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**Retribution:**  
Acquitted in '97 of charges he stole \$350,000, Mario Martinez eventually sued Brink's.

# Ex-Brink's worker wins \$8.2 million judgment

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*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*

Six years ago, Brink's Inc., the tightfisted, heavily armored security company, accused Mario Martinez of slipping out of its Riviera Beach branch office with \$350,000.

Now, he's walking away with \$8.2 million.

A federal court jury in Miami awarded the former Brink's carrier that amount Thursday, agreeing that the company maliciously sought criminal charges against Martinez and should pay for destroying his reputation.

"He deserved it," said Martinez's attorney, Daren Stabinski of Miami. "I wouldn't go through what he went through for \$10 million."

Martinez, 40, spent nearly six months in the Palm Beach County Jail in 1997 awaiting trial for allegedly stealing \$350,000 in cash in an elabo-

See BRINK'S, 7A ►

# Award includes penalty, lost wages

## ► BRINK'S *from 1A*

rate heist supposedly caught on videotape by surveillance cameras at the company's office in Riviera Beach.

But, even with the video, a jury in Martinez's criminal trial in 1997 took only 90 minutes to acquit him of theft charges.

Sheriff's deputies testified that Martinez used sleight-of-hand to outsmart the world's largest and oldest transportation security company.

On Dec. 10, Martinez and a new employee signed out 91 bags of money and other valuables from a Miami vault for delivery to Palm Beach County. At the Brink's office in Riviera Beach, Martinez dropped off 26 bags, including one holding \$350,000 in cash that Brink's says turned up missing.

Police and the security company claimed that Martinez slipped the bag off the cashier's counter with such speed that no one else inside the office noticed it was gone . . . except surveillance cameras.

One second it was there; the next, it was gone.

The jury in his criminal trial concluded that the choppy, stop-action videotape — basically the only piece of evidence — never showed Martinez with the bag. And other people besides Martinez were in the room.

"We never actually saw Mr. Martinez's

hands on the package," the forewoman said.

The money was never recovered and Brink's never even proved the money was missing, according to Martinez's civil lawsuit, filed in 2001.

But the stain on Martinez's reputation stuck, Stabinski said. Everyone Martinez knew thought he was a criminal. The grand theft arrest is still on his record and Martinez couldn't find work outside his family.

The federal jury Thursday found that the damage to Martinez's reputation and mental anguish is worth \$3 million. The jury also assessed \$4 million in punitive damages against Brink's and an additional \$1.2 million for Martinez's past and future lost wages.

It's not known whether Brink's will appeal the verdict. Peter Walsh, a Brink's attorney, said Friday the company "feels it's inappropriate to comment right now."

Martinez, who spent 16 months in a Cuban prison for trying to leave the country illegally before reaching the United States on a boat in 1994, was pleased with the outcome, Stabinski said.

He now lives in Broward County and still speaks poor English, Stabinski said.

"But he's grateful," Stabinski said. "He never would have even had the opportunity to prove his innocence in his native country." The Miami Herald contributed to this story.

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