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Second robbery suspect arrested; Man faces federal, state charges in crime-spree case

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Kevin Cox, whose case involving a 1996 crime spree was initially dismissed by a Baltimore judge for procedural errors, was picked up by FBI agents Thursday night, hours after he and a co-defendant were indicted on federal charges stemming from the spree.

Apparently oblivious to the publicity surrounding his case, Cox reported to a probation office Thursday in Hyattsville. A probation officer called the FBI, and Cox was arrested and transported to a Baltimore County jail in Woodlawn.

Yesterday, FBI agents brought Cox to U.S. District Court in Baltimore for his first appearance on the federal indictment, handed up Thursday against Cox and co-defendant Christopher Wills.

The charges stem from an April 20, 1996, crime spree that began when two men robbed a Super Pride market on East Northern Parkway in Northeast Baltimore. They then forced a family of five from their car at gunpoint before barging into a rowhouse to steal the keys to another car.

Police captured two suspects several blocks away when an officer shot one of them.

After Cox and Wills were arrested, the case unraveled in Baltimore Circuit Court. A Baltimore judge dismissed the armed robbery case against the pair on Nov. 5, 1997.

An appellate court later overturned the dismissal, ordering the judge to hold another hearing. At that Nov. 12, 1998, hearing, the judge dropped all charges against Wills again, ruling that the case had languished too long and a critical hearing had been held without him. But because Cox didn't appear in court that day, the armed robbery charges against him remained in effect.

Baltimore prosecutors said yesterday they do not plan to drop the state charges. "We still consider it to be a viable case," Assistant State's Attorney Jan Alexander said.

After reading an account of the crime spree and what happened to the charges, FBI agents and prosecutors with the U.S. attorney's office opened a federal case. They filed complaints last week, charging Cox and Wills with violating the Hobbs Act, which prohibits interference with interstate commerce. The Super Pride receives some of its food and other products from Pennsylvania. A conviction carries a maximum 20-year prison term.

FBI agents arrested Wills on Feb. 5 and were seeking Cox until his arrest Thursday.

Hours before Cox's arrest, a federal grand jury returned a five-count indictment against the two men. In addition to charging them with violating the Hobbs Act, the grand jury indicted Cox and Wills on carjacking charges, which carry 20-year prison sentences, and federal firearms charges, which carry penalties of 10 to 20 years.

Cox went before U.S. Magistrate Judge Susan K. Gauvey for his first court appearance on the new charges yesterday. He said he didn't understand the Hobbs Act and Gauvey explained it to him.

He also said he didn't understand why prosecutor Thomas M. DiBiagio had the right to detain him without the possibility of bail.

"That's it?" Cox asked the judge. "I have no way to challenge that?"

Gauvey told him she would schedule a hearing Wednesday to determine if he, like Wills, would be kept behind bars until his trial. Until then, she said he would have to stay in jail because of the serious nature of the case.

"The federal system is very different than the state system," Gauvey explained to Cox.

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