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Oddly Enough - Reuters

Nike Kicks Up Fuss in China Again with Cartoon Ad



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BEIJING (Reuters) - Infamous for pirating everything from watches to software -- and Nike shoes -- China doesn't usually level copycat charges.

But a Beijing court has ordered Nike Inc. to pay damages to a Chinese cartoonist who said his stick figure was copied in the footwear giant's ads, local media reported on Thursday.

The court said the stickman character 28-year-old Zhu Zhiqiang created was nearly the same as one used in Nike advertisements, and ordered the company to pay 300,000 yuan (\$36,000)

"Nike used images similar to the plaintiff's work in its advertisement without receiving authorization from the plaintiff, resulting in copyright infringement," the China Daily quoted the court ruling as saying.

Although the damages are just a fraction of the \$242,000 Zhu had requested, Nike representative Zhang Zaiping said the company would likely appeal against the decision and argued that the figure was too generic to deserve a copyright.

"Zhu's stick figure is within the public domain and lacks originality," he was quoted as saying.

The row was the latest run-in for the world's biggest athletic shoe company in China.

Earlier this month, China stopped broadcasts of Nike ads featuring basketball star LeBron James going head to head against a series of animated opponents, including a white-haired kung fu master, saying they violated national dignity.

Nike later apologized for the ad, known as "LeBron James in Chamber of Fear."

China, where pirated DVDs of the latest Hollywood blockbusters can be bought for less than a dollar on street corners, has promised to get tougher on intellectual property piracy.

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