2 . "

= = Incident = =

= = = Altercation = = =

The deciding Game 7 of the 2015 Finals was scheduled to be played at 7 : 00 PM on April 30 , 2015 at the WFCU Centre in Windsor , Ontario . The Express shootaround was set to take place before that of the Rainmen . The road team was supposed to arrive for warm @-@ ups at approximately 1 : 00 PM , but entered the stadium approximately two hours earlier . Express assistant coach Gerry Brumpton recounted , " They snuck in here before they even had the light on . We were here in the dark , I opened up the curtain and I looked in and there they were . They were still here working out . So they had been here for a while . " The Express told their opponents to leave the arena , but they refused , with one Rainmen player dunking a basketball instead . Windsor 's Bill Jones then attempted to take a ball from Halifax center Liam McMorrow , but the player " flinched , " pretending to throw a punch . According to Rainmen player Forrest Fisher , Jones tackled McMorrow to the ground and Express guard Tony Bennett followed up by hitting McMorrow with a chair . Referring to the Rainmen , Jones said , " A couple of them kicked me and tried to take swings at me . And my players were there and they came to my rescue to be able to get me up . " Soon the violence escalated , with staff members and players from both teams involved . At around 10 : 40 AM , Windsor police received a phone call " that between 15 to 20 men were involved in an altercation . " By the time they arrived at the WFCU Centre , however , the fighting was over and the Rainmen players had already reached their team bus .

= = = Forfeit = = =

After leaving the stadium , the Rainmen drove to the airport . But midway , they crossed paths with Vito Frijia , London Lightning owner and a member of the NBL Canada executive committee , who stopped the bus in the middle of the highway . Despite Frijia spending a good hour attempting to convince the Rainmen 's coaches to return to the WFCU Centre and play the game , they refused . According to Frijia :

The start time of Game 7 of the series was postponed from 8 : 00 to 8 : 30 PM AST , but it was

cancelled once the Express were informed that the Rainmen had left the city . By the end of the night , Windsor were declared the NBL Canada champions . Shortly before the scheduled start time , the Rainmen said in an official statement , " Due to a physical altercation between the Halifax Rainmen and the Windsor Express , the game has been cancelled citing safety concerns . " At around 9 : 00 PM , the Express were awarded the championship trophy and conducted their post @-@ game celebrations .

= = Reaction = =

In the weeks after the forfeit , Rainmen guard Joey Haywood recounted that the team had been approached by an unknown man at their hotel following the brawl . Haywood said , " He was pacing around the lobby on his phone eyeing us . He then went to the ATM but didn 't actually do anything . He went and sat in a parked car out front . We thought something was going to go down , like he was scouting us out . " The Rainmen promptly left on the team bus , but the incident would be ignored by owner Andre Levingston . However , it was considered a motive for forfeiting the game . On the morning of May 2 , two days after the brawl , Rainmen guard Forrest Fisher wrote on Twitter that he had been kicked out of his apartment without warning . He said , " We were in Toronto Friday morning , and I get a message from the landlord at the apartment I stay at , telling me that my bags have been packed and all of my stuff has been moved to storage . " The players also claimed that they had not been paid in more than two weeks .

Members from the Rainmen profusely criticized the brutality of the Express throughout the series as well . Kevin Young was notified by players on Windsor saying that their coach had told them to " take out " him , Liam McMorrow and Forrest Fisher . Cliff Clinkscales said , " There 's a difference between playing physical and dirty and hurting people . " Halifax entered Game 7 with two players out with concussions they suffered in the series itself . Clinkscales also played with injured ribs . Despite this , the players had supposedly been " forced " by team owner Andre Levingston to partake in the game . Levingston attempted to convince the players to play without their coaches , who favored forfeiting it . He also offered the Rainmen new coaches , a raised salary , and \$ 1 @,@ 000 , but to no avail . Haywood said , " How could we play without coach , bringing another coach in ? And do what ? Coach us ? He doesn 't even know us . " Levingston , on the other hand , slammed Clarós , saying that " instead of leading our team to the championship , he led a group of talented players to broken contracts and a lifetime of controversy . " The owner claimed that he felt cheated and that the players were misled by their coaches . He took full responsibility for leading the Rainmen into the WFCU Centre ahead of schedule but believed that the two teams could have negotiated to avoid conflict .

Eric Crookshank , who had his jersey retired while playing for Halifax , said that the prospect of having the organization fold was " sad . " He also said , " If what these players are saying is true it ? s very hurtful to me . It sickening to my stomach that the players say they didn 't get paid or they got kicked out of their living arrangements . " Joey Haywood criticized the league for not having a players ' union or commissioner , with " owners acting like commissioners . " He also condemned Levingston for not standing up for his players . On May 7 , Clarós issued an open letter to the City of Halifax and the fans of the Rainmen . In a paragraph about the forfeit , he wrote , " At this time , we don 't know what the future holds . But there is one thing we know for sure . That when a group of good people unite to take a stand in the name of safety , good values , people ? s rights and strong principles , that this will rise above any rules or even winning . "

= = Investigation and charges = =

In the day after the forfeit , the NBL Canada announced , " The league takes this incident very seriously and we are working to address the matter to ensure it never happens in the future , and so that those who were responsible are held accountable . " On May 5 , 2015 , Dave Magley , head coach and general manager of the Brampton A 's during the season , was appointed by the league 's Board of Governors to lead the investigation . He had already conducted interviews and spoken to

representatives from both teams involved in the brawl . Magley also said that he would consider assuming the position of commissioner if he was approached , succeeding Paul Riley , who was fired in January 2015 . Vito Frijia would be named league spokesman during the investigation .

