

Early Lead

# Family of Aaron Hernandez victim issues ‘friendly challenge’ to Patriots: Pay up

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By **Matt Bonesteel** April 21, 2017

The attorney for the mother of Aaron Hernandez murder victim Odin Lloyd said Friday that they want the New England Patriots — Hernandez’s former NFL team — to pay some of the damages they are seeking in a wrongful-death lawsuit that first was filed against Hernandez in 2013, when Lloyd was gunned down at a Massachusetts industrial park.

It’s important to note that the Patriots were not named in the lawsuit. Nevertheless, Sheff said he was issuing a “friendly challenge” to the team.

“We want to provide the Patriots with an opportunity to become something more, not just champions of football, to become champions of justice,” attorney Douglas Sheff, who is representing Ursula Ward, told the New York Daily News.

Hernandez was found guilty of Lloyd’s murder in 2015. On Wednesday, he was found dead in his cell at a Massachusetts prison, where he was serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. His death, ruled a suicide by a state medical examiner, opened up a number of legal issues:

— Because Hernandez died before the final appeal of his murder conviction was heard, his family could petition the court to declare the verdict vacated because of an obscure legal principle that Massachusetts courts follow. In essence, the principle states that because Hernandez had not yet exhausted all of his legal challenges when he died, it’s as if he never had been charged and the trial never happened. In the eyes of the Massachusetts legal system, he would be an innocent man.

— However, Sports Illustrated legal expert Michael McCann says such a principle would not automatically end any civil lawsuits filed against him by the family members of his victims or alleged victims.

“Normally those lawsuits continue, with Hernandez’s estate replacing him as the defendant,” McCann writes, though he does note that the attorneys for Lloyd’s family could face a greater challenge winning any civil suit if the guilty verdict in his criminal trial is thrown out.

Sheff said a judge already has found Hernandez liable for Lloyd’s death and that the civil trial is now in the damages stage.

— But how much in damages can Lloyd’s family collect? Hernandez’s legal bills were thought to be large considering the