

New Documentary Puts Dogfighting Where it Belongs: In a Harsh Spotlight

Off the Chain is a resource for activists and legislators alike

A potent new tool for combating dogfighting is on video shelves now. *Off the Chain*, written, produced and directed by Bobby J. Brown (a regular guest on television crime dramas like HBO's *The Wire* and NBC's *Law and Order SVU*), gives

rarely documented aspects of the crime: a pit bull being electrocuted after losing a fight, a dog having her teeth sharpened with a power tool, and, of course, the bloody fights themselves.

The documentary provides a compelling history of the pit bull terrier in the United States, starting from the breed's use as a bull-baiting dog. With the banning of bullbaiting in 1835, the more easily hidden activity of dogfighting emerged and began to slip into American society, even as the pit bull gained popularity as a family pet. Throughout the film, interviews with expert sources and responsible pit bull owners serve as a constant reminder that the activity of dogfighting—not the breed—is the problem. The movie includes heartwarming interviews and footage of well-socialized pit bulls at play; the ineffectiveness of breed-specific bans in curbing dogfighting is discussed as well.

While enhanced laws and a growing awareness within the law enforcement community have led to a crackdown on organized dogfighting, street-level fighting is booming. As *Off the Chain* points out, the spontaneous nature of street-level, amateur dogfighting makes arrests and prosecutions challenging for humane societies and animal control officers. Graphic undercover footage of dogfights and the interviews with professional dogfighters highlight the difficulty that law enforcement also faces in infiltrating the more organized, close-knit subculture. Scenes of teens

showing off their dogs and composing raps glorifying dogfighting highlight the allure that the activity possesses for many of today's youth.

Off the Chain was released just before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast states, so promotion of this important piece of work has been delayed. Now is an excellent time to pick up copies and get them in the hands of policymakers, newspaper reporters, and other people in the community who have the means to make a difference. Dogs affected by the crime of dogfighting are filling animal shelters from coast to coast. This movie should help nurture the public dialogue needed to address this problem.

The HSUS is encouraging people to help get this film shown on local television stations, including public access channels or PBS affiliates that have a larger audience. Journalists, city council members, and police officers dealing with this issue will benefit from viewing *Off the Chain*. Educational seminars on dogfighting and its effect on the community are also excellent forums for showing the film. The hour-long movie is segmented in a way that makes it easy for speakers to select specific clips to show.

The movie is available for \$14.95 through www.offthechain-movie.com. Posters are also available for display in your shelter. 🐾

—John Goodwin



a powerful glimpse into the underground world of pit bull fighting. *Off the Chain* provides an excellent balance between images of friendly pit bulls with responsible owners and their all-too-real flip side—the bleeding and scarred dogs who have been fought. With access to several professional dogfighters, Brown was able to get footage of