

Crime

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Miami cop escapes felony convictions, but must leave law enforcement

BY DAVID OVALLE - DOVALLE@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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MIAMI POLICE DEPARTMENT

After his arrest for drugs and kicking out a patrol-car window, Miami police officer Christopher Vital escaped any felony convictions.

He will not, however, get to keep his badge.

Prosecutors on Wednesday dropped felony charges against Vital as long as he agreed to not fight his firing from the Miami police department, where he had worked since 2008. He'll also give up his state law enforcement credentials.

The 29-year-old University of Miami graduate instead pleaded no contest to misdemeanor charges of marijuana possession and criminal mischief. A judge granted him a "withhold of adjudication," which means Vital won't technically have any convictions on his record.

His lawyers, Ed O'Donnell IV and Eric Schwartzreich, said their client "cherished his time as a police officer."

"Chris is a talented young man who comes from a very strong family," the lawyers said in a statement. "He is pursuing a graduate degree and is going to enter the private sector, which has always been his plan."

Miami Beach police arrested Vital in September after he sped his BMW past a traffic accident scene on the MacArthur Causeway. After a short chase — authorities say he reached 100 miles per hour — Vital stopped and was handcuffed.

Officers found marijuana and cocaine in the car, along with suspected heroin. He was also charged with drunk driving.

Authorities said Vital, while being driven to a detention cell at police headquarters, began banging his head on the car's partition, saying he would blame his injuries on the driver.

Before being escorted from the patrol car, Vital told the Miami Beach officer, "I'm going to hunt you down, you and your family, and I'm gonna have your job," according to an arrest report. Vital also claimed he would kill himself.

A woman in his car, Stephanie Malvin, 25, was also charged with felony cocaine possession. She's still facing trial.

Vital's last months as a Miami cop proved troubled.

In November 2013, he was arrested for disorderly intoxication after he got into a drunken fight in the stands a Miami Dolphins game. It took five police officers to wrestle Vital to the ground and arrest him.

The department suspended him for 100 hours without pay. The criminal charge was dropped after he entered a "pre-trial" intervention program for first-time offenders and completed an alcohol-awareness course.

Three months later, his driver's license was suspended for failure to obtain insurance – a mistake later chalked up to the insurance company mistakenly failing to notify the driver's license bureau.