

Haynes Boone Secures Reversal of Multimillion-Dollar Jury Verdict Clarifying Off-Duty Conduct Liability for Employers

February 25, 2025 Mark Trachtenberg, Ryan Pitts

PRACTICES Appellate

A Haynes Boone appellate team led by Partner [Mark Trachtenberg](#) and Associate [Ryan Pitts](#) successfully reversed a \$3.8 million jury verdict and obtained a take-nothing judgment from the Texas Fourteenth Court of Appeals in Houston on behalf of Great Lakes Dredge & Dock Company in a high-stakes maritime personal injury case.

The case, which involved claims under the Jones Act, arose from a fight between two off-duty employees staying at a hotel while on rotation for a Great Lakes ship. The jury returned a substantial damages verdict in favor of the plaintiff, who was allegedly injured in the altercation. However, Trachtenberg and Pitts successfully argued—and the appellate court agreed—that there was not legally sufficient evidence to establish the incident occurred within the course and scope of employment or in service of the ship, reversing and rendering a take-nothing judgment for Great Lakes.

“This decision reinforces important legal principles governing employer liability in the maritime industry and provides meaningful precedent for cases evaluating the scope of employment under the Jones Act,” Trachtenberg said. “We are pleased to have obtained this favorable outcome for Great Lakes.”

The ruling clarifies the parameters of employer liability for off-duty conduct and strengthens protections for maritime companies operating in Texas.

Haynes Boone’s [Appellate Practice Group](#) is nationally recognized for winning precedent-setting appeals and shaping litigation strategy at every stage of trial. Ranked Band 1 in Chambers USA, the group is known by clients and peers alike for its collaborative approach, empirical-driven strategy and success in bet-the-company appeals.