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Cuban: Nelson Beat Mavs With Inside Info

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DALLAS -- Mavericks owner Mark Cuban claims in an ongoing dispute with his former coach that Don Nelson used "confidential information" to help the Golden State Warriors pull off a stunning first-round playoff victory.

That accusation is part of Cuban's response to an arbitration claim Nelson has filed against Cuban to get \$6.5 million of deferred compensation, which Nelson said he is owed for his time with the Mavericks from 1997-2005.

"Don may know that (Dirk) Nowitzki likes to turn toward his left shoulder not his right shoulder, but we don't think that's a trade secret or confidential information," Nelson's attorney, John O'Connor, said by phone Friday from his San Francisco office. "Cuban apparently does."

Cuban didn't respond to e-mail Friday, when he had left hip replacement surgery. A team spokeswoman said the Mavericks had no comment about the arbitration case.

The Warriors became the first No. 8 seed to win a best-of-seven playoff series to knock out the top-seeded team, winning in six games. The stunning end to the Mavericks' season came a year after they made it to the NBA Finals, then lost in six games against Miami after taking a 2-0 series lead.

The counterclaim by Cuban, in which he also contends that Nelson violated a noncompete clause in his Dallas contract when he became Golden State's coach last summer, was first reported by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on Friday.

Nelson's arbitration claim was filed May 1 after failed attempts to settle the dispute with Cuban. The claim was filed while the playoff series between the Warriors and Mavericks was still ongoing.

"Don is a bit embarrassed that he is part of this, and that people might think this was his idea," O'Connor said.

Nelson's contract with the Mavs included a clause that called for arbitration to settle any

disputes.

A panel of retired judges will hear the case later this year, likely in October or November, after both sides have time for depositions and discovery. Any ruling by the arbitration panel is final and binding, without any right of appeal.

When he resigned as the Mavericks' coach in March 2005 and replaced by hand-picked successor Avery Johnson, Nelson still had a deal to remain a team consultant through 2011 for about \$200,000 a year.

In Nelson's claim, he contends he was never paid a consultant fee and thus was free to take another job.

Cuban has said Nelson returned to coaching after repeatedly telling the billionaire that Dallas would be his last job.

The money Nelson is seeking stems from the days before Cuban owned the team, back when the Mavericks were draft lottery regulars and Nelson was hired as the general manager to clean up the mess. He overhauled the roster, made himself the coach and discovered how well the combination of Michael Finley, Steve Nash and Nowitzki worked.

The team became playoff regulars after Cuban bought the team in 2000 and injected money and enthusiasm. Nelson was his mentor early on, and they made for an entertaining tandem.

Nelson, whose 1,232 victories are the second-most in NBA history, returned last summer to the Warriors and led them to a 42-40 record, enough to earn a playoff spot on the last day of the regular season. Dallas was 67-15, but was 0-3 during the regular season against Golden State.