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Chapter 1
Pitting and Petting: The Pit Bull's Past

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Perhaps no other dog breed has endured as many public misconceptions as has the Pit Bull. These misconceptions truly run the gamut: Although some people consider Pit Bulls to be the safest and gentlest companions, others regard them as evil enough to be Satan's understudies. Neither viewpoint is correct, but both have some basis in fact — and in the breed's controversial roots.

Creating Canine Gladiators

Dogs and humans around the world have long shared a special relationship — a relationship originally based on function. Early dogs who proved least useful — or who were too wild, skittish, or dumb — probably ended up in the cave man's pot, but the most helpful dogs (who were good at sounding alarms at intruders or at chasing down game) lived to produce others like them. Eventually, breed forerunners were created by breeding the best guards to the best guards and the best hunters to the best hunters. Of these, some strains proved to be especially brave and tough — valuable traits in a rough world.

Of course, these strains weren't really breeds. Few cave men had American Kennel Club or United Kennel Club papers for their dogs, so pure breeding wasn't terribly important to them. Still, with time the strains of dogs became more and more specialized. By classical Greek times, large fierce dogs called *Molossians* were so valued that Phoenician traders used them as bartering items. Because of this practice, the Molossian type was distributed along Phoenician shipping routes, some of which included stops in ancient Britain. The Molossians who ended up in Britain became further specialized and gave rise to the Mastiff family of dogs.

In Britain, Mastiffs were perfected as war dogs. When the Romans invaded Britain, they were so impressed by the Mastiff's warring ability that they brought some back to Rome. Romans valued entertainment, and the courageous dogs became infamous as gladiators who fought humans, bears, lions, bulls, and even each other in Rome's great Coliseum.

Rome was not, however, the only civilization to revel in blood sports. The British, too, placed high value on contests that featured animals fighting to the death. The spectacle of a dog killing a bull was the highest entertainment that most small villages could offer its poor inhabitants. But this kind of entertainment spanned all classes: By the 16th century, bull-, bear-, and even horse-baiting provided the finale for a royal evening of entertainment (for an explanation of bull-baiting, see the sidebar "Bull-baiting"). In the 17th century, the King even appointed a Master of the King's Games of Bears, Bulls, and Dogs.

The dogs' owners won prizes for their animals' spectacular performances, and the progeny of famous or particularly *game* dogs (meaning those dogs who refuse to quit the task at hand despite overwhelming adversity) were sought after and capable of bringing high prices. As distasteful as it sounds, these dogs produced the never-say-die stock from which today's Pit Bull claims her heritage.

An end to legal blood sports in England finally came about in 1835, but that only pushed the fans and gamblers to conduct covert matches. Staging a clandestine bull-baiting would have been difficult, but scheduling a dogfight in a barn, cellar, or back room without being discovered was quite simple.

Dog fighting favored a slightly smaller, more agile gladiator than the dogs who were adept at baiting larger animals. Most historians believe that the stocky bull-baiting dogs were crossed with the swift and agile terriers of the time to produce the aptly named Bull and Terrier, a relatively small, smart, agile, tough, and strong game dog the likes of which had never been seen before. Other breed historians contend that no such cross was made and point out that the Bulldog of the time, the Bullenbeisser, was, in fact, so similar to the modern Pit Bull that it was simply a matter of selecting the most successful fighters. Whatever the recipe, it worked.

BULL-BAITING

Although the role of canine gladiator was the most visible job for the tough dogs of ancient Europe, it was far from their most important one. A subtype of Molossian dogs known as *Bullenbeissers*, or German Bulldogs, were valued for their ability to control unruly cattle, earning their keep as butcher's dogs. These dogs had to catch and grip escaping or uncooperative bulls on their way to market. The dog would hang on the bull's nose, gripping the nose without letting go until the butcher could regain control. A good butcher's dog could make the butcher's job easy; a bad dog could be killed by the bull. As with all people who depend on their dogs, butchers were proud of their best "bulldogs" and anxious to prove them better than the neighboring town butcher's dogs. So began the cruel practice of bull-baiting, in which a bull was tormented (sometimes for hours) not only for entertainment, but also in the mistaken belief that torturing the animal before killing it made its meat more tender. In fact, in some places selling meat from a bull that had not been baited was illegal. Bullenbeissers gave rise to the Boxer breed in Germany and to what would eventually become the Pit Bull in Britain.

Almost every town in England had a bull-baiting ring. One or two dogs were released, and they would attempt to grab the bull (which was usually chained to a stake) by the nose, often tormenting it for hours. The cruelties inflicted upon the poor animals (bulls and dogs alike) by people in the process were atrocious. In one well-known case, the owner of a dog demonstrated how courageous his dog was by cutting off each of her legs, one leg at a time, while she continued to drag herself to attack the bull. The dog was lost, but her offspring were in high demand.

As the Bulldogs or Bull and Terriers became known less for their bull-baiting skills and more for their fighting skills in the pits, they came to be known as Pit Bulldogs, or more simply, Pit Bulls.



