

Three Women Vying for Ownership of \$1 Million Lottery Ticket

Written by Lucky

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A winning \$1 million lottery ticket picked out of a gas station trash can has become the subject of a three-way legal battle in Arkansas.

Sharon Jones was at a Super One Stop in July 2011 in Bebee, Ark., when she went to a trash bin to pick up a handful of discarded lottery tickets, as she had done many times before, according to her attorneys.

A program through the lottery commission website allows people to register non-winning tickets for points that they can use to work towards prizes.

"On Sunday, as was a routine, my client and her husband sit around and enter these tickets in the program," Jones' attorney Winston Collier told ABCNews.com. "[The program] wouldn't give them points on this one ticket in particular." The couple realized the problem was that the ticket was not completely scratched off.

"It was, in fact, not a losing lottery ticket and not only that, but it's worth a million dollars," Collier said. "Thus a controversy was born."

Jones turned in the ticket and received a check for \$680,000. After the check was issued, the lottery commission began the process of confirming all winning tickets and in the course of the investigation, surveillance footage showed Jones grabbing a handful of discarded tickets from the trash bin.

After seeing the footage, the store manager, Lisa Petriches, claimed that customers were not allowed to take tickets from the bin and that she had a deal with the manager that those tickets belonged to her.

A month after Jones collected her check, Petriches filed a lawsuit against her, claiming that the winning ticket was hers. Petriches also claimed that there was a "Do Not Take" sign on the bin. "We really don't believe that Lisa Petriches has any claim whatsoever," Jones' attorney Jimmy Simpson told ABCNews.com. "She's saying those tickets were hers, but you've got all these people saying they weren't."

Simpson said several regulars from the store are willing to testify that it was common practice for customers to grab tickets from the bin and that that sign was not up at the time when Jones picked up the winning ticket.

"Our theory is that it was abandoned property," Collier said. "Once someone has abandoned it, it becomes the property of the first possessor."

One of Petriches' attorneys, Steven Underwood, refused to comment for the story.

"From our perspective, the person who won is the winner, the person who brought it in," Julie Baldrige, the interim director of public affairs and legislative relations for the Arkansas Lottery Commission told ABCNews.com. "We don't take a position on ownership. It's whoever comes to our claims office with their signature on the back."

Baldrige said that legally, it's up to a judge to decide who the ticket belongs to.

A third party entered the equation this week when Sharon Duncan claimed that she was the one

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who originally purchased the ticket and that the jackpot is rightfully hers. The attorneys are meeting with the lottery commission on Monday to determine if there is any way to confirm the ticket's ownership.

Duncan could not be reached for comment.

The two parties originally involved in the case appeared before a judge on Wednesday, but were dismissed after the judge expressed concern that not all of the necessary parties were present, alluding to Duncan and her claim of ownership.

The \$680,000 winnings are frozen as the case makes its way to court, but Collier said that his distressed client already spent some money in the month she had the winnings that she would not have otherwise spent, including buying a used car.

"She is a salt of the earth woman," Collier said. "I recognized her when she came into my office because she used to work at a mom and pop cafe for years and years. She's a friendly person, but she's had to double her blood pressure medication."

The next court date has not yet been set.

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