

Collections • [American Airlines](#)

Ex-airport baggage handler found not guilty of theft

BY MENSAAH M. DEAN, deanm@phillynews.com 215-854-5949
 POSTED: January 05, 2012

The surveillance video shown in court Thursday was compelling, as it captured American Airlines baggage handlers rummaging through passengers' luggage and taking items before tossing the bags onto a conveyor belt at Philadelphia International Airport.

The prosecution's only problem, however, was a big one: Not once was accused thief Victor Soler filmed taking anything.

Soler, 46, of Doylestown, who was arrested in November 2010 with three other American baggage handlers, is seen on Aug. 27 and Sept. 20 and 21 of that year working side-by-side with his sticky-fingered co-workers. He even laughed at one's antics.

He was charged with theft, conspiracy and related crimes because it appeared he was acting as a lookout. He was keeping luggage flowing on the belt so his co-workers could steal without being detected by supervisors, Philadelphia police Det. Michael Wokciechowski testified during Soler's one-day, nonjury trial.

The hidden camera was mounted after the airline contacted police about the thefts, said Wokciechowski, the police department's lone detective assigned to the airport.

Assistant District Attorney Sara Guccini called no other witnesses and asked Municipal Judge Bradley K. Moss to find the defendant guilty based on the detective's testimony and the video evidence.

Defense attorney A. Charles Peruto Jr., in his closing argument, questioned why no airline representative or former Soler co-workers were called to testify about his client's alleged thefts.

As for the video, Peruto said, it failed to show his client doing anything of a criminal nature.

Moss agreed, noting that Soler's "mere presence" with others breaking the law is not a crime itself.

"Looking at the video," Moss said, gave him "reasonable doubt" about Soler's guilt.

Not guilty, said the judge.

The three airline employees arrested with Soler pleaded guilty and were given probation sentences last year.

Soler, an unemployed, married father of three daughters, emerged from the courtroom fighting back tears and fighting mad. "I'm angry at everybody," he said. "I lost a lot of money. I lost a lot of pride, my respect.

"It's wrong what they did to me," he said of the airline for which he had worked for 10 years before being fired.

Not only was Soler not involved in thefts, but he reported the crimes to airline supervisors several times, Peruto said.

Co-workers retaliated against Soler as a result, said Peruto, who promised to file lawsuits against the co-workers, American Airlines, the city and the police department.

American Airlines had no comment, spokesman Ed Martelle wrote in an email.

You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

[Protect Employees with Disability Insurance](#)

34 1 0 @
 Like Tweet 8+1

MESH ONE-PIECE BATHING SUIT

\$58.50

SHOP NOW

[Shop Now >>](#)



FRAMESDIRECT.COM
premium eyewear

FREE SHIPPING

**Become a
"Barefoot Writer"**

And live the life of a famous writer without having to write a blockbuster movie script or a chart-topping book.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS UNIQUE GROUP OF HIGHLY-PAID WRITERS ...

We Recommend

Judge Decides To Bag It In Theft Case
 January 6, 2012

Four American Airlines baggage handlers charged with stealing
 November 6, 2010

Troubled US Airways names chief of operations
 September 7, 2007

Daniel Rubin: A labor of love stolen in Phila.
 May 26, 2008

Find More Stories About

[American Airlines](#)