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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | [customerservice@law360.com](mailto:customerservice@law360.com)

# Late Argentine Soccer Star's Ex-Wife Wins Asset Battle

By **Hailey Konnath**

Law360 (October 23, 2023, 11:44 PM EDT) -- A Florida state court has ruled that the estate of late Argentine soccer legend Diego Armando Maradona had no evidence to support his claims that his ex-wife hid assets and stole millions of dollars from him in their divorce, finding that the case is devoid of even "a scintilla of evidence."

Florida Eleventh Judicial Circuit Judge Carlos Lopez granted final summary judgment in favor of Claudia Rosana Villafañe "on all counts" in the eight-year-old dispute. The judge said Villafañe testified that she used her own funds to make various purchases, and Maradona's estate hasn't offered up any evidence to the contrary.

"Plaintiff failed to identify evidence in support of a material factual dispute regarding conferring a benefit — there are no allegations or recorded evidence of a transfer of funds to Villafañe, which she accepted and retained," Judge Lopez said in the decision, dated Oct. 20.

Specifically, Judge Lopez said there's no evidence of Maradona ever possessed the funds his ex-wife is accused of stealing, the amount of those funds, the bank account where funds were held, how funds were transferred and the date of that transfer.

"Plaintiff has not produced any financial records, not a single bank statement, check, wire transfer, safety deposit record, or any proof of any kind tending to indicate that Maradona had possession of the funds at issue at the time he alleges they were stolen," the judge said. "Moreover, there is no evidence even remotely supporting his allegation that Villafañe misappropriated funds, much less totaling millions of dollars."

Paula Aguila, an attorney representing Villafañe, said in a statement Monday that after eight years of litigation "and extenuating efforts to sift through all the lies said in and out of court about Villafañe, the court found zero evidence to support Maradona's allegations against her."

Aguila called the litigation "long, contentious and drawn-out" and noted that it frequently made headlines in Argentina and elsewhere around the world.

"The summary judgment order is not only the end of the case, but it clears Villafañe's name of these false allegations, which both [Maradona's counsel] and Maradona repeated publicly for years," Aguila said.

Maradona, one of the greatest soccer players of all time, led the Argentine national team to its victory in the 1986 World Cup. Three years later, he married Villafañe, but they separated in 1999 and divorced in 2003. They didn't formally divide their assets until a decade later, in 2013, per the suit.

He sued his ex-wife, as well as several of her shell companies, in Florida state court in December 2015. According to the complaint, when they were married, Maradona trusted her to manage his finances and she took some of his money to buy six apartments in South Florida. Though the properties were bought before the parties settled, she didn't disclose them during the settlement proceedings in Argentina, Maradona claimed.

Maradona died in 2020, at the age of 60, at his home in Argentina. His estate continued the suit after

his death.

According to Aguila, Maradona declared in sworn affidavits that his Argentine lawyer, Matias Morla, had uncovered Villafañe's fraud during a 2014 audit of Maradona's finances. But Maradona fought being deposed and had his doctor appear before the court to explain why he purportedly couldn't give his deposition, Aguila said. Maradona died before the court could weigh in on his opposition to being deposed, she added.

However, Aguila did take the deposition of Morla, she said. And that testimony confirmed Villafañe's defenses because there were no financial records from Maradona or his estate supporting his allegations and "no financial audit whatsoever," she said.

That proved that the case "should have never been filed," Aguila said.

Consequently, earlier this year, Judge Lopez found that the audit never existed and sanctioned Maradona's estate. All references to the audit were struck from the complaint, and Villafañe was awarded attorney fees for their time digging into the alleged audit.

In Friday's decision, Judge Lopez said Maradona had actually admitted that he didn't know how the alleged theft occurred or how his ex-wife obtained the funds to purchase the properties at the heart of the dispute.

On top of that, the statute of limitations barred him from bringing his unjust enrichment claim when he did, according to the decision. Similarly, his breach of fiduciary duty claim was also brought too late, Judge Lopez said.

In 2018, a Florida appeals court **ruled that** Miami was the appropriate forum for the dispute, finding that the statute of limitations had run out for his claims in Argentina. Specifically, Florida's Third District Court of Appeal affirmed the trial court's refusal to dismiss Maradona's claims and said the trial court had not abused its discretion in determining that Argentina is not an adequate forum for his lawsuit.

"We can see no abuse of discretion in the trial court relying on conflicting expert testimony on its way to finding that the Argentine courts were not an adequate alternate forum for Maradona's claims," the Third District said at the time.

Counsel for Maradona's estate didn't immediately respond to a request for comment late Monday.

Maradona's estate is represented by Eduardo F. Rodriguez of EFR Law Firm.

Villafañe is represented by M. Paula Aguila and Monica Amador of MPA Law.

The case is Diego Armando Maradona v. Claudia Rosana Villafañe et al., case number 2015-029014, in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court of the State of Florida.

—Additional reporting by Carolina Bolado. Editing by Michael Watanabe.