



**WE ARE THEIR VOICE.**  
Join the ASPCA Now!

Fight Animal Cruelty Adoption Pet Care

Donate Online Community ASPCA Store

**Fight Animal Cruelty**

- [Report Animal Cruelty](#)
- [Help Fight Animal Cruelty](#)
- [ASPCA on the Frontlines](#)
- [Advocacy Center](#)

- [Puppy Mills](#)
- [Animal Hoarding](#)
- [Blood Sports](#)
- [Chaining and Tethering](#)
- [Farm Animal Cruelty](#)
- [Animals in Entertainment](#)
- [Exotic Pet Trade](#)

The latest pet care news, adoptable pets, and cruelty alerts.

Dog Tested.



Home > Fight Animal Cruelty > Dog Fighting > Dog Fighting FAQ

**Dog Fighting FAQ**

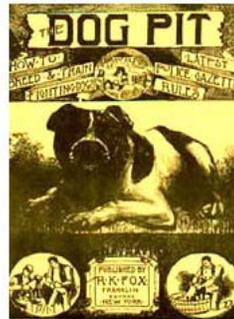
**Q. When and How Did Dog Fighting Come to America?**

Although there are historical accounts of dog fights going back to the 1750s, widespread activity emerged after the Civil War, with professional pits proliferating in the 1860s, mainly in the Northeast.

Ironically, it was a common form of entertainment for police officers and firemen—the “Police Gazette” served as a major source of information on dog fighting for many years. Although many laws were passed outlawing the activity, dog fighting continued to expand throughout the twentieth century.

**Q. Where Did These Animals Come From?**

Many of the dogs were brought over from England and Ireland, where dog fighting had begun to flourish after bull-baiting and bear-baiting became illegal in the 1830s.



*Police Gazette. From the personal collection of Dr. Randall Lockwood*

**Q. How Has the ASPCA Combated Dog Fighting Through the Years?**

Henry Bergh, founder of the ASPCA, was particularly repulsed by the brutality of the dog fighting he saw in New York and elsewhere. His 1867 revision of the state’s animal cruelty law made all forms of animal fighting illegal for the first time, including bull, bear, dog and cockfighting. The involvement of regular police in dog fighting activities was one of the reasons Bergh sought and received authority for the ASPCA Humane Law Enforcement Agents to have arresting powers in New York.



*The arrest of Kit Burns by ASPCA officers, May 8, 1868. Courtesy of the New York State Historical Society*

**Q. How Does the ASPCA Combat Dog Fighting Today?**

Today, the ASPCA incorporates information on blood “sports” in the animal cruelty trainings it provides in New York’s police academies as well as in police officer trainings around the country.

It also provides training on a national level to animal control officers and veterinarians on how to identify the signs of animal cruelty, as well as in crime scene investigation (CSI).

In addition, the ASPCA regularly provides training and assistance to prosecutors on how to build an effective case against those charged with these crimes, and its experts often serve as witnesses in such cases. Several ASPCA employees have published educational and reference books on animal cruelty investigation and prosecution that are used widely throughout the country.

The ASPCA Humane Law Enforcement (HLE) Department is active in enforcing New York City’s animal cruelty laws and has played a vital role in raising awareness of animal cruelty.

**Q. Are There Different Levels of Dog Fighting?**

Most law enforcement experts divide dogfight activity into three categories: street fighting, hobbyist fighting and professional activity:

- **“Street”** fighters engage in dog fights that are informal, street corner, back alley and playground activities. Stripped of the rules and formality of the traditional pit fight, these are spontaneous events triggered by insults, turf invasions or the simple taunt, “My dog can kill yours.” Many of these participants lack even a semblance of respect for the animals they fight, forcing them to train while wearing heavy chains to build stamina, and picking

**Share This**

58 13 tweets

Share retweet  
[Print this Page](#)  
[Send to a Friend](#)

**HELP US** end animal cruelty



**Animal Cruelty**



**Learn. Report. Fight!**

**Wear Your Support!**



**Shop Now**



street fights in which they could get seriously hurt. Many of the dogs are bred to be a threat not only to other dogs, but to people as well—with tragic consequences.

“Street” fights are often associated with gang activities. The fights may be conducted with money, drugs or bragging rights as the primary payoff. There is often no attempt to care for animals injured in the fight and police or animal control officers frequently encounter dead or dying animals in the aftermath of such fights. This activity is very difficult to respond to unless it is reported immediately. “Professional” fighters and “hobbyists” decry the techniques and results of these newcomers to the blood “sport.”

- **“Hobbyist”** fighters are more organized, with one or more dogs participating in several organized fights a year as a sideline for both “entertainment” and to attempt to supplement income. They pay more attention to care and breeding of their dogs and are more likely to travel across state lines for events.
- **“Professional”** dog fighters often have large numbers of animals (often 50 or more) and earn money from breeding, selling and fighting dogs at a central location and on the road. They often pay particular attention to promoting established winning bloodlines and to long-term conditioning of animals. They regularly dispose of animals that are not successful fighters or breeders using a variety of methods, including shooting and blunt force trauma. Unlike “professional” dog fighters of the past, both “professionals” and “hobbyists” of today may dispose of dogs that are too human-aggressive for the pit by selling them to “street” fighters or others who are simply looking for an aggressive dog—thus contributing to the dog bite problem.

In recent years, a fourth category of dog fighters seems to have emerged, with some wealthier individuals from the sports and entertainment worlds allegedly using their financial resources to promote “professional” dog fighting enterprises, which essentially use the philosophy and training techniques usually associated with street fighting.

#### **Q. How Widespread is Dog Fighting in America?**

As with any other illegal underground activity, it is impossible to determine how many people may be involved in dog fighting. Estimates based on fight reports in underground dog fighting publications, and on animals entering shelters bearing evidence of fighting, suggest that the number of people involved in dog fighting in the U.S. is in the tens of thousands.

While organized dog fighting activity seemed to decline in the 1990s, many law enforcement and animal control officials feel that it has rebounded in recent years. Street fighting has reportedly continued to grow as a significant component of urban crime. The Internet has also made it easier for dog fighters to rapidly exchange information about animals and fights.

#### **Q. Is Dog Fighting More Prevalent in One Part of the Country?**

No. Dog fighting has been reported in urban, suburban and rural settings in all regions of the country.

Fighters were traditionally attracted to states with weaker penalties for dog fighting and animal cruelty, many in the South—but laws continue to be made stronger throughout the country. As a result, this activity is no longer limited to any single area, but it is more likely to thrive wherever enforcement of anti-fighting laws is weak.

#### **Q. What Types of People Are Involved in Dog Fighting?**

Just as dog fighting cuts across many regions of the country, participants and spectators at dogfights are a diverse group. While some might typify dog fighting as a symptom of urban decay, not every dog fighter is economically disadvantaged. There are people who promote or participate in dog fighting from every community and background. Audiences contain lawyers, judges and teachers drawn in by the excitement and thrill of the fight.

#### **Q. What Other Crimes Are Associated With Dog Fighting?**

Many of the practices associated with the raising and training of fighting dogs can be prosecuted separately as animal abuse or neglect. In addition, dog fighting, by its very nature, involves illegal gambling. Dog fighters often face additional charges related to drug, alcohol and weapons violations as well as probation violations. Arguments over dog fights have also resulted in incidents that have led to charges of assault and even homicide. Other charges might include conspiracy, corruption of minors, money laundering, etc.

#### **Q. Why Do People Get Involved In Dog Fighting?**

There are many reasons people are attracted to dog fighting. The most basic is greed. Major dog fight raids have resulted in seizures of more than \$500,000, and it is not unusual for \$20,000 - \$30,000 to change hands in a single fight. Stud fees and the sale of pups from promising bloodlines can also bring in thousands of dollars.

For others, the attraction lies in using the animals as an extension of themselves to fight their battles for them and demonstrate their strength and prowess. However, when a dog loses, this can cause the owner of the dog to lose not only money, but status, and may lead to brutal actions against the dog.

For others, the appeal simply seems to come from the sadistic enjoyment of a brutal spectacle.

#### **Q. What Dogs Are Used In Dog Fighting?**

Although there are many breeds of dogs used for fighting worldwide, the dog of choice for fighting in America is the American Pit Bull Terrier. Fila Brasileiros, Dog Argentinos and Presa

Canarios have also been used in this blood "sport". Occasionally Doberman Pinschers or German Shepherds are reportedly used in street fights, or as "bait dogs" to train fighting dogs.

In the early days of dog fighting, the Bull Terrier was the dog of choice for this brutal blood sport, but it was replaced in the early twentieth century by the American Pit Bull Terrier—the Americanized version of the Bull Terriers developed from larger bull-baiting dogs in England—when smaller and faster dogs were needed for fights that took place in pits.

#### **Q. Does This Mean the Pit Bull Is Unsuitable As a Family Pet?**

Even though it was bred as a fighting dog—or perhaps because of that—the American Pit Bull Terrier was one of the most popular dogs of the time, noted for its strength, intelligence and devotion to their family.

It is important to remember any dog can become aggressive, depending on its upbringing and environment. When a dog that is loved, well-treated and cared for, no matter its breed, is matched with the right kind of owner and household, it results in positive reinforcement of the human-animal bond.

#### **Q. Can All dogs Be Trained to Fight?**

No. Much like herding dogs, trailing dogs and other breeds selected for particular roles, fighting dogs are born ready for the training that will prepare them to succeed in the pit, and are bred to have a high degree of dog aggression.

#### **Q. Where Do the Dogs Who Are Used In Dog Fights Come From?**

For "professional" and "hobbyist" dogfighters, the sale of pups from parents who have won several fights is a major part of their activity. Underground dog fighting publications and websites are commonly used to advertise pups or the availability of breeding stock. Many "street" level fighters think they can also make money by breeding and selling dogs, but a great number of these animals are killed or abandoned if they fail to perform.

#### **Q. How Are Fighting Dogs Raised and Trained?**

Fighting dogs must be kept isolated from other dogs, so they spend most of their lives on short, heavy chains, often just out of reach of other dogs. They are usually poorly socialized to any other dogs and to most people. However, many "professional" fighters invest much time and money in conditioning their animals. They are often given quality nutrition, basic veterinary care and exercised under controlled conditions where they will have limited contact with other dogs, such as on a treadmill or "jenny."

The conditioning of fighting dogs may also make use of a variety of legal and illegal drugs, including anabolic steroids to enhance muscle mass and encourage aggressiveness. Narcotic drugs may also be used to increase the dogs' aggression and mask pain during a fight. Young animals are often trained or tested by allowing them to fight with other dogs while muzzled or leashed in well-controlled "rolls." Those who show little inclination to fight may be discarded or killed at an early age. Some fighters will use stolen pets as "bait dogs," or sparring partners.

There are many other common techniques used in the training and testing of dogs, but these methods vary widely among different fighters and may range from systematic to haphazard. "Street" fighters usually make little investment in conditioning their animals, relying on "quick fixes" to produce aggression. These might include starvation, physical abuse, and use of stimulants or other drugs to excite the dogs.

#### **Q. Why Do Fighting Dogs Have Their Ears Cropped and Tails Docked?**

Fighting dogs used by all types of fighters usually have their ears cropped and tails docked close to their bodies. This serves two purposes. First, it limits the number of areas of the body that another dog might grab onto in a fight, and second, it makes it more difficult for other dogs to read the animal's mood and intentions through the normal body language cues dogs use to avoid aggressive encounters.

Many fighters perform this cropping/docking themselves, using crude and inhumane techniques. This can lead to additional criminal charges related to animal cruelty and/or the illegal practice of veterinary medicine.

#### **Q. What Goes On In a Dog Fight?**

As noted above, fights can take place in a variety of locations and at any time. They may be impromptu events in a back alley, or carefully planned and staged enterprises in a location specially designed and maintained for the purpose. Usually the fight takes place in a pit that is between 14 and 20 feet square, with sides that may be plywood, hay bales, chain link or anything else that can contain the animals. The flooring may be dirt, wood, carpet or sawdust. The pit has "scratch lines" marked in opposite corners, where the dogs will face each other from 12 to 14 feet apart.

In a more organized fight, the dogs will be weighed to make sure they are approximately the same weight. Handlers will often wash and examine the opponent's dog to remove any toxic substances that may have been placed on the fur in an attempt to harm the opposing dog. At the start of the fight, the dogs are released from their corners and usually meet in the middle, seeking to get a hold on the opponent, often shaking and tearing to maximize damage. Handlers are not permitted to touch the dogs except when told to do so by the referee. This can happen if dogs become "fanged," with the tooth of one dog embedded in the skin of its opponent. Becoming "fanged" may require the use of a "breaking stick" (also called a "bite stick") to pry the animals apart.

If the action slows or if a dog turns away from his opponent without renewing his attack, the referee may call a "turn" and require that the dogs be returned to their corners and released after 20-30 seconds. If the dog who committed the "turn" fails to cross the pit and grip his opponent, the match is over and the other dog is the winner. A draw may occur if both dogs fail to "scratch" several times in succession, i.e. repeatedly fail to cross the "scratch lines" and re-engage in the fight. This is an unusual and unpopular end for those involved.

#### **Q. How Long Do Dog Fights Last?**

Fights can last several hours. Both animals may suffer injuries ranging from puncture wounds, lacerations and blood loss to dehydration, crushing injuries and/or broken bones. Although fights are not technically fought to the death, many dogs succumb to their injuries.

#### **Q. What Happens to the Losing Dog?**

Unless they have had a good history of past performance or come from valuable bloodlines, losing dogs are often discarded, killed or left untreated. If the losing dog is perceived to be a particular embarrassment to the reputation or status of its owner, it may be executed in a particularly brutal fashion as part of the "entertainment."

#### **Q. What Are the Laws Related to Dog Fighting?**

As of 2008, dog fighting is a felony in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In most states, the possession of dogs for the purpose of fighting is also a felony offense. Being a spectator at a dog fight is illegal in all states except Montana and Hawaii. [See a chart of state dog fighting laws and their penalties](#), which vary widely.

On the federal side, the Animal Welfare Act of 1966 prohibits certain animal fighting-related activities when they have involved more than one state or interstate mail services, including the U.S. Postal Service. In 2007, Congress passed the Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act with strong bipartisan support. The Act amended the Animal Welfare Act and provides felony penalties for interstate commerce, import and export relating to commerce in fighting dogs, fighting cocks and cockfighting paraphernalia. Each violation can result in up to three years in jail and a \$250,000 fine.

#### **Q. What Happens to Dogs Who Are Seized From Dog Fight Operations? Can They Be Rehabilitated?**

Fighting dogs have been bred and trained to inflict injuries on other animals, and are difficult to house and care for. They are often relatively friendly to people, since such people have been the only source of food and attention—but they can be unpredictable around other animals. Concerns about liability, public safety and other risks mean that many animals seized from such operations are not adoptable, meaning they cannot be considered candidates for successful placement, and often have to be euthanized.

Confiscated fighting dogs are also at high risk of being stolen from shelters, foster care or other placements and returned to the fight trade. Exceptions are sometimes made for puppies or other animals who show no signs of training or use in fighting, and who do not exhibit tendencies of aggression toward other animals or people. However, such animals must be carefully evaluated by trained animal behavior professionals and their placement must be monitored over the long term.

#### **Q. If Dog Fighting Is So Widespread, Why Don't More Cases Come to Light?**

Dog fighting is a violent and highly secretive enterprise that is extremely difficult for law enforcement and investigative professionals to infiltrate. A dog fight investigation requires many of the same skills and resources as a major undercover narcotics investigation, and challenges the resources of any agency that seeks to respond to it.

An additional complication is that the evidence likely to be seized includes living creatures who must be taken care of and maintained while the judicial process unfolds. Most prosecutors would be happy to take on every dog fight case they could, but they are limited by the human and animal care resources available to them.

#### **Q. What Can Communities Do to Combat Dog Fighting?**

The first step in combating dog fighting is for individuals to alert the authorities to any suspected or actual dog fighting activities in their area—identification of the problem is the first step to a solution.

In addition, the ASPCA recommends the formation of local or state task forces to address dog fighting. These groups should include members from all the major stakeholders in that community—law enforcement, prosecutors, animal control, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, public health officials, housing authorities, the neighborhood watch and others. The group should identify the nature of the problems in the area, the laws that could be applied to these problems, and the resources that are available. Dog fighting is most effectively addressed by a collaborative approach to this heinous crime.

#### **Q. What Can Citizens Do?**

The enforcement of animal cruelty laws begins with the individual. If you see something, please say something—notify your local police and/or humane law enforcement of any suspicious activities that suggest dog fighting is taking place in your community.

#### **Q. How Prevalent Is Dog Fighting in New York City?**

In general, dog fighting is difficult to detect. ASPCA HLE Agents report seeing the peripheral effects and elements of dog fighting—these include injured dogs who had extensive wounds consistent with injuries of a "bait dog," such as scars and cuts in various stages of healing, as

well as multiple, and often serious, bite wounds.

Paraphernalia associated with dog fighting such as treadmills, break sticks, steroids, pain-numbing drugs, syringes and weapons, large amounts of cash or other evidence of gambling is occasionally discovered, but not often enough to consider the blood "sport" prevalent in New York City.

**Q. Does the ASPCA Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital (BMAH) See Many Dogs Who Have Incurred Injuries As a Result of Dog Fighting? What Kind of Injuries Do These Dogs Most Often Show?**

No, the ASPCA BMAH rarely, if ever, sees dogs who have incurred injuries as a result of dog fighting. This does not mean that dog fighting does not occur in New York. It is possible that such dogs are less likely to be brought to the ASPCA for treatment. Their owners might avoid the ASPCA because they know that the organization is sensitive to signs of animal cruelty and might place them under investigation.

In general, fighting dogs are less likely to have access to veterinary professionals for treatment of their injuries. As for the injuries fighting dogs often bear, these include, but are not limited to: tails and ears cropped in an unprofessional manner; serious, multiple bite wounds; and scarring.

---

Search (or Content or Material) provided in conjunction with

