

## Jury awards more than \$16 million to man Jefferson County jailers beat

By Kalyn Belsha

Published: 03:41 p.m., Wednesday, January 12, 2011

A federal jury awarded a man more than \$16 million after two then-Jefferson County jailers used excessive force on the man as they processed him.

The jury had to ponder several questions in a complicated civil rights trial, including whether [Rodney George Cole II](#) or [Johnny Lynn Vickery, Jr.](#) used excessive force against [Joseph Roberts](#), now 24, in a way that violated his 14th Amendment right.

Surveillance video played in court shows Cole punched Roberts in the face during his book-in and Vickery threw Roberts against a jail wall while he was preparing to be released on medical bond for an injury he sustained from Cole.

Mitch Adams, Vickery's attorney, said jails are a dangerous place to work and that his client acted out of concern for his and other jailers' safety, and in the way he'd been trained by Jefferson County.

Vickery testified he feared Roberts was going to spit on him, so he used force to remove the risk for contamination. Cole said he used force in self-defense and never meant to cause Roberts harm.

In June 2008, Cole pleaded guilty in state district court to the Class A misdemeanor offense of official oppression and was sentenced to one year's probation and fined \$4,000. Two months earlier, a jury convicted Vickery of the same offense and sentenced him to pay a \$4,000 fine. Both men resigned from their positions with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department after the 2007 incident.