

THE FINAL ROUND

Sample Letter to the Editor about Cockfighting

[Date]

[Name of Editor]

[Name of Publication]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Re: Cockfighting

Dear [Mr./Ms. Last Name]:

[If you are responding to an article that has run in the publication, cite the article's title and date. Please note that the purpose of this letter is to enhance public awareness of the evils of cockfighting in general, not to make accusations against individuals or organizations or to comment on particular events. (If you have information to support specific accusations, you should contact local law enforcement agencies rather than the media.) Keep your letter general in nature, using the following text as an example.]

It is inexcusable that some people view the animal suffering involved in staged cockfights as a form of entertainment or a way to make a profit. This barbaric blood sport is prohibited in almost every state and should be illegal throughout the country.

Cockfighting promoters often say that they are simply allowing the birds to do what they do naturally, but this claim is absurd. While it is true that birds will fight over food, territory, or mates, such fights generally take place only to establish dominance within a group and seldom result in serious injury. This natural behavior is quite different from what takes place in staged cockfights, in which pairs of birds—bred for maximum aggressiveness and sometimes given steroids or other drugs to make them more successful and therefore more potentially profitable—are placed in an enclosure where they are forced to fight until a winner is declared. The birds are usually fitted with artificial spurs called gaffs or slashers—sharp implements designed to puncture and mutilate. A cockfight usually results in the death of one of the birds and sometimes in the death of both.

Aside from the animal suffering involved, this so-called sport has several other disturbing aspects, which have been revealed by law enforcement raids. Gambling is the norm at cockfighting events. Thousands of dollars can change hands as spectators bet on their favorite birds. The owner of the bird winning the most fights in an event can receive a purse of up to tens of thousands of dollars in presumably undeclared income. Because large amounts of cash are present, firearms and other weapons are common at cockfights. Violent crimes, even homicides, have been connected to cockfighting in recent years. Furthermore, law enforcement officials have documented the strong connection between cockfighting and the distribution of illegal drugs.

The presence of young children at cockfights is especially disturbing. Exposure to such brutality can promote insensitivity to animal suffering and an enthusiasm for violence. Anthropologist Margaret Mead suggested that acts of cruelty to animals committed in childhood may signify the development of an impulsive, assaultive character disorder. Psychiatrists at the Menninger Foundation revealed that a history of cruelty to animals can be symptomatic of seriously abnormal aggression and that such aggression is significantly associated with aggressive behavior directed against other humans. Animal fighting is a vicious and brutal activity that can breed violence.

While it is true that cockfighting has been practiced for centuries in various countries, including the United States, “old” does not necessarily mean right or even acceptable. At one time the United States allowed slavery, lacked child abuse laws, and refused women the vote.

Cockfighting is now illegal in almost every state and a felony in many states. We should encourage and support local animal care and control agencies and law enforcement officials as they work to stem this brutal and shameful activity, and we should urge our prosecutors and judges to take cockfighting seriously when it comes time to prosecute.

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your City, State, Zip]

[Your Phone Number]

[Note: Some publications require your address and phone number before they publish a letter to the editor, but you may request that this information be withheld.]

THE FINAL ROUND

Sample Letter to the Editor about Dogfighting

[Date]

[Name of Editor]

[Name of Publication]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Re: Dogfighting

Dear [Mr./Ms. Last Name]:

[If you are responding to an article that has run in the publication, cite the article's title and date. Please note that the purpose of this letter is to enhance public awareness of the evils of dogfighting in general, not to make accusations against individuals or organizations or to comment on particular events. (If you have information to support specific accusations, you should contact local law enforcement agencies rather than the media.) Keep your letter general in nature, using the following text as an example.]

It is inexcusable that some people view the animal suffering involved in staged dogfights as a form of entertainment or a way to make a profit. And it is difficult to believe that this illegal and shameful activity is on the upswing.

For those who are unacquainted with dogfighting, it involves placing two dogs in a pit (usually an area enclosed by plywood walls) where they must fight before a crowd of cheering spectators until one dog becomes too injured or exhausted to continue. Dogs used in these brutal contests have been bred for maximum aggressiveness. The fights may last from several minutes to more than two hours, and the dogs usually suffer painful injuries, including multiple puncture wounds, deep lacerations, and broken bones. Dogs often die from dehydration, blood loss, infection, exhaustion, or shock as a result of a fight, and owners kill many of the losing dogs by gunshot or other methods.

Dogfighters often use stolen pets and stray or unowned animals as training fodder for their dogs. Dogfighters have also been known to obtain "bait" animals through "free to good home" advertisements.

Aside from the animal suffering involved, this so-called sport has several other disturbing aspects, which have been revealed by law enforcement raids. Gambling is the norm at dogfighting events. Thousands of dollars can change hands as spectators bet on their favorite dogs. The owner of the winning dog collects anywhere from several hundred to tens of thousands of dollars in presumably undeclared income. Because large amounts of cash are present, firearms and other weapons are common at dogfights. Violent crimes, even homicides, have been connected to dogfighting

in recent years. Furthermore, law enforcement officials have documented a strong connection between dogfighting and the distribution of illegal drugs.

The presence of young children at dogfights is especially disturbing. Exposure to such brutality can promote insensitivity to animal suffering and enthusiasm for violence. Anthropologist Margaret Mead suggested that acts of cruelty to animals committed in childhood may signify the development of an impulsive, assaultive character disorder. Psychiatrists at the Menninger Foundation revealed that a history of cruelty to animals can be symptomatic of seriously abnormal aggression and that such aggression is significantly associated with aggressive behavior directed against other humans. Animal fighting is a vicious and brutal activity that can breed violence.

Dogfighting is against the law in all 50 states and a felony in almost every state. If dogfighting is to be eradicated, it must become a felony in every state. Currently, promoters and trainers simply migrate from states where dogfighting is a felony to states where the penalties are lighter or the law is not aggressively enforced. We must encourage law enforcement officials and the courts to take this crime seriously if we are to stop this violent trend.

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your City, State, Zip]

[Your Phone Number]

[Note: Some newspapers require your address and phone number before they publish a letter to the editor, but you may request that this information be withheld.]

THE FINAL ROUND

Sample Letter to Law Enforcement Agencies

[Date]

[Name of Sheriff/Police Chief]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Re: Illegal Animal Fighting

Dear [Sheriff/Chief Last Name]:

As you may be aware, there has been an increase in cruel and illegal cockfighting and dogfighting activities. For many years The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has been extensively involved in efforts to end these crimes. In response to the high volume of calls for information and/or assistance from law enforcement agencies across the nation, The HSUS has prepared training materials to help these agencies respond effectively to animal fighting.

The HSUS offers courses in dealing with animal fighting that cover such topics as the background of animal fighting, relevant laws, gambling and other associated crimes, successful investigative techniques, use of informants and undercover operations, search warrants, and care and disposition of seized fighting animals.

For the safety of our community, I urge your agency to take animal fighting crimes seriously. If you believe your agency would benefit from this information, please visit The HSUS website at www.hsus.org or www.AnimalFighting.org or e-mail info@AnimalFighting.org.

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your City, State, Zip]

THE FINAL ROUND

Sample Letter to Prosecutors and Judges

[Date]

[Name of Prosecutor—if a judge, use “The Honorable”]

[Name of Organization]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Re: Illegal Animal Fighting

Dear [Honorable/Mr./Ms. Last Name]:

Dogfighting and cockfighting activities—and the attendant illegal firearms, drugs, and gambling—may be on the rise throughout the country. I feel that it would be in our community’s best interest to have law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges well informed about the latest animal fighting information, investigative techniques, and laws for our area. Those responsible for protecting us should be fully armed with the best possible skills—for our safety as well as their own.

While it is true that animals will fight over food, territory, or mates, such fights generally take place only to establish dominance within a group and seldom result in serious injury. This natural behavior is markedly different from a staged cockfight or dogfight, in which the animals are bred, conditioned, and trained for maximum aggressiveness—and given steroids and/or other drugs to make them even more vicious. There is nothing inherently natural about staged animal fighting; it is done for entertainment and profit.

Currently, cockfighting is illegal in almost every state and a felony in many states; dogfighting is illegal in every state and a felony in most states. Detection, investigation, and maximum penalties are the only successful ways to keep animal fighting out of our communities. I have learned that The Humane Society of the United States offers courses on this subject to law enforcement, prosecutors, government investigators, and judges on a by-request-only basis. I encourage you to employ every opportunity to eradicate animal fighting and keep it from infesting our community.

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your City, State, Zip]