On May 1 , 2015 , the league 's Board unanimously approved of several charges for players and coaches from the Rainmen . The organization as a whole was fined \$ 20 @, @ 000 per league rules , head coach Josep Clarós was fined \$ 10 @, @ 000 and assistant coach Pedro Monteiro was fined \$ 5 @, @ 000 . Both coaches received lifetime bans from the NBL Canada as well . A \$ 5 @, @ 000 fine was imposed on every player on the team 's roster , excluding Douglas Appiah , Jr. who was injured at the time of the brawl . They were also suspended indefinitely during the investigation . Later on , the league allowed the Rainmen 's players to apply for reinstatement into the league , although the coaches would remain banned for life . Halifax 's total fines totaled up to \$ 90 @, @ 000 . The Rainmen were not notified of their fines and suspensions through e @-@ mail or a phone call . Instead they learned of it through Twitter . Clarós officially received his termination letter on May 5 , after his contract had already been renewed for one more month . In an effort to give the players and coaches their final paychecks , he contacted the Canadian labour board . After one month , Clarós won the decision , but Levingston declared bankruptcy on July 6 , the following day . According to bankruptcy documents , the Rainmen were about \$ 700 @, @ 000 in debt .

Later in the investigation , an additional \$ 4 @, @ 000 fine was imposed on Monteiro . The coach had a salary of only about \$ 1 @, @ 500 per month during the eight months he spent with the Rainmen . Despite this , he was unable to contact team owner Andre Levingston , who did not assist or help him . Monteiro responded to the charges by claiming that they were unfair . In a statement on May 11 , he said , " I am looking for help to fight these unjust sanctions and fines so I can continue to work and be able to support my family . The investigation was not full . The truth of what happened is being ignored . I have not been contacted by any league representative . "

For the Express , head coach Bill Jones faced a one @-@ year suspension that would bar him from directing his team in the 2015 ? 16 season . He also received a \$ 4 @, @ 000 fine with Monteiro . The coach accepted responsibility for his role in the incident . Windsor guard Tony Bennett faced an indefinite suspension from the league during the investigation . Frijia said , " It was a very , very big decision to suspend Jones for a year . " However , Express owner Dartis Willis claimed that the investigation was " botched , " because Magley was an NBL Canada coach that had faced Jones in previous games .

= = Aftermath = =

By late August 2015 , it became a strong possibility that a new NBL Canada team would be created in Halifax for the 2015 ? 16 season . A new ownership group , led by former Rainmen advisor and CEO of Corporate Research Associates in Don Mills , soon confirmed that the defunct team 's reincarnation would compete for the next season . Mills expected a group of 25 shareholders to help start up the organization , many of whom personally paid for the Rainmen 's flights and hotels in the last season . He chose to not include Levingston in the ownership group but allowed him to assume the position as the team 's general manager . Mills said , " There would not be a new team in Halifax without Andre . We decided that the only way we would go forward to raise the money was if Andre was part of the solution . " Despite this , he preferred to break ties with the Rainmen franchise . It was not disclosed who paid for the \$ 250 @, @ 000 fee required for a team to register in the NBL Canada .

On October 20 , 2015 , the team was announced as the Halifax Hurricanes . Mills commented , " We think it 's kind of an appropriate name from where we 're located and from a sports team 's point of view . What it really says is energy and power , so some of the descriptions of hurricanes sort of suit the kind of team that we want as well . " The Hurricanes also signed Cliff Clinkscales and Mike Glover as its first players and hired Hugo López as head coach . Mills aimed for lower ticket prices at the team 's games .

For the Express , head coach Bill Jones was replaced by his brother Tony Jones , who would assume the position of interim head coach until February 20 , 2016 . At this time , Bill was reinstated

into the NBL Canada , with Tony remaining with Windsor as an assistant coach . Bill said , " What happened in that Game 7 was not Bill Jones . It happened in the heat of the moment and is something I 'll probably regret for the rest of my life . " Magley said that his concern with the future of the Express organization helped him make the decision to reinstate Jones , who he believed would help the team 's fan support grow .

At the beginning of the new season on December 31 , 2015 , Clinkscales and Tony Bennett were both reinstated after applying to return to the league . The two players received unanimous support from the NBL Canada Board of Governors . Bennett was only suspended for two games and received a \$ 500 fine , while Clinkscales still had a \$ 5 @, @ 000 fine . On March 11 , 2016 , Rainmen player Tyrone Watson was also reinstated to the league after paying his \$ 5 @, @ 000 fine and receiving a unanimous vote .