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‘She stood her ground and won’: Miami woman prevails in \$14.5 million abuse case

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A Miami-Dade jury awarded \$14.5 million to Mireya Cristina Cambero Cordero after a decade-long legal battle in which she proved her ex-husband, Jose Fernando De Matos Rebolledo, was liable for domestic abuse and fraudulently hiding assets during their divorce proceedings.

A Miami-Dade jury has awarded \$14.5 million to a Venezuelan woman who spent more than a decade pursuing a civil case in the U.S. court system after alleging domestic abuse and financial misconduct by her former husband.

The verdict, issued on July 15th in Miami Dade circuit court, comes after a civil lawsuit brought by Mireya Cristina Cambero Cordero against her ex-husband, Jose Fernando De Matos Rebolledo, who was found liable for assault and battery, as well as for fraudulently transferring assets in an effort to shield his wealth during the legal proceedings.

“This case was like something out of a telenovela,” said Cambero’s lawyer, Gary Davidson. “You had shocking domestic abuse, secret asset transfers, and lies stretching across borders.”

Cambero and De Matos once jointly operated a successful meat distribution business in Venezuela. At its peak, the company supplied a large share of the country’s beef, and expanded internationally by sourcing products from Colombia. The couple moved to South Florida in 2009 and invested heavily in distressed real estate, acquiring around 35 properties across the region.

But behind the financial success court records describe a history of domestic violence. The case centered on an incident in March 2011 that left Cambero hospitalized. Testimony and police reports presented at trial described severe physical and sexual assault. A police officer who responded to the scene said it was the worst domestic violence case he had witnessed.

De Matos was arrested and jailed for 21 days. However, the criminal case faltered after Cambero signed an affidavit recanting her accusations. In court, she said she did so under coercion from members of De Matos’ family, who warned her she could lose custody of her children or face threats against her relatives in Venezuela.

Cambero later testified that De Matos and his family continued to exert pressure in the months and years following the incident. Legal experts involved in the case described it as consistent with “trauma bonding,” a psychological dynamic often seen in abusive relationships.

Reached for comment through his lawyer, De Matos declined to speak to the Herald.

Cambero’s attorneys, Davidson and Evan Stroman of Diaz Reus & Targ in Miami, said Cambero played a central role in building the couple’s business ventures, starting as a butcher shop operator in Punto Fijo, Venezuela, and later expanding the business into an international operation.

“She was the doer,” Stroman said. “She ran the operations, stocked shelves and managed the logistics that made the business grow.”

After relocating to Florida in the aftermath of the U.S. housing market collapse, the couple began purchasing foreclosed properties at discounted rates, forming various legal entities to manage them. But their relationship came to a violent end in 2011, and their eventual divorce proceedings in Venezuela left Cambero with approximately \$600,000 in assets—while De Matos retained significantly more, including a Coral Gables property valued at over \$4 million.

In 2015, Cambero filed a civil suit in Miami, alleging both the 2011 assault and a series of fraudulent asset transfers designed to obstruct justice and conceal De Matos’ wealth.

According to court filings, once the lawsuit began De Matos started transferring assets to relatives and associates, including properties moved to his daughters from different marriages and to business partners in Colombia and Venezuela. He also allegedly established shell companies to obscure his holdings.

One focus of the case was the Coral Gables property, which was transferred to two corporate entities. Despite De Matos no longer appearing as the legal owner, evidence presented at trial showed he continued collecting rent and remained involved in property decisions—helping the jury conclude that the transfers were not legitimate.

“He was still pulling the strings,” Stroman said. “On paper, he had nothing. In practice, he was still in control.”

The attorneys also uncovered evidence that De Matos had resumed operations in Venezuela’s meat distribution market, continuing to pay employees and receiving payments through U.S. bank accounts, despite claiming financial insolvency in court.

During trial, De Matos maintained that nothing unusual had occurred on the night of the 2011 assault. He said the couple “just went to bed.” But medical records and photos from the Jackson Memorial Hospital trauma unit, along with police testimony, offered a contrasting narrative. The responding officer described a violent crime scene with significant evidence of physical harm.

Cambero also recounted years of abuse, including an incident during her pregnancy in which De Matos allegedly placed a gun in her mouth. In another, she said she gave birth prematurely after a severe beating.

Following the March 2011 assault, Cambero said she was pressured to drop the charges. According to testimony, she was warned she could lose her children and that her family in Venezuela could be harmed.

The jury found De Matos liable on all counts and awarded Cambero more than \$20 million in compensatory and punitive damages, including interest. While De Matos may pursue an appeal, his attorneys would need to post a bond or secure funding for further litigation. Cambero's legal team has begun taking steps to recover assets through enforcement of the judgment.

Cambero, who has worked cleaning homes in Broward County since the breakup of the business, now holds a judgment that acknowledges both her role in building the financial enterprise and the abuse she suffered.

"He tried to beat her, silence her, and bankrupt her," Davidson said. "She stood her ground and won."

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