

\$2 mil. awarded in alleged cop beating

Jury finds police liable but rejects gay man's hate-crime contention

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A gay Chicago man won a \$2 million verdict Friday in a police brutality case against the City of Chicago that was sparked after the man squirted water at an officer following a Cubs game in 2000.

After two days of deliberations, a jury of two men and six women sided with Kentin Waits, awarding him \$15,000 in compensatory damages, to be paid by the city, and \$2 million in punitive damages, to be paid by the sergeant and officer named in the case.

While siding with Waits on his excessive force claims, jurors rejected his contention that he was the victim of a hate crime.

"I'm feeling a lot of relief," Waits said after the verdict.

His attorney, Jon Loevy, was less modest.

"He's a hero," Loevy said.

Waits, 32, sued last year, claiming he was the victim of excessive force and a hate crime at the hands of officer Daniel Durst, and that Sgt. Michael Prusank and others tried to cover up the alleged beating in an interrogation room at the police station at Belmont and Western.

It all started when Waits was driving away from a Cubs game on July 22, 2000, and got into an argument with an officer while trying to make a turn.

Waits drove away, but returned about 20 minutes later with water from a nearby convenience store, squirting it in the officer's face.

He was arrested the next morning at his home by eight officers, some of whom had traveled from outside of their district responding to an "all call" allegedly put out by Prusank.

Waits said he was held at the station for 22 hours, where he said he was handcuffed, called a "faggot" and slapped in the face about 15 to 20 times by Durst.

Waits was found guilty of a misdemeanor and sentenced to a year of court supervision for the water incident. In September 2000, he filed a complaint with the Police Department, which later ruled that his claims were "unsustained."

Attorneys for the city denied

the beating took place and said there was no medical evidence to back up Waits' claims.

"He wants to mar the careers of these officers with the allegations he's made," Assistant Corporation Counsel Michael Monahan said in closing arguments.

Loevy said his client never denied he threw the water and knows he shouldn't have done it. Still, Loevy said, Waits' actions did not justify this form of "street justice."

"This sends the appropriate message that maybe Chicagoans are tired of this problem and if the Police Department is not going to clean this up, then the jury system will," Loevy said.

Monahan and a Chicago Police Department spokesman declined to comment on whether the city would appeal the verdict.