

The Vancouver Sun

Nielson takes cash brawl right to top court

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OTTAWA - Erstwhile Vancouver Canucks hockey coach Roger Neilson has stickhandled a dispute with his former team as far as the Supreme Court.

A lawyer for Neilson argued today that the Canucks owe his client \$109,136 for breaking his contract and dumping him as head coach in January 1984.

Lawyer David Church of Vancouver told a panel of Supreme Court judges that the team damaged Neilson's reputation in the National Hockey League and violated terms of his lucrative four-year contract when he was fired during a mid-season slump.

But Canuck's lawyer Garth McAlister said the \$64,000 Neilson has already received ends the team's obligation.

McAlister dismissed suggestions that Neilson's reputation was damaged, noting that Neilson was hired within days as coach by the rival Los Angeles Kings at an equal salary.

As well, such firings are commonplace in the NHL, McAlister said.

The Court reserved judgment on whether it will hear Neilson's appeal.

His court battle began in 1985, when he was awarded \$173,500 by the B.C. Supreme Court. That amount represented his remaining salary for the 1983-84 and 1984-85 seasons.

The hockey club appealed that ruling, winning a majority decision by the provincial court of appeal that cut the award to \$64,364.

Lawyers for the club had successfully argued that Neilson need only be compensated for the difference between his contracted salary and the pay he received from subsequent coaching jobs.

Neilson finished the 1984 season as head coach for the Kings, but spent the 1984-85 season working at a drastically lower salary as an assistant coach for the Chicago Black Hawks.

Neilson, known for his innovative use of video cameras in coaching, has since worked for TSN, an all-sports television channel, covering hockey playoffs.