WARNING

The breed known today as the Bulldog or English Bulldog is not the same as the Bulldog of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The earlier Bulldog strain is the ancestor of both the modern Pit Bull breeds and the modern Bulldog, but it was more similar to today's Pit Bull than to today's Bulldog. Many people still incorrectly refer to Pit Bulls as "Bulldogs," though.

When English immigrants came to America, they brought with them their sport and their dogs. By the mid-1800s, dog fighting had a solid following in America. With the migration west, Bulldogs once again found themselves called upon to do the toughest jobs. They served as all-purpose farm and guard dogs, protecting families and stock from fierce wildlife, rampaging cattle, and marauding vermin. Many also served as hunting dogs, holding their own against bears, wolves, and on occasion, buffalo. Once again, the Bulldog underwent a metamorphosis — this time into a larger dog that could best serve these vital functions.

This variety of purpose is directly responsible for the great range in size of today's Pit Bulls. An example of one possible size is shown in Figure 1-1.

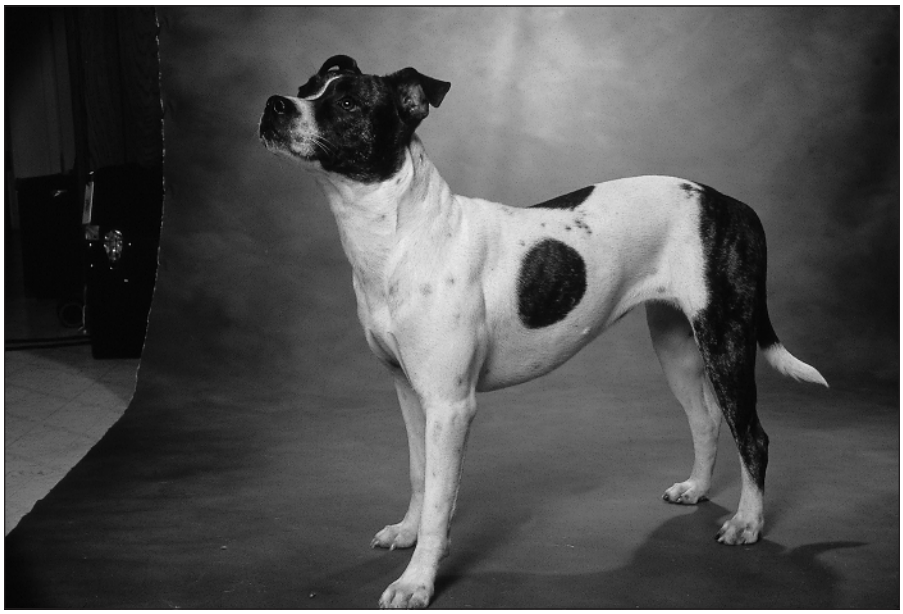


FIGURE 1-1: Pit Bulls, because of their toughness, have been asked throughout history to do the tough jobs.

Showing Off

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, purebred dog mania was sweeping Europe and America. Anything that looked like a pure breed — and could be paraded around a show ring — was fair game. The fighting dogs (now dubbed Pit Bulls) seemed unlikely show dogs, however, for they lacked the desired association with the upper echelons of society (any association the upper class would admit to, that is).

The American Kennel Club (AKC) was formed in 1884 to promote the interests of purebred dogs. It did so by maintaining a pedigree registry and by sponsoring performance and conformation competitions. *Performance competitions* were designed to test dogs at the function for which they were bred; for example, pointing breeds competed at pointing field trials. *Conformation competitions* were designed to compare dogs to the breed's standard of excellence, which in turn was written to describe a dog who was built to perform the job for which he was bred.

That the AKC was interested in promoting both the performance and the conformation of breeds was a problem because the job that the Pit Bull had been bred to perform was illegal. The AKC refused to endorse any aspect of dog fighting. And

the old-time Pit Bull fighting men weren't too interested in exchanging the excitement of the dog pit for a trot around the show ring.

Thus, an alternative registration body, called the United Kennel Club (UKC), was formed in 1898 to register Pit Bulls (and later, other breeds). The UKC, founded by Pit Bull owner Chauncey Bennett, emphasized function and included dog fighting as a legitimate function of Pit Bulls. To this day, the UKC remains a strong registry for many breeds — especially its banner breed, the American Pit Bull Terrier — but it no longer endorses dog fighting in any manner.

FIGHTING WORDS

Although dog fighting is illegal in the United States, it does occur — and it even has rules! Understanding how a traditional match was (and still is) conducted is — no matter how unsavory — essential to understanding the way Pit Bull breeding stock were selected for generations.

In the heat of battle, the dogs must discriminate between biting another dog and biting a human. Before a fight begins, each dog is washed by the opponent's handler to make sure that no drugs or toxic or foul-tasting substances are on the dog's coat. Otherwise the other dog would get the substances in his mouth. The dog is then dried and carried to his corner. During the fight, a referee and the two handlers remain in the ring with the dogs. The handlers sometimes kneel right beside the dogs; they are allowed to urge their dogs on but not to touch them. If a dog becomes "fanged" (that is, if its canine tooth pierces its own lip), the handlers hold both dogs while the referee tries to push the tooth back through the lip with a stick or other utensil. The dogs are then released a few feet from each other.

