

## Reggae singer Buju Banton released pending retrial

Photo courtesy of DAVID O. MARKUS



Buju Banton's lawyer David Oscar Markus, right, and reggae star Stephen Marley await the release of Banton.



By **ELAINE SILVESTRINI** | The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - More than a month after a federal jury deadlocked in his cocaine-trafficking trial, Jamaican reggae singer Buju Banton walked out of the Pinellas

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County Jail today after a judge ordered his release under strict conditions.

Banton, whose real name is Mark Myrie, declined comment and covered his face as he left jail and headed home to South Florida.

He had been behind bars since his arrest in December. A federal judge declared a mistrial Sept. 27 after jurors couldn't agree on a verdict. Banton is scheduled to be tried again in February.

"We're thrilled that Buju will have some time to regroup before we try this case again," defense attorney David Oscar Markus said.

As a condition of Banton's release, his friend Stephen Marley, a musician and son of reggae icon Bob Marley, posted \$300,000 worth of equity in his South Florida home.

Last month, U.S. Magistrate Anthony Porcelli ruled that Banton could be released under stringent conditions. U.S. District Judge James Moody last week denied a prosecution appeal of Porcelli's ruling.

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Under the terms of Banton's bond, he must pay a private security detail to guard him so he doesn't flee. He also was required to sign an extradition waiver, ensuring his return if he does flee the country, and will have to wear an electronic monitoring device.

Two men indicted along with Banton, including the singer's driver, have pleaded guilty and are awaiting sentencing.

Banton maintains he was set up by a well-paid government informant.

But the prosecution argued that recorded conversations showed Banton was an experienced cocaine trafficker who was trying to invest in another deal.