

ASPCA® AnimalandPages



Special Edition

Animal Fighting

Police and animal cruelty investigators walked around to the back of the mansion. At first approach you wouldn't have known that anything cruel or illegal had been going on. Then there was the sound of barking dogs. Lots of them.

When police uncovered the dog fighting operation at the Virginia home of former football star Michael Vick, they found over sixty dogs who looked like pit bulls, most hungry and neglected, and many with scars all over their bodies. They found equipment used to train dogs to fight, medications used to make them stronger, and hidden buildings with blood-splattered walls and carpets. Some people say that dog fighting is cruel, inhumane and must be stopped. Other people say "They're just dogs" or "They like to fight." **How do you feel?**

Dog fighting has been around for a very long time. At the beginning of this country's existence, our forefathers participated in animal fighting. The development of modern day dog fighting as practiced in Europe, North and South America, can be traced to 1835, when bull-baiting was prohibited in England. After the ban, owners of bulldogs—who were used to bait bulls and other animals—turned to staging fights between the dogs. Soon, the largest bulldogs were bred with terriers to produce the bull terriers, who today are the prominent breed of choice for fighting. Staffordshire Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers and Pit Bull Terriers come from this ancestry. Dogs who fall into this broad class are identified as pit bulls.

Today, dog fighting is a felony (a serious crime that is punished more severely than a misdemeanor) in all 50 states, but it still goes on in cities and states across the country with disturbing frequency. The punishment for a felony usually includes imprisonment. Unfortunately, people are still fighting dogs—on street corners, in urban warehouses and basements, in abandoned homes and out in the country in backyard structures.

Most of the dogs forced to fight are American Pit Bull Terriers, or other similar breeds. That doesn't mean that all dogs who



look like pit bulls are mean dogs. These breeds are naturally athletic, have a lot of strength, endurance and tenacity. The dogs who are used for fighting have been specially bred and trained to do so—their physical abilities and desire to fight are exploited in a very cruel and inhumane manner. After being bred for aggression and encouraged to "fight to the death," many fighting dogs won't stop until one (and sometimes both) of the animals die or collapse from injuries or exhaustion.

Dogs aren't the only animals forced to fight. Cockfighting (a fight between roosters who are specially bred to be aggressive) still goes on today, and also has its deep roots in American history and culture. It wasn't until June 2007 that cockfighting was made illegal in Louisiana, the last of the 50 states to ban the activity. The ban took effect in August 2008. Though illegal throughout the United States, cockfighting still occurs across the country, particularly in the rural south. Much like fighting dogs, the roosters used in cockfights are specially bred and trained to be aggressive. These are not the normal roosters you would find on a farm. Many are given drugs to make them stronger and even more aggressive. They are fitted with steel blades on

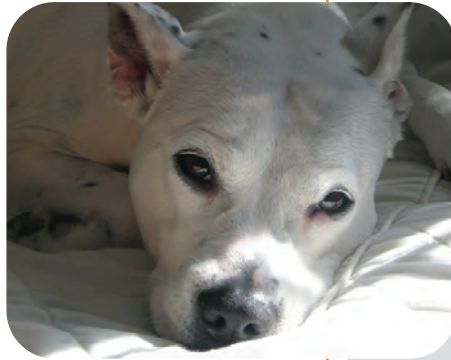
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their legs called spurs, which make them more dangerous during the fights. Again, just as with the dogs, roosters are trained to keep fighting until one of the birds die.

People get involved in animal fighting for different reasons. Some people like to bet on the fights, and can make a lot of money if their dog or rooster wins a match. They might make additional money by breeding successful fighting animals and selling their offspring. Some people fight their dogs because it makes them feel powerful and raises their self-esteem when their dog is seen as “tough” and “a winner.” Still others get involved in dog fighting or cockfighting because they like the adrenaline rush they get when they watch the violence. However, none of these are acceptable reasons to treat animals in such a cruel manner.

So what can you do about it? Well, in this special issue of ASPCA Animaland pages, you will find resources and information about things you can do to recognize and help stop animal fighting in your area and across the country. Putting an end to animal cruelty starts with each individual's pledge to be kind to animals, and a commitment to making sure others around you do the same!



What do you see when you look at the face on this page?

Do you see a dog?

A beloved family member?

Or do you see a monster?

A fighting machine?

The face you're looking at is one of an American Pit Bull Terrier. Many people would look at her and see a dog meant for one purpose—to fight other dogs. If you ask Sugar, though, time is much better spent licking faces for treats, curling up on the couch for naps, or playing a game of fetch with some kids outside. If only all dogs like her were so lucky!

Cockfighting is a Crime



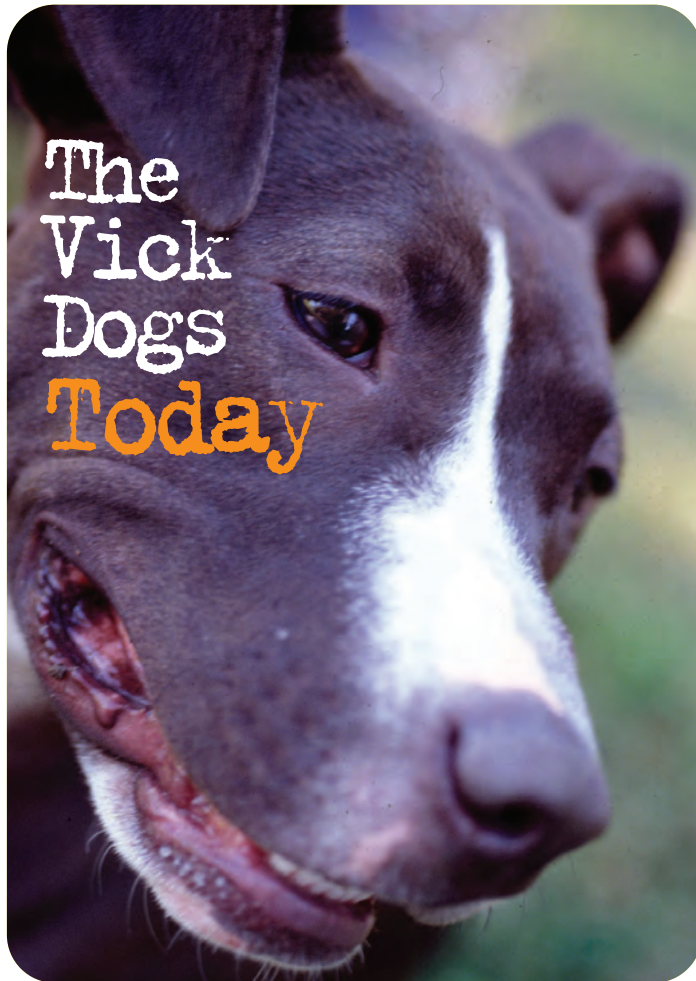
It's April 2003, at 10:00 p.m. on a Saturday in a Bronx, New York basement. The spectators are shouting—some in frustration; others with joy—as their favorite combatants fight to the death in a dirt ring twenty feet in diameter. Food and drinks are being served, and bets are being taken on who will be the winner. This is no ordinary fight. The people are participating in an illegal cockfight. Spectators usually pay an admission fee and bet hundreds of dollars on which rooster will kill or be killed.

The roosters are often injected with steroids (synthetic hormones that promote the storage of protein and the growth of tissue to increase muscle size and strength), and razor-sharp metal spurs are often attached to their legs. In the ring, the birds attack each other until one dies or is too injured to continue.

On this particular Saturday night, agents from the New York City Police Department, the United States Department of Agriculture and the ASPCA raided this Bronx basement and ended the brutal fighting between the roosters. It took the authorities more than six hours

to issue summonses to all eighty people arrested. Those arrested were charged with both felonies (gambling, animal fighting) and misdemeanors (viewing animal fighting). Felonies generally call for imprisonment for more than one year, while misdemeanors usually call for fines or jail term of less than one year.

In 1881, New York banned cockfighting and today, it is ILLEGAL in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, but it still occurs across the United States. It remains legal in the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, as well as The Philippines, Mexico, many areas of Southeast Asia, Central and South America and some parts of France.



Ten dogs went to live in foster homes under the supervision of the Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls (BAD RAP) adoption program. They were rehabilitated and are now living happy lives in loving homes. Once a well-known model for Vick's dogs, Jonny appeared on the Rachael Ray Show and Animal Planet. At BAD RAP he received his Canine Good Citizen certificate and his American Temperament Test Society title. He was adopted by a couple in San Francisco and has a sister dog named Lily. Jonny serves as a social demonstration dog for Bad Rap and is a registered therapy dog. Another lovable dog is Hector, who loves being held. He lives in Minnesota, in a home with three other dogs. Hector earned his Canine Good Citizen award and is on his way to becoming a registered therapy dog. For more success stories about

The ASPCA worked closely with federal authorities at every step of the case against Michael Vick and his partners in Bad Newz Kennels. First with Dr. Melinda Merck, forensic veterinarian with the ASPCA, assisting in the investigation, and later when Dr. Stephen Zawistowski, Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist and Executive Vice President for the ASPCA, led a team of several Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists (trained animal behavior experts who have been certified by the Animal Behavior Society) to evaluate the seized dogs. The team's report concluded that 48-49 dogs had the potential for some form of placement. Recommended placement options included possible re-homing into appropriate foster homes, rehabilitation as law enforcement dogs or placement in sanctuaries. Only one of the dogs was considered unfit for rehabilitation and recommended for euthanasia.

So where are these dogs today?

the Vick dogs, visit BAD RAP at www.badrap.org. Twenty-two of the forty-eight dogs seized were placed at Best Friends Animal Society. They live in a sanctuary within Best Friends called Dogtown. After living at the sanctuary for almost a year, the dogs once trained to fight have made many changes for the better. A black pit bull named Cherry would not walk on a leash when he first arrived. He would flatten his body to the floor and had to be carried from place to place. With training and therapy, Cherry has become a friendly dog, likes to play and even takes walks on a leash. Georgia was a prized fighter and used for breeding. She arrived scarred and toothless. She growled at anyone who came near her food bowl and toys. After much veterinary care and training, Georgia has not only healed, she has mastered basic commands and has learned to be comfortable around people.

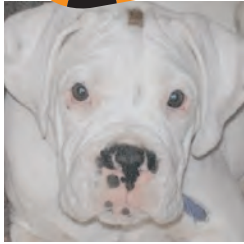
For more success stories about the dogs seized from the Vick property, visit BAD RAP at www.badrap.org and Best Friends Animal Society at www.bestfriends.org.

Find The PIT BULL

Only one of the pictures below features the real American Pit Bull terrier

Take the test to see if you can find it. Note there are no mixes or rescue dogs of unknown background whose breed could be debated. All dogs have been picked from breeders' websites and should be good representatives of their breed. Quite often dogs that attack are incorrectly identified as pit bulls. Here are 20+ breeds that are misidentified as pit bulls.

Visit Understand-a-bull (www.understand-a-bull.com) for more information.



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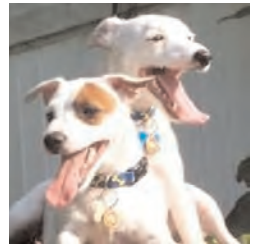
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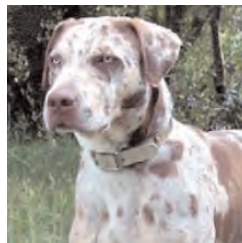
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