City man not guilty of rooster fighting

By Brett Lovelace Intelligencer Journal Staff

A Lancaster County jury Thursday found a 36-year-old Lancaster city man not guilty of training roosters to fight.

Also, after three hours of deliberations, the jury could not reach a verdict on a felony charge of owning or possessing

dogs for fighting.

Judge Joseph C. Madenspacher, however, did convict Ivan Ruiz Rivera of one count of cruelty to animals, a summary

charge. The charge stems from the dirty conditions found in the yard where Rivera kept pit bulls.

Assistant District Attorney Christine L. Wilson and defense attorney Robert Bacher are scheduled to meet with

Madenspacher today to determine if Rivera will be retried on the dog-related charge.

The judge also could decide whether Rivera's pit bulls and roosters, which the Humane League of Lancaster County has

been keeping, will be returned to him.

"The verdict is a relief," Bacher said. "This trial has been gruelling, very hard, because there was a lot of technical

information to learn fast."

Jurors began deliberating about 1:30 p.m. Thursday after listening to closing arguments and testimony from a pit bull

expert.

During her closing argument, Wilson pointed to what authorities found in the defendant's South Lime Street home -

animal-training equipment, performance-enhancing drugs, animal fighting publications, training logs and videos, three

pit bulls and 30 chicks.

"He was engaging in a blood sport for purposes of entertainment," Wilson said. "Ivan Ruiz is a dog fighter and a cock

fighter."

"The big picture is this was a training ground for animal fighting. The totality of it all is evidence of training dogs and

roosters to fight. These are sadistic, gory crimes."

Bacher told jurors that Rivera, 36, is an animal lover who obtained the training equipment and drugs while trying to

start a dog breeding business.

He said Wilson built a case on "circumstantial evidence" with no witnesses to place Rivera at a pit bull or cock fight.

"Things were exaggerated beyond a strict review of the evidence," Bacher said. "We were supposed to hear about the

underground world of dog fighting with various evil characters coming and going.

"Was Ivan a malicious dog fighter? No, he's a guy that's a kid in a body that size.

"He liked chicks, dogs and teenagers in the neighborhood. He has the spark of kindness in his heart."

Bacher put a retired University of Georgia professor on the witness stand to refute earlier testimony that one of the pit

bulls Rivera owned had scars from "pit fights." I. Lehr Brisbin Jr. said he is a wildlife and animal behavior expert who

has studied pit bull fighting for about 30 years.

Rivera testified Wednesday that his pit bull suffered the injuries while trying to break through a wooden backyard

fence.

"I study dog fighters like Truman Capote studied mass murders," Brisbin said. "I have nothing but respect for people

who fought dogs and gave it up."

He reviewed photographs of Rivera's adult male pit bull and called the injuries "trivial."

"If a dog is fighting another dog in a pit, they don't come out without injuries all over their bodies because dogs attack

at all points," Brisbin said. "Those marks were more likely caused during a fence fight in which dogs will chew their

way through a wood fence for better access. Fence fights are just a curse of owning a dog."

Brisbin also said a treadmill, sticks used to separate dogs, wire muzzles, chains, harness and animal fighting

publications found in Rivera's home are typical for dog breeders and kennel owners.

The charges against Rivera, a certified nursing assistant and maintenance worker at a Lancaster nursing home who has

three young children, were filed after city police discovered the pit bulls, roosters, drugs and training equipment May

27, 2006, while trying to arrest him on charges he violated a protection-from-abuse order.

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