



THE FIGHTERS
Do they deserve halos or horns?

Pit bulldogs: fighters with a bad reputation

By LOU PARRIS

Evening Herald staff writer

ROCK HILL — The American Pit Bull Terrier debate is a haze of contradictions.

Whether in the backwoods of York County or in the vacant lots of some big city, the mere mention of dogfighting or of pit bulldogs can evoke an argument of such intensity that fact becomes lost in speculation and emotion.

That scarred dog with an eye gouged out or missing ear most likely didn't fall from the back of a truck. It probably was the victor of a fight — battling another dog until the other died or refused to continue the bloody fun.

Outside the blood-soaked rings is a world of animal lovers who make it hard to believe that they are talking about the same dog — the pit bull.

A pit bulldog's bad behavior, some say, is sparked by inherited traits bred through the centuries.

Others claim the dog's "badness" is taught by its owner and that pit bulls are harmless.

Those who claim pit bulls are vicious by instinct want to see the breed eliminated.

It boils down to the question of whether the bulldog asleep on the lap is the same dog that would fearlessly attack a bear or a lion.

Because of the controversy, many humane societies refuse to put pit bulls up for adoption, unless it's a pup and the taker promises that the animal won't be used for fighting.

People on both sides of the coin claim ignorance abounds when evaluating the dog's nature.

One pit bull handler says, "Ninety

Dogfighting is illegal in the United States, but the underworld sport — the pitting of one dog against another for the purpose of gambling — has been around for centuries. The fights often are bloody, and the stakes are high. Today in the second of a series, the Evening Herald looks at the fighters — pit bulldogs.

percent of the people who will tell you about dogfighting don't know the first thing about it." He argues that the pit bull is a natural born fighter.

"Not so," says Dr. Michael Fox, perhaps the nation's most famous animal behaviorist. "I spent 20 years studying the behavior of dogs, and it's not their nature. Man has created a monster, if you wish."

Dr. Fox is director of the Institute for Study of Animal Problems, scientific branch of the Humane Society of the United States headquartered in Washington.

"These dogs were selectively bred to fight," he says. "They have a greater potential to fight other animals, which is brought out in training. A piece of fur or a small cat or dog on a pole is waved in front of these dogs to encourage them to attack. It gives them a taste for blood."

John Rockholt of Rock Hill, a pit bull handler, argues that "it's inhumane to not allow them to fight. If you have to encourage them to fight, they're not worth the powder it would take to blow them away."

"To never allow them any type of combat...that's inhumane."

Dr. Fox says that while pit bulls mainly attack other dogs, "they can attack people, and because of the attitudes of pit bulls, it is more likely that they will attack a person."

"The worry is the power in the dog's jaw...to bite and not let go. It's quite sufficient to crush right through a child's arm or leg."

The pit bull, strongest of all dogs, exerts as much as 1,500 pounds of jaw pressure per square inch.

Extra large jaw muscles put the dogs in a class of their own. The muscles enable the dog to clamp onto its opponent, shake it violently and tear its hide to shreds.

The Humane Society of the United States, with the help of U.S. Department of Agriculture investigators, has broken up a number of dogfights in recent years, and Dr. Fox says, "This business is growing. It's a popular spectator sport in Japan."

"We're educating the public, but we need further support by those who care." The society frequently publishes newsletters criticizing dogfighting.

Rockholt contends that the pit bull is not one of the 10 breeds most likely to bite a person.

"The Lord put in these dogs what they are. Man has only taken advantage of it," Rockholt argues. He then ponders, "Did the good Lord put strong wind and fastness in a race horse, or did man do that?"

Rockholt figures the Humane Society "is just here to hassle people. They should be looking for horses with their hooves turned up."

"I used to travel McConnells High- See ARE PIT, page 16

we've got to balance this federal budget. When the federal government has to borrow money, it's taking money out of circulation for other institutions."

Reagan's policies so far, he said, are "basically the right idea. But it's going to be a bitter pill to swallow."

He said he personally is willing to make any sacrifice necessary for economic stability.

"We've got to (make sacrifices) for the future economic stability of the country."

Deaths and funerals

Mark Hoyt

McCONNELLS -- Mark Houston Hoyt, 24, of McConnells, died today at his home.

