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Dogfighting Investigations

by: **Carrie Allan**

- The bloodsport that every year results in the rescue and seizure of thousands of scarred, bloodied, and torn dogs - mostly pit bulls- has a history that dates back to Roman times. Men, dogs, and other animals were forced to fight to the death for spectators in the Coliseum. The peculiar enthusiasm for the activity continued through early modern times, and was exported to the United States by the British.
- Society eventually turned its back on dogfighting, outlawing it in every state by 1976. But proponents continue to celebrate old bloodlines, often putting dogs through sadistic forms of training to achieve “gameness”, the intangible combination of aggression, tenacity, and power that makes for a winning fighting dog.
- While some “dogmen” can trace bloodlines of their animals through generations, the bloodsport of dogfighting doesn’t take root only through direct instruction by longtime enthusiasts passing “the tradition” on to their descendants. In some areas, dogfighting springs up more loosely, a symptom of other social ills such as street gangs, illegal guns, and drugs.
- While professional fighters often invest a great deal of money in their animals’ care in order to prepare them for matches - feeding them, providing at least rudimentary worming and vaccinations - streetfighters tend to treat their dogs as disposable objects, often giving them little food and no medical care at all before setting them up to fight other dogs.
- Street-level dogfighting has grown for a number of reasons, but many experts point a finger at the hip-hop industry. Certain gangsta rappers have driven dogfighting to the forefront of juvenile consciousness by glorifying the imagery of the dogfighting pit.
- The violent, neglectful affection these urban fighting dogs experience reflects the mistreatment many of their owners have suffered.

- Whether professional or street-level, whether rural or urban, whether dogfighting is passed on as a family tradition or stumbled upon as part of gang life, the problem has a common root: absent, inadequate, or distorted examples of how to live and how to care for other creatures.
- If the people around a child present a clear message that the dogs enjoy it, that they're doing what is instinctive for them, that they don't feel pain - and if the child doesn't hear any other messages - the damage may be done.
- In 1997, when *Animal Sheltering* published a feature on caring for dogfighting victims, the crime was a felony in 43 states; that total is now up to 48. Only in Idaho and Wyoming does it remain a misdemeanor.
- Professional dogfighters are careful about whom they let into their circles, so gaining access to their operations can be a full-time job. But the long-term undercover work and investigations that have led to prosecution of professional fighters and fighting-dog breeders won't always work for streetfighting, which tends to be more spontaneous and is usually conducted by people who already spark fear in their fellow citizens.
- The only way to combat this ever-shifting crime is to be ready to shift with it. Involve the community. Involve the police. Involve the schools. Use the methods that work best for you....
- The best thing that could happen for pit bull-type dogs - not just individual dogs but the breed as a whole - is the elimination of dogfighting. If dogfighting disappears, the breeding of pit bulls would not only decrease, but some breeders' efforts to produce animals who appeal to people seeking the dog's "tough" image would decrease as well.