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The Jesse White Tumbling Team sued because of tumbler's injury

By John Flynn Rooney
Law Bulletin staff writer

A Chicago lawyer who filed a lawsuit on behalf of a former tumbler who suffered a severe spinal cord injury, said the Jesse White Tumbling Team Inc. made some critical mistakes that contributed to the injury.

The four-count lawsuit was filed this month on behalf of Jarvis Williams in the Cook County Circuit Court by Antonio M. Romanucci. Williams, now 20 and confined to a wheelchair, lost the use of his legs and has limited use of his arms following his injury during a parade two years ago, Romanucci said.

The complaint names the not-for-profit tumbling team founded in 1959 by Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White. More than 8,500 young men and women have performed on the team, whose members must maintain a C average in school and avoid gangs and drugs, according to the team's website.

The lawsuit asserts that the tumbling team failed to recognize and administer any type of emergency medical treatment after knowing that Williams might have suffered a spinal cord injury during a July 4, 2008, parade in Wheeling, said Romanucci, a principal of Romanucci & Blandin LLC.

When asked if he had any concerns

about filing a lawsuit against the popular tumbling team of a popular elected official, Romanucci said, "My concern was more toward the Jesse White Tumbling Team continuing to do all the great work they have done for the community, with the hope that they continue their successful work with young men and women knowing that they must institute and also execute safe practices and procedures for these very same children in the instance of injury or potential injury."

"I think that once the facts are explained, the jurors will consider Jesse White and the beloved figure he is, but in the end will decide that the tumbling team made some very critical mistakes in Jarvis' case," he said.

At the time of his injury, Williams was a senior at Fenger High School in Chicago. He played football, wrestled in high school and planned to attend college.

Williams had tumbled since age 7 and had been a member of the Jesse White Tumbling Team for about a year, Romanucci said.

On July 4, 2008, Williams jumped off a trampoline and completed a tumble landing on a mat placed on asphalt, according to the lawsuit.

"When I went up, I just came down on my neck," Williams said. "I couldn't move or get up."

A team member picked Williams up

over his shoulder and carried him to the team's van, Romanucci said.

The tumbling team continued its performance and finished before heading back in the van with Williams to the team's office on Chicago's Near North Side, Romanucci said.

When Williams' parents came to pick him up at the office, they noticed the condition of their son and his father called for an ambulance, Romanucci said.

Williams was transported to Northwestern University Memorial Hospital, where he underwent spinal fusion surgery and remained for more than two months, Romanucci said.

The lawsuit maintains that the tumbling team failed to call for an ambulance and failed to adequately stabilize Williams' neck before moving him. *Jarvis Williams v. Jesse White Tumbling Team Inc., et al.*, No. 2010 L. 7728.

"We're not saying that the tumbling team caused the injury," Romanucci said.

Williams does not recall whether he signed a liability waiver as a member of the tumbling team, Romanucci said. Plaintiff attorneys will seek information during discovery about whether Williams signed a liability waiver, Romanucci said.

A spokesman for the tumbling team declined to comment because the team has not yet been served with the lawsuit.