

Beat: Vips

Romanian princess pleads not guilty after cockfighting arrest

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USPA News - Princess Irina, the third daughter of the last king of Romania, pleaded not guilty Friday when she and her husband appeared in U.S. federal court after being accused of running a cockfighting business on their ranch in rural Eastern Oregon, prosecutors said. Irina Walker, 60, and her husband, former sheriff's deputy John Walker, 67, appeared in federal court in Portland on Friday afternoon after they were arrested and charged a day earlier.

Both pleaded not guilty and were released pending trial, although the princess was banned from leaving Morrow County and ordered to wear an electronic-monitoring bracelet. The Walkers were among 18 people who were arrested in Oregon and Washington on Thursday after they were indicted by a federal grand jury, charging the couple and four others with operating an illegal gambling business. All 18 defendants were also charged with conspiracy to violate the Animal Welfare Act by conducting unlawful animal fighting ventures on ten occasions. According to court documents, the couple and four other defendants organized at least 10 cockfighting derbies between April 1, 2012, and May 19 of this year, bringing in \$2,000 or more per day. Cockfighting is a game in which a knife or other sharp instrument is attached to the legs of gamecocks and roosters for the purpose of fighting each other. The fights, which are supervised by a referee and occur in a pit or ring surrounded by spectators, ends when one rooster is dead or refuses to continue to fight. A series of cockfights conducted in a day is referred to as a derby, which usually consists of dozens of individual cockfights lasting for several hours depending on the number of entries. The losing rooster is almost always killed after the fight ends, if the animal does not die during the fight. According to the indictment unsealed after Thursday's arrests, participants in the cockfighting games would bring roosters to a rural ranch owned by the Walkers, while others would come as spectators or workers. Several of the defendants are believed to have crossed state lines to participate in the events. "Various persons would perform roles at the derby, including but not limited to: collecting admission and entry fees and bets, weighing the roosters, matching the roosters for the fights, keeping written records of the fights, selling and sharpening gaffs, and disbursing the wagered money to the winners of the derby," prosecutors allege in court documents. It said one or more other persons would manage and supervise fights in the role of a referee, while others would sell food and drinks at a concession stand. Each of the charged offenses - one count of Illegal Gambling Business, ten counts of Unlawful Animal Fighting Venture, and one count of Conspiracy to Violate the Animal Welfare Act - carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The Walkers are also subject to the forfeiture of all property and buildings used in the gambling business. "Cockfighting is illegal under federal law and under the laws of all 50 states," Amanda Marshall, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon, said after Thursday's arrests. "Besides being a barbaric practice, cockfighting jeopardizes public health and safety and facilitates the commission of other criminal acts." Irina is the third daughter of Romania's last king, Michael I, and Queen Anne. Michael reigned as a young child from July 1927 until June 1930, and again from September 1940 until December 1947 when he was forced to abdicate by the Communist Party-controlled government. King Michael, who is one of only two surviving heads of state from World War II and shared company with figures such as German Führer Adolf Hitler, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, said he learned of his daughter's arrest with deep sadness. "His Majesty and the entire Royal Family hopes that the American justice system and the Oregon legal authorities will try to resolve this case in the right way, in the fastest way possible," the royal family said in a statement. "His Majesty also hopes that the presumption of innocence will be upheld, as it is legal and ethical, from the start and until the end of this unfortunate event."

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