Funeral will 4 p.m. Friday at Olivet Presbyterian Church, with the Rev. Fred Thompson officiating. Burial will be in the church cemetery.

Mr. Hoyt attended Mars Hill College.

Surviving are his parents, the Rev. and Mrs. Samuel Hoyt Jr. of the home; a brother, Samuel Hoyt III of McConnells; two sisters, Virginia Bach of Chester and Frances Hoyt of Rock Hill; and his maternal grandmother, Frances Lambeth of Decatur, Ga.

The family will receive friends from 7 to 9 tonight at York Funeral Home.

Memorials can be made to the Mark Hoyt Scholarship Fund at Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, N.C.

Marvin Johnson

AUGUSTA, Ga. -- Dr. Marvin E. Johnson, 62, 439 Scotts Way, formerly of Rock Hill, died Tuesday at Doctors Hospital in Augusta, Ga.

Graveside services with full military honors will be 2 p.m. Friday at Westover Memorial Park in Augusta. Memorial services will be 3 p.m. Friday at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Augusta, with Dr. C. Harold Reagan officiating.

Dr. Johnson was a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Augusta and a graduate of the George Washington University of Medicine in Washington, D.C. He was a cum laude graduate of Transylvania College in Lexington, Ky. He was associate pathologist at York General Hospital for eight years. After moving to Augusta, he was civilian pathologist at Dwight David Eisenhower Army Medical Center at Fort Gordon, Ga.

Surviving are his wife, Carolyn Sexton Johnson; two sons, Philip M.

Alvin Young Jr.

CARLISLE -- Alvin Pierce Young Jr., 58, Route 2, died Wednesday at Chester County Hospital in Chester.

Funeral will be 3 p.m. Friday at Calvary Baptist Church in Chester County, with the Rev. H.R. Saxon officiating. Burial will be in the church cemetery.

Mr. Young was a retired construction employee and a member of Calvary Baptist Church.

Surviving are his wife, Doris McCallum Young; two sons, Herbert Young of Carlisle and Oliver Young of Chester; a daughter, Mrs. Jimmy Martin of Gaffney; and a sister, Mrs. Charles Riley of Columbia.

The family will receive friends from 7 to 9 tonight at Barron Funeral Home.

Roy Hulon

DILLON -- Roy L. Hulon, 67, 110 N. Carolina Ave., died Wednesday in Columbia.

Funeral was to be 4 p.m. today at Blanton Funeral Home. Burial was to be in Greenlawn Cemetery.

Mr. Hulon was a retired insurance agent and a member of First Baptist Church in Dillon.

Among survivors is a daughter, Ronda Nicolas of Rock Hill.

Willie Pate

BENNETTSVILLE -- Willie Howard Pate, 66, of Bennettsville, died Wednesday at Marlboro General Hospital.

Funeral will be 3 p.m. Friday at Whitner Funeral Home. Burial will be in Sunset Memorial Park.

Mr. Pate was a retired sheet metal worker.

Among survivors is a sister, Sara Brock of Rock Hill.

Russell Bland

YORK -- Russell Edward Bland, 73, 216 S. Congress St., died Wednesday at Divine Saviour Hospital.

Funeral will be 2 p.m. Saturday at

saying that if the Times has an authentic transcript, there apparently has been an unauthorized disclosure in violation of a federal statute, court order or regulation."

Halderman told the Times he had no comment and did not "care much" about 10-year-old tapes.

Are pit bulls born bad or led astray?

Continued from page 1
way quite a bit, and I can remember seeing a dog chained. Several days later that dog looked like it was 40 pounds lighter. The Humane Society should do something about that."

Marsha Falle, owner of Pet Paradise east of Rock Hill, says most pet shops don't handle pit bulls because "they don't get along with other dogs...period, point blank. They're not even good watchdogs. They're only good for holy terror with other dogs. I wouldn't have one if you gave it to me."

The dogs' vicious feelings toward other animals can be demonstrated by placing a mirror in front of one of the iron-jawed creatures. They hate the very looks of themselves and will **attack** the mirror for the kill.

Also, breeding can be a problem. Some pit bulls can't be bred because of their first love -- fighting.

"I've actually had to help some of my dogs breed," Rockholt said. "That's how much they love to fight."

