

MIAMI BEACH

## Many previous complaints against cop in Solange Knowles banana dispute

The Miami Beach cop who allegedly tried to puncture an inflatable banana belonging to Beyoncé's sister has a long list of internal affairs complaints.



Solange Knowles and her son Daniel Julez Smith Jr. on Aug. 17 in New York City. ANDY KROPA/GETTY IMAGES

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A Miami Beach police officer accused of hassling the sister of pop star Beyoncé in a dispute over an inflated banana has had 16 internal affairs complaints filed against him, and 33 documented incidents of using force to make an arrest in his 16 years with the department.

Officer John Pereira was suspended for 120 hours in 2005 for using excessive force, and has been reprimanded three times, including once for violating the department's rules for integrity, records show.

Pereira, who was in uniform working an off-duty shift at Club Cameo in South Beach, allegedly intervened when Solange Knowles was denied entry into the club because she was toting a five-foot banana balloon early Sunday morning.

Knowles, who has her own music career, was in town recording, not partying, said her attorney, Roy Black. She picked up the inflatable at an event earlier in the evening at LIV, a nightclub at the Fontainebleau. She intended to give it to a musician friend's child, Black said. After leaving LIV, she decided to stop by Cameo, a Washington Avenue hotspot.

But the bouncers didn't like the banana and told her to leave. Knowles' assistant and her drummer began deflating the toy by pushing it between them to release the air. Black said at that point, Pereira approached Knowles and pulled out a knife "in a good faith attempt to deflate the banana." The

officer did not threaten Knowles, he said, but the act nevertheless rattled her, especially after he began yelling at her.

"For some reason he got very nasty about the situation," Black said Wednesday. "She didn't commit a crime, she wasn't drunk, she wasn't causing a disturbance. She didn't feel she deserved to be treated like that."

Miami Beach police, however, said she became hostile and started alleging racial discrimination.

"I have literally had my last leg with discriminating police," she tweeted on Twitter afterward. Later, she said, "Yes, very funny a balloon was involved in the incident ... but having a switchblade pulled out on you is no laughing matter."

A spokeswoman for Club Cameo declined to comment. Miami Beach police are investigating. Alex Bello, president of Miami Beach's fraternal order of police, said Pereira is prohibited from commenting on an open internal affairs investigation.

"There's a lot of things that don't jive here. Hopefully, once we hear from the officer, the whole thing will be cleared up," Bello said.

The incident is the latest in a string of unfavorable events involving Miami Beach police officers. In recent months, Miami Beach police officers have been accused of drinking on duty, cavorting with women at nightclubs and using excessive force in the fatal shooting of a robbery suspect on Memorial Day weekend.

Chief Carlos Noriega has said the incidents are isolated cases, officers have been disciplined and the problems in the department are not systemic.

Pereria's full internal affairs file was not available Wednesday. But a snapshot of his file shows that he has been investigated by the department following complaints of excessive force, harassment, making racial remarks, false arrest and battery. The internal affairs investigations concluded that most of the complaints were unsubstantiated, which means the accusations could not be proven or disproven.

Wayne Jones, a spokesman for Miami Beach police, said most officers average about one documented incident of using force to make an arrest per year. Pereira, with 33, is about double the average.

"Yes, his is one of the highest I've seen, but it may be he is just a very proactive officer and works a lot of nightclubs," Jones said.

Black said his client decided to pursue a complaint because she believes that Miami Beach police mischaracterized the incident.

"It hit the news, people make judgments based on that, thinking that it's just another celebrity getting into trouble. If the police don't correct their public statements, we will take appropriate action," Black said.

Black, a civil and criminal attorney best known for gaining an acquittal of William Kennedy Smith on rape charges in 1991, said he has received a number of complaints about Miami Beach police over the years. Most of them involved beach cops who do off-duty work in South Beach. Though they are in uniform, they are not working for the public, he said.

"When they work the clubs, they then are employees of the club, not the city. They are looking out for the owner of the club," Black said. "When the owner has an argument with somebody, often the police end up dragging people out."

*Miami Herald Staff Writer David Smiley contributed to this report.*