

Caleb Williams' "ICEMAN" Trademark Refusal Shows Why Even Famous Nicknames Need Clearance

Nonfinal Office Action, U.S. Trademark Application Serial No. 99/704,819 (U.S.P.T.O. June 24, 2026)

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A great nickname can feel like a brand before anyone files a trademark application. Fans use it, media members repeat it, and merchandise ideas follow naturally. But trademark law does not protect a nickname simply because people associate it with a celebrity.

A company owned by Chicago Bears quarterback Caleb Williams filed to register ICEMAN as a standard-character trademark, seeking protection for the wording itself rather than a particular logo or stylized design. The application identifies Williams as the living individual associated with the mark and reaches a broad range of goods and services, including apparel, accessories, digital collectibles, charitable events, football-related entertainment, and personal appearances.

The USPTO initially refused the application based on a likelihood of confusion with a prior ICEMAN registration. The cited registration is owned by LaCrosse Footwear and covers insulated boots and boot liners. That may seem like an odd conflict because Williams is an NFL quarterback and LaCrosse sells boots. But trademark conflicts do not require identical businesses or products; the question is whether consumers seeing the same mark on related goods might believe there is a connection, sponsorship, affiliation, or common source.

That is where broad celebrity-brand filings can become vulnerable. A nickname used for entertainment services may present one set of issues. The same nickname used for clothing, bags, accessories, and other merchandise may present another. Apparel and footwear often move through overlapping channels and sit within the same lifestyle or athletic-brand ecosystem.

The refusal is not necessarily fatal. Williams' team can respond by arguing that the goods and services are different, narrowing the application to avoid the closest overlap, seeking an agreement with the prior registrant, or evaluating whether the cited registration can be challenged.

The broader lesson is not that athletes should avoid filing for nicknames. It is that celebrity branding requires the same discipline as any other brand launch. Clearance should happen early, the application should match the business plan, and the goods and services should be selected strategically. Fame can help build a brand, but it does not guarantee the right to register one.