Next: Who are these people who pit dogs against dogs?

Broadcast plans risky, says Cuban

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A Reagan administration plan to beam anti-communist broadcasts into Cuba could trigger anti-Castro violence and retaliatory measures against the United States, a top Cuban diplomat says.

A White House announcement Wednesday said a new broadcast



Evening Herald photo by Lou Parris

A MAN AND HIS DOG
Breeder John Rockholt plays with a pit bulldog

Pit bull breeder loves dogs that love to fight

By LOU PARRIS
Evening Herald staff writer
ROCK HILL — John Rockholt speaks with authority when he talks

Dogfighting is illegal in the United States, but the underworld sport — the pitting of one dog

way I wouldn't have 'em."

Pit bulls have many different bloodlines and come in no definite

Pit bull breeder loves dogs that love to fight

By LOU PARRIS

Evening Herald staff writer

ROCK HILL — John Rockholt speaks with authority when he talks about pit bulldogs.

The bearded Newport man — his bottom lip fattened by a pinch of tobacco — gazes at his dogs and ponders aloud, "Do you ever wake up and feel like you're on top of the world? It's everyday with the pit bull."

He got his first pit bull when he was 11. It was a 35-pound female.

"I grew up poor on the mill hill in Rock Hill, and I always had beagles and cocker spaniels that were continuously being chewed up by the other dogs. When I got my pit bull, I wore out what shoes I had showing that dog," Rockholt remembers.

"She could down me and the other dogs. She loved to fight."

Rockholt, at 34, is a welding inspector for Duke Power Co.'s Catawba Nuclear Plant, but he says he also is known to the dogfighting public as one of the top breeders in the East.

He's big, but he says he's a lot of things other than the "big, dumb dogfighter a lot of people would like to think I am."

Rockholt is well-traveled. He is a former marine and completed 26 courses while in service. He also has completed three years of college.

"I've traveled all over the world, and I've come in contact with pit bulls just about everywhere I've been," Rockholt says.

He estimates there are 500 "true"

Dogfighting is illegal in the United States, but the underworld sport — the pitting of one dog against another for the purpose of gambling — has been around for centuries. The fights often are bloody, and the stakes are high. Today in the last of a series, the Evening Herald looks at the people who pit dog against dog.

pit bull breeders in the United States.

Rockholt says he hasn't made a great profit from raising pit bulls, although selling prices have been known to go as high as four figures.

"I'm just getting my investment back. It takes a lot of money to raise these dogs right." Lean beef often is part of a pit bull's daily diet.

Rockholt says most of his dogs are gentle with people, but then there is "Rock's Sudden Death" — a pit bull that will take a command to attack anything.

Pit bulls usually don't make good attack dogs, as a doberman or shepherd would, but Rockholt says he has successfully trained one of Rock's Sudden Death to attack on command.

His work isn't complete, though. Rockholt explains, "He will attack on command, but he doesn't know when to let go. I would have to kill him to get him off of you."

Rockholt, speaking of the dogs' desire to fight, adds, "Their second love is man, and if it was any other

way I wouldn't have 'em."

Pit bulls have many different bloodlines and come in no definite colors. Some are blue, some are black and some are white, but Rockholt figures, "It's the color of their heart that counts. We can civilize the dogs and make them just about any color we want, but man will still worship the born fighter.

"But if you have a dog that will fight you (the handler), the best thing to do is to take him out and shoot him. He's unpredictable and shouldn't be allowed to breed."

To say pit bulls are not mean is a lie of sorts, according to Rockholt, but he says he's had only one dog to ever bite him. "Then it was just a snap. The only fear is being scratched by a toenail."

Rockholt spends between two and three hours each day with his dogs. He used to run eight miles a day with one of his males.

The daily chores include feeding vitamins to his dogs. His 6-year-old daughter often is allowed to help.

The dogs are attached to a cat mill to increase their strength and stamina. The mill is similar in appearance to an oxen-driven grain mill with a bucket of feed hanging in front of the animal to tease him on.

Sometimes a cat is hung from a pole or placed in a basket to entice dogs to drag a heavy weight around a center pole. Rockholt says he doesn't use live game to train his dogs. He uses a piece of fur.

See PIT BULLS, page 2

Strangler suspect hearing Oct. 15

ROCK HILL — A preliminary hearing has been scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Oct. 15 for Stirling Spann, suspected of strangling a Clover woman whose nude body was found in her home Sept. 14.

The hearing, to be held in Magistrate Albert Johnson's chambers, at 529 S. Cherry Road, will determine whether there is sufficient evidence against Spann to warrant a trial.

The case could go to the York County Grand Jury as early as Oct. 19.

Spann, 19, 509 Sumter St. Ext., is charged with burglary, sexual assault and murder in the death of Melva Niell, 81. Mrs. Niell's bruised and battered body was discovered by Clover police in her bathtub about 10 a.m. Sept. 15. She lived approximately four tenths of a mile from Spann's residence.

Spann is being held in Fort Mill's jail in lieu of \$100,000 bond set Saturday by Circuit Judge Robert L. McFadden.

An investigation into the death of Mary Ring, 67, is continuing, according to the solicitors office. Mrs. Ring, also a widow, was discovered in her bathtub July 20.

Who are these people who go to dogfights?

By LOU PARRIS

Evening Herald staff writer

ROCK HILL - People who go to dogfights come from almost all walks of life.

The doctor, lawyer, hospital administrator, electrician, company president, ditch digger, highway patrolman - they're all there.

"Oh yes! There are some poor, low-class people there, but most are just your average human being," says one pit bull handler in the upstate.

"There's a bad apple in every group. You've got some who will go crazy when their dog loses, and they will whip out a gun and blow the dog away. I guess that's the worst in us."

Dr. Michael Fox, head of the institute for the study of animal problems in Washington, can't find a kind word for people who allow dogs to fight in what he has labeled a

"barbaric sport."

"The real question to raise is what is in the minds of these people? It's a clear symptom of a sick state of mind," Fox says.

He says people who attend dogfights or allow their dogs to fight as entertainment are incapable of empathy and "to put it politely, they are emotionally disturbed."

York County pit bull breeder John Rockholt responds, "The public that thinks we are lower class and ignorant...they are the ones who are ignorant."

Rockholt confirms that guns are a way of life at the pits, and he says he can only recommend that anyone wanting to attend a fight should first find out if he is welcome.

Some people are "wising up" about the guns, as one fighter puts it. "People don't want to get caught

with a firearm. That's a serious offense," he says.

The Humane Society of the United States warns in its publications that weapons, drugs and violence are a part of the dogfighting subculture.

"Anyone who can stand by and encourage animals to kill each other...that goes back to the dark ages. These people simply haven't evolved," Fox continues.

He says socio-economics has nothing to do with the class of people who attend dogfights, but rather it involves "the lack of emotional development and the inability to have empathy for animals."

The belief of some, including Fox, that dogfighting is on the increase in the United States "is telling us how difficult it is to change people's minds, to help them reach a more mature level," Fox says

Pit bulls put you on top of the world, he says

Continued from page 1

He says he no longer goes to dogfights because he doesn't believe in gambling.

"I used to fight them, but I don't believe the Lord would want me at a dogfight now. I do still sell to fighters," he says.

Rockholt, looking back at his dogfighting days, recalls the danger of the sport. "You go and stay at a fight. There's no getting up and leaving, not even to go take a leak or make a phone call."

He says in a serious tone, "You don't want to go to a fight, little buddy. You might not make it out alive. You would only make the men un-

NBC report tonight

A report on dogfighting will air on 'NBC Magazine' tonight beginning at 8 p.m.

NBC news correspondent Douglas Kiker will report that "a violent, repugnant sport" — bull terrier fighting — is flourishing around the country.

comfortable, and some might take action."

Then how does one go about becoming "one of them?"

Rockholt says, "You have to first become known to someone from

within, and even then you have to be convincing that you are dedicated to the preservation of the breed. You don't just walk up to the gate and pay to get in."

Gambling is big business at the pits, and it starts on the day the fight is contracted.

"I could call a man right now and have \$30,000 bet on any one of my dogs," Rockholt says.

Rockholt has a pit bull that killed a dog in the first 30 seconds of a match.

"Pound for pound there's no dog alive that can whip a pit bull. Pound for pound the pit bull is four times the dog a doberman is."