

Dog Fighting: America's Latest Vice

Charlie and Sport stare at each other fearlessly in the pit, each patiently waiting in their corresponding corners for the fight to begin. There they stand, waiting to be let go, waiting to kill or be killed, quietly waiting to begin the journey that will either make or break them in achieving the ultimate goal: winning the battle. The trainers give a light nod to the referee, the signal that the dogs are ready to fight. Then comes the all-familiar whistle from the referee himself and the trainers let go of Charlie and Sport. This is the moment where the dogs stop looking at each other as brothers but more like the bait that was used during the tedious training sessions both dogs had endured all their lives. Bait is all Charlie and Sport see in each other, bait that is meant to be destroyed at all costs, even if it means sacrificing themselves. In a matter of seconds both dogs are on each other, tearing, ripping, scratching, biting, trying their best to reign supreme. They are forced to push aside all the pain and concentrate solely on destroying each other. After all, the crowd wants it and their masters demand it. The fight could be over in a couple of minutes or it could last hours, but that doesn't matter, it's all in a days work for Charlie and Sport.

Sadly, the story of Charlie and Sport repeats itself hundreds of times a day in America and many other countries across the world. The Humane Society estimates that there at least 40,000 dogfighters in America alone, this number not including the thousands of amateur dogfighters participating in the sport as well. (Gibson) Because dog fighting is mostly an underground sport, the exact number of dogs killed and abused is uncertain. However, there is no denying that the number of formally reported incidents regarding dog fighting is quickly on the rise. (American Society) The fact that there are no set statistics on the cruel sport does not

justify ignoring the truth: dog fighting is an issue that must be solved and it is up to us to stop the cruel activity from continuing to thrive, if we don't stand up to for these dogs, who will?

A fighting dog's abuse begins long before meeting the opponent in the pit. Since puppies, dogs are forced to spend countless hours on the treadmill and the springpole, which is a device with hanging bait that supposedly strengthens the jaw muscles and back legs by forcing the dogs to jump up and down repeatedly. (Gibson) The bait used to taunt the dogs during exercise sessions is usually small animals such as squirrels or rabbits. Other times, the bait is obtained by stealing pets from their homes or adopting them from animal shelters. The saddest part of this situation is that this "bait" in no way makes the dog stronger, it simply encourages the dog to train for longer periods of time. (Wikipedia) Dogs are also forced to live with heavy chains around the neck, sometimes with extra weights, to strengthen the neck and upper body. (Gibson) Sadly, the abuse does not end there.

Dog trainers know that being mentally prepared is just as important as being physically prepared. To accomplish this, trainers abuse the dogs to bring out as much aggression as possible. Most fighting dogs are forced to live in isolation to prevent them from building any type of bond with other animals or people, they are also ridded of the basic essentials of life like food and water; trainers know that a hungry dog makes for a meaner dog. (American Society) To further the aggression, dogs are given vitamins, supplements, and drugs such as cocaine in an attempt to induce even more violent behavior. (Gibson) Besides the obvious suffering dogs go through because of the sadistic form of entertainment, dog fighting extends to a much bigger problem.

It is widely known that “violence begets violence”, and dog fighting is certainly not the exception. Although not the animals fault, fighting dogs pose a real threat to those that live around them. Fighting dogs are trained so well that the ability to distinguish children from other small animals is impaired; making children as well as other small pets a likely candidate for attack. (Simmons) In addition, children are becoming a bigger audience at dog fights because of parents that want to teach their children the difference between the “weak” and the “strong.” (Gibson) In reality, children are being taught that it is okay to hurt others, therefore accepting animal abuse and becoming the future participants of animal cruelty. Dog fighting also supports other crimes such as gambling, drugs, and gangs. Gambling is probably the main reason dog fighting is so popular; it is a cowardly way of making money easily. Gang members often use dog fights to demonstrate their superiority in winning dogs, but these are also the people that bring drug dealing into the picture, besides gambling drugs are a major profit motive for attending or supporting dog fights. (Simmons)

We have all the reasons in the world to want to stop this malicious sport and more than enough people and organizations willing to join the fight as well, so why is it that dog fighting is such a major issue? The answer is simple; people are going to continue to participate in this sick form of animal abuse unless the *price paid* is higher than the *profit gained*. It is very depressing to hear that there are still states (Wyoming and Idaho) that consider this degrading, vicious form of entertainment only a misdemeanor. Worse yet is that in other states (Montana, Hawaii, Nevada) it is still legal to be either a spectator at a dogfight or in possession of dogs for dog fighting and in some cases, such as Georgia, both. (Bogue) Among the bottom six states listed with the most tolerant dog fighting laws, the average sentence for fighting dogs is one to

five years in prison and a fine of \$100-\$10,000, being a spectator only carries a maximum of six months in jail and up to a \$1,000 fine, finally, owning dogs meant to fight has a maximum fine of \$10,000 and a one to five year possible sentence. (The Humane Society) With weak laws like these how can we expect dog fighting to cease, especially when an average professional dog fight brings in anywhere from \$20,000 to \$500,000? (American Society) In states like these where laws against dog fighting are very lenient, the price paid for getting caught fighting dogs is not comparable to the profits gained from abusing the animals, therefore, dog fighters will continue to fight innocent dogs.

If we plan to make any kind of justice to the victims of dog fighting, we have to get the community involved in reporting each and every suspicion about possible dog fights going on around the neighborhood, both organized and unorganized. However, this will be pointless if we don't create tougher jail sentences and higher fines for those that violate the law. Both spectators and dog fighters alike should be punished just the same. After all, dog fighters organize the fight but it is the spectators that fuel the sport and encourage dog fighting to grow. Possessing fighting dogs must not go unpunished, just because these people have not fought the dogs does not mean they won't in the future. The only way we will be able to reduce the spread of this sickening vice is if we make all three areas of dog fighting (dog fighting itself, being a spectator, and owning a fighting dog) a felony. The only way we are going to achieve this goal is if we get involved in voting in political representatives that have this same view; after all, it is these people that will vote on legislation that will help us in our cause. Currently, seventeen states classify all three categories involved in dog fighting as felonies, the toughest being New Jersey who has a three to five year sentence and a maximum fine of \$15,000 for all

three aspects of the crime. (The Humane Society) In order to make dog fighting a thing of the past we must create a no-tolerance policy that overshadows the profits this disgusting business rakes in.

So, whatever happened to Charlie and Sport? This answer is up to us. It is up to us to take dog's natural obedient, loyal, and protective behavior and keep it that way instead of allowing others to exploit these characteristics in what is now known as "dog fighting." This malevolent pastime must be stopped; we cannot continue to sacrifice these caring animals for the sick pleasure of watching or making money. It is up to each and every one of us to stop this animal abuse at all costs, it will all be worth it to save man's best friend.

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