



Department of Justice

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Seventeen Kentuckians Indicted for Animal Fighting Charges

LEXINGTON, Ky.- In four separate indictments, issued by a federal grand jury sitting in London, 17 Kentuckians have been indicted with various offenses related to animal fighting and cruelty.

In the first indictment, the grand jury charged Cruz Alejandro Mercado-Vazquez, 43, of Maysville, Ky., with two counts of attempted bribery and one count of possessing animals for the purpose of having the animals participate in an animal fighting venture.

The indictment alleges that, on two separate occasions, Mercado-Vaquez offered a bribe of more than \$5,000, to the Mason County Sheriff, to influence the Sheriff in connection with a planned animal fighting venture. The indictment further alleges that Mercado-Vazquez knowingly bought, possessed, and trained roosters to participate in an animal fighting venture.

In the second indictment, the grand jury charged Rickie Dale Johnson, 55, Jacklyn Rachelle Johnson, 31, Harold “Fuzzy” Hale, 72, all of London, Ky, with conspiracy to knowingly sponsor and exhibit animals in an animal fighting venture, in connection with the Bald Rock chicken pit in Laurel County. The indictment alleges that Rickie Johnson rented property from Hale and, for at least two months in 2021, operated regular animal fighting ventures at that location, with assistance from Jacklyn Johnson. The following individuals were also charged with exhibiting an animal, specifically a rooster, in the animal fighting venture at the Bald Rock pit:

Orville D. Asher, 39, of London, Ky
Dallas Cope, 35, of Livingston, Ky
Hiram B. Creech, Jr., 47, of East Bernstadt, Ky
Bradley Cye Rose, 72, of Parkers Lake, Ky.
Joshua Westerfield, 36, of London, Ky

In the third indictment, the grand jury charged Millard Oscar Hubbard, 72, of Manchester, Ky.; Timothy Sizemore, 42, of Manchester, Ky.; Beachel Collett, 28, of Oneida, Ky.; Lester Collett, 25, of Manchester, Ky.; and Justin Smith, 33, of Manchester, Ky., with one count each of conspiracy to knowingly sponsor and exhibit animal fighting ventures. Sizemore was also charged with knowingly promoting the animal fighting events using instrumentalities of interstate commerce.

The third indictment alleges that, between November 2018 and January 2020, the

defendants conspired to operate weekly animal fighting ventures at Riverside Game Club, in Manchester, Ky. The indictment further alleges that Riverside Game Club was owned and operated by Hubbard. Sizemore, with the assistance of Beachel and Lester Collett, organized the participants into various fights, cataloged the entry fees, the weight of the roosters, tracked the weapons used on the animals, arranged the fights and tracked the wins and losses of various participants. Sizemore allegedly distributed advertising material about the fights, and Hubbard collected admissions fees and had trailers that could be rented to individuals who participated in the animal fighting. It was also alleged that, the defendants paid regular employees, including Smith, to work the fights.

The third indictment further charged Sizemore with one count conspiracy to operate a weekly animal fighting venture at Blackberry Chicken Pit, located in Pike County, Kentucky. It alleges that Sizemore, with the assistance of others, operated weekly animal fighting ventures at Blackberry between May 2020 and December 2021.

In the fourth indictment, the grand jury charged Walter H. Mitchell, 55, of Ewing, Ky, Jerrard McVey, 47, and Linda McVey, 42, of Carlisle, Ky, with conspiracy to knowingly sponsor and exhibit animals in an animal fighting venture, in connection with the Valley, a chicken pit on the border of Nicholas and Fleming Counties.

“Animal fighting ventures are cruel and illegal,” said Carlton S. Shier, IV, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. “We are committed to enforcing federal animal cruelty laws and I want to commend the efforts of our law enforcement partners, whose dedication and effort led to these indictments for the Eastern District of Kentucky.”

“The gruesome ritual of animal fighting simply has no place in a civilized society. Animal cruelty, however, is just one criminal aspect surrounding this barbaric activity. Whether it is illegal gambling or the attempted corruption of our public officials, the criminal enterprise surrounding cockfighting operations will not be tolerated,” said Special Agent in Charge Jodi Cohen, FBI Louisville Office. “Through outstanding cooperation and great work, the FBI and its state and federal law enforcement partners have dealt a serious blow to cockfighting and a multitude of other criminal activities in the Eastern District of Kentucky.”

United States Attorney Shier; Jason M. Williams, Acting Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General; Special Agent in Charge Cohen; Colonel Phillip Burnett, Jr., Commissioner, Kentucky State Police; and Superintendent Rob Townsend, Indiana Gaming Commission, jointly announced the indictments.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by USDA, FBI, KSP, and the Indiana Gaming Commission. The cases are being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kate Smith and Andrea Mattingly-Williams.

Each defendant faces up to 5 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. Mercado-Vasquez faces up to 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000 for the attempted bribery counts. However, any sentence following a conviction would be imposed by the Court after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and the federal sentencing statutes.

Any indictment is an accusation only. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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