

View from driver's seat looks good

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. He is stronger," said his sister and business manager Kati Castroneves, who was acquitted along with her brother. "Some people would say it was a bad year. We'd say, 'It's a good year, we have the trial behind us. He won Indy, everything is back again.'"

Castroneves was charged last September and acquitted April 17. On May 22, the final conspiracy count in the case was dropped. Just two days later, Castroneves won his third Indy 500, while emotional family members looked on.

"If it would be in a movie, it would be like it never happened in real life — and it did," Castroneves said. "I'd have to say it's the power of prayers, the power of fans being positive."

Well-loved in the IndyCar world, Castroneves' fame was propelled by his *Dancing with the Stars* performance in 2007. The sprightly Brazilian with the effervescent personality raced — and danced — into fans' hearts.

But the charges against him and Kati were serious — evading taxes on \$5.5 million in income. The U.S. Attorney's office in Miami declined to comment, but during the trial prosecutors tried to prove Castroneves dodged U.S. income taxes through a Panamanian shell corporation set up by his father.

Brother and sister endured the trial by attending the Church of the Epiphany in South Miami each morning before court. Kati's family and Helio's parents moved into Helio's Coral Gables home for several months.

"Sometimes you don't realize the people beside you, around you, they love you because of who you are and not who you become," Helio Castroneves said. "And for me, it's having these type of people, it just makes you stronger. Because in the tough times, that's where they are there to support you."

According to the Davie Brown Talent Index, which measures celebri-

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Helio Castroneves on the past year's events

ties' attributes to help companies choose endorsers, Castroneves' awareness has increased since the trial, but his appeal, trust and other traits have dropped slightly.

That hasn't hurt his marketability.

GentlemenDrive Miami, the local branch of a Spanish company that allows members to drive high-end cars on a short-term basis, asked him to be their spokesman for the service that launches in December.

Those Masses led to Castroneves' relationship with HCA. At church he met Laurice Joseph, whose son Michael Joseph is president of HCA East Florida. Mother introduced son to Castroneves, and after the verdict a partnership was forged. Castroneves filmed ads that stress the speed of HCA's hospitals; he will also make hospital visits.

"I don't know all the intricate details of what did or didn't transpire," said Joseph, who along with his mother plans to attend Saturday's race. "The nice thing is it worked out well."

Castroneves is entertaining other business offers, but so far hasn't scored a coveted hair product endorsement. "It's a secret," Castroneves said of what he uses to ensure his hair is perfectly coiffed even under his racing helmet. He'd reveal it, he says, if a company came calling.

Also expected to attend Saturday's race is Marc Buoniconti, president of the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis. Castroneves has raised money to support Buoniconti's foundation and



Getty Images, file

Helio Castroneves, center, was overcome with emotion after winning the Indianapolis 500 this May. "I'd have to say it's the power of prayers, the power of fans being positive," he says of overcoming turmoil.

was honored at its sports legends dinner last year. Buoniconti stayed in touch during the trial and sent his friend a text message after the Indy 500.

"I got emotional at the end. I could barely stay in my wheelchair," he said. "It brought an honest tear to my eye when he crossed the finish line ... a storybook ending."

Team Penske and the Indy Racing League stood by Castroneves, but waited for the legal process to play out. Castroneves was not included in 2009 marketing materials to start the season.

"We've seen pretty short memories from fans," said Terry Angstadt, president of IRL's commercial division. "They love the fact he's back ... it is like it didn't happen."

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Susan Stocker, Sun Sentinel file

In April, Helio Castroneves and his sister Kati were acquitted of federal tax evasion charges.