True fighting dogs are eerily silent. Barking, growling, snarling, and showing teeth are threat displays that most dogs use in an attempt to discourage an opponent before a fight begins. Most dogs are more show than go, and fighting consists largely of bluffing the other dog into submission. Not so with a fighting Pit Bull. He is more likely to whine with excitement.

If one of the fighting dogs turns away from the other, the referee calls a "turn" and both handlers retrieve their dogs and take them back to their corners. The dog who turned is then released and expected to "scratch," meaning to cross the pit and attack the other dog within ten seconds. The dogs continue to take turns being released first every time one dog turns. The dog may crawl, stagger, or drag himself toward the other dog as long as he doesn't stop or hesitate. A dog who fails to scratch loses the match, and perhaps his life, as he is considered to lack gameness. A dog who is losing, but nonetheless attempts to scratch, might lose the match but may return to fight another day if his handler concedes the match.

The UKC fancied up the breed's name by calling it the American (Pit) Bull Terrier, later changing the name to the now accepted American Pit Bull Terrier. Because the breed's roots are mostly European, and the Pit Bull may or may not have terrier influences, the name is somewhat of a misnomer.

The first American (Pit) Bull Terrier to be registered with the UKC was Bennett's Ring, owned by UKC founder Chauncey Bennett.

In 1909, Pit Bull proponents organized yet another registry, the American Dog Breeder's Association (ADBA). The ADBA registers only one breed: the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT). The ADBA was traditionally the registry of fighting Pit Bulls. Although it no longer endorses dog fighting, it maintains that reputation. The ADBA instead now sponsors conformation shows and popular weight pulling contests.

NAME THAT DOG

A breed of many names, Pit Bulls have been called

- American Pit Bull Terriers
- American Bull Terriers
- American Staffordshire Terriers
- Brindle Bulldogs
- Bull and Terriers
- Bulldogs
- Half and Halfs
- Old Family Reds (Ireland)
- Pit Bull Terriers
- Pit Dogs
- Pit Terriers
- American Rebel Terriers
- Staffordshire Fighting Dogs
- Staffordshire Terriers
- Yankee Terriers

Until the 1970s, neither the UKC nor the ADBA sponsored conformation shows. Yet, some Pit Bull fans wanted to try their dogs in the show ring. In 1936, Pit Bull fans who wanted to try their dogs in the show ring sacrificed the breed's name (which was unacceptable to the AKC because of its fighting connotation) and replaced it with another name: the Staffordshire Terrier. The AKC welcomed Staffordshire Terriers into its registry and show rings. This turn of events set up an unusual situation in the world of dogs. The same dog can be registered as an American Pit Bull Terrier with the UKC and the ADBA, and as an American Staffordshire Terrier (the *American* was added in 1972 to distinguish the breed from the Staffordshire Bull Terrier) with the AKC. Over the years, Pit Bull fanciers have tended to stick with one registry (and breed name) over the other.



REMEMBER

Today, the APBT and the American Staffordshire Terrier (or *AmStaff*) have diverged somewhat. AmStaffs tend to be larger and more muscular than APBTs. ABPTs have a greater range in looks because APBT breeders traditionally breed for function in the fighting pit rather than for looks in the show ring. Although there is considerable overlap, in general, AmStaffs *look* tougher, but APBTs *are* tougher.

Becoming America's Sweetheart

In the early 20th century, Pit Bulls moved graciously from fame as pit fighters to fame as national symbols. The Pit Bull's reputation for courage and tenacity, combined with his good nature, made him a natural as the dog synonymous with the United States during World War I. A popular war poster of the period aptly captures the true Pit Bull outlook by showing a picture of a Pit Bull wearing an American flag bandana above the phrase "I'm neutral, but not afraid of any of them." Another poster featured a Pit Bull named Tige, who was the companion of the then-popular cartoon character Buster Brown. (Buster Brown and Tige also represented Buster Brown shoes in advertisements.)

In fact, a possible Pit Bull (or Pit Bull mix or Boston Terrier mix — nobody knows for sure) named Stubby emerged from World War I as a national hero. Stubby was the unofficial mascot of the 102nd infantry, and when it came time to go overseas, the men smuggled him on board. Despite no training or experience in battle conditions, Stubby braved intense shelling to comfort wounded soldiers lying in the crossfire. He eventually served for 18 months and participated in 17 battles. Stubby repeatedly warned his regiment of incoming mortar shells and mustard gas attacks, and once he even prevented a spy from escaping. When Stubby was wounded, he played the role of therapy dog, cheering hospitalized soldiers. Even while recuperating in Paris, he was credited with saving a child from being run over.

Stubby was decorated by General Pershing, awarded the rank of honorary sergeant, and received by three presidents. He led more parades than any dog in history. Upon Stubby's death in 1926, his hide was mounted over a plaster form of his body