Dogfighters on the Run: The HSUS Spurs Police Crackdown
Words alone—no matter how descriptive—cannot adequately portray the sickening reality of the sport of dogfighting. The sounds, the smells, the unforgettable sights of this degrading, bizarre spectacle are enough to revolt all but the most degenerate members of the human race.

How can anyone derive satisfaction from watching two dogs tear each other apart? How can anyone sit for hours, not only watching but cheering every wound, every broken leg or mangled eye?

We can only guess the answers to such questions. What we do know is that every weekend, hundreds of men, women, and children attend dogfights, enjoying the blood and excitement of dogs matched to the death and even wagering on the outcome. Virtually anyplace—a vacant garage, warehouse, apartment building basement, or city park—can house a dog pit. A picturesque farmhouse or barn may hold hundreds of spectators brought out in cold or heat or dead of night for a marathon of blood, gore, and misery.

...His face is a mass of deep cuts, as are his shoulders and neck. Both of his front legs have been broken, but Billy Bear isn't ready to quit. At the referee's signal, his master releases him, and unable to support himself on his front legs, he slides on his chest across the blood- and urine-stained carpet, propelled by his good hind legs toward the opponent who rushes to meet him. Driven by instinct, intensive training and love for the owner who has brought him to this moment, Billy Bear drives himself painfully into the other dog's charge....Less than 20 minutes later, rendered useless by the other dog, Billy Bear lies spent beside his master, his stomach constricted with pain. He turns his head back toward the ring, his glazed eyes searching for a last look at the other dog as he receives a bullet in his brain.

—Craig M. Brown
Atlanta Magazine
Exposé on Dogfighting
For years, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) investigators have conducted undercover operations in an effort to infiltrate dogfight rings, and many have witnessed this illegal activity firsthand. The cruelties they’ve reported have been unspeakable—dogs with ears, eyes, and genitals dangling from their bodies; coats splattered with blood; and faces so swollen victims could neither breathe properly nor open their eyes. Despite their own heroic efforts to save injured dogs, investigators recall in all-too-vivid detail those animals that have bled to death before their very eyes. Those images, like the faces of cheering dogfight spectators, are burned into investigators’ memories and serve as im­petus for their tireless efforts to wipe out this repugnant sport and lock away all those involved.

In addition, HSUS investigators have repeatedly testified before state legis­latures, imploring lawmakers to upgrade penalties for this violent crime. We be­lieve that felony laws accompanied by tough felony law, police officers are able to storm this rural dogfight and nab some 65 people from nine midwest­ern states.

Anatomy of a Dogfight

While the American Pit Bull Terri­er—the most commonly fought breed—averages only about 40-50 pounds, it is more extraordinarily muscular and are capable of breaking an oppo­nent’s leg in a matter of seconds. Due to generations of selective breeding for a combative disposition, along with a grueling training regimen that cultivates the animal’s blood instincts, it’s virtually impossible to keep fighting dogs from attacking each other once they have eyed an opponent.

To begin a contest, both dogs are carried into a makeshift pit—a 20-foot-square plywood ring with 2½-foot-high walls—and placed in their respective corners. On the referee’s command of “Face your dogs,” the animals are turned toward each other and, with the words “Let go!” are re­leased to square off in what’s often a fight to the death.

Once an animal has a firm hold on another, jaws lock in place. As the dog with the hold savagely tears and shakes its competitor, blood and urine spot­ting everywhere, staining pit walls, carpet, even the referee’s clothing. Despite seri­ous injuries incurred early on in the match—puncture wounds, large gashes, broken bones, and internal injuries—these animals will continue to grapple with each other, often until they col­lapse or are dragged out of the pit. Ashamed of a losing dog, an owner may destroy his animal with a bullet to the brain or a knife to the throat. “Sometimes, the owner’s just stone­dumb is kept in the dark as to the fight’s whereabouts. Only minutes be­fore a fight is scheduled to begin are the patrons rounded up from various ob­scure meeting places and conveyed to the site. There, they must go through a series of security checks, and once in­side, no one is permitted to leave until the fights are over, for fear the authori­ties will be tipped off.

“Consequently, it takes months of undercover investigations to raid one of these fights,” says HSUS investigator Bob Baker. “It’s for this reason that police officers have been reluctant to become involved. Also, law enforcement agencies felt it wasn’t worth that kind of time and manpower to infiltrate fights if a judge was just going to slap offenders with a $30 fine and let them off the hook.”

Not only do misdemeanor penalties fail to provide incentive for police of­ficers to crack down on fighters, they don’t serve as deterrents for dogfight participants themselves. “Thousands of dollars are bet at these fights,” says Baker, explaining that a recent Arkan­sas raid netted a quarter of a million dollars in cash, along with the largest cache of illegal weapons and drugs ever seized in that state. “To fighters and promoters, dogfighting is a big, money­making business. To them, a $50 fine is nothing more than an inconvenience.”

Those are the very reasons The HSUS has been working to take dogfight­ing out of the backwoods and warehouses and bring it to the attention of state legislators. Only by upgrading the penalties for this violent crime have we been able to spur law enforcement agencies into taking aggressive action against dogfighting.

“The Bloodsport Underground”

For years, the large, underground network of dogfighters—with devotees in virtually every state and social stratum—has gone to extremes to keep its activities tightly under wraps. In fact, so cautious are fight organizers that, until the last possible moment, even ar­
And cooperative efforts between authorities and The HSUS are paying off. With our help, police departments have begun pursuing dogfighters aggressively; during the last five years, we've seen a dramatic rise in the number of raids, arrests, and convictions of both fighters and spectators.

Unfortunately, just because we've prompted authorities to do their jobs doesn't mean that ours is complete. America's dogfighters, now fearful of the consequences a dogfight conviction can bring (in some states, it's up to five years in prison; in others, it's a $50,000 fine), have retreated further underground, making it more difficult than ever for outsiders to penetrate their rings. What's more, due to the unprecedented popularity of pit bulls, we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of unorganized, impromptu street fights. Dogfighting, which used to be a backwoods affair, is now taking place in the heart of major metropolitan areas. In fact, fifty spectators were recently apprehended while cheering and betting on a dogfight in a Brooklyn, New York park!

For these reasons, HSUS investigators are continuing their efforts to infiltrate dogfight rings. Undercover operations have proven to be exceedingly dangerous; our investigators have been threatened, followed, and even shot at! Yet such operations have enabled them to provide law enforcement agencies with invaluable information that, time and again, has lead to subsequent raids.

HSUS investigators have also been crisscrossing the country, conducting training seminars to provide local and state authorities with information on how to combat dogfighting in their areas. Our agents recently assisted the city of Chicago in devising a manual to help police officers tackle this growing problem. It's the first time a major metropolitan city has taken an active interest in pursuing dogfighters.

Because there's been an influx of dogfighters into states where the activity remains a misdemeanor, HSUS investigators continue to travel from state to state testifying for tougher penalties. And, time and again, they've served as expert witnesses in the courtroom to ensure that dogfighters receive their just punishments. Thanks to the recent testimony of regional director Marc Paulhus, three of the country's most notorious dogfighters nabbed in a Georgia raid received the longest prison sentences on record for their offenses.

Finally, The HSUS is offering a reward of up to $1,000 to anyone providing information leading to the arrest and conviction of dogfight participants. In the past, such rewards have proven to be extremely effective in apprehending these criminals.

The HSUS has been intimately involved in this battle every step of the way. Already, we've had a significant impact on legislation affecting dogfighters, but our investigators must continue in their exhaustive efforts to eradicate this cold-blooded cruelty. After all, thousands of loyal pit bull terriers, and even more innocent kittens and puppies used as bait, are depending on us to end their suffering.

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**WE NEED YOUR HELP**

- Contact your state legislators to find out if dogfighting is a felony offense in your state. If not, join forces with others in your area to initiate a campaign to toughen penalties for this crime. Distribute HSUS dogfighting fact sheets to state legislators to educate them to the atrocities of this activity. Send $1.00 for 25 fact sheets, or $1.50 for 50, with the enclosed coupon to The HSUS.

- Educate local and state law enforcement officials to the seriousness of this problem. Encourage them to become actively involved in enforcing laws to wipe out such blatant cruelty. Inform them that The HSUS can provide materials and recommendations to help them combat this problem in their areas.

- Finally, help The HSUS end this depravity and the ruthless exploitation of pets for human amusement. Your tax-deductible contribution will enable our investigators to continue infiltrating dogfight rings, training law enforcers, and fighting for tougher penalties in those states where participation in this vile sport is not yet a felony. Please use the enclosed post-age-paid envelope to send your contribution today.

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Not all pit bulls are as lucky as this one. For thousands of loyal pets each year, dogfighting spells a bitter and bloody conclusion.