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Dog Fighting FAQ

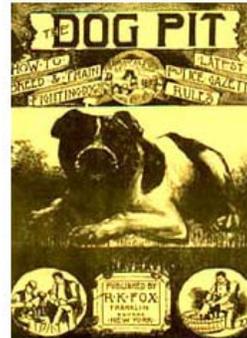
Q. When and How Did Dog Fighting Come to America?

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 to outlaw the activity, dog fighting continued to expand during 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 arrest powers in New York.

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 dog fight 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 people who participate in these fights lack even a semblance of respect for the animals, often starving and beating them to encourage aggressive behavior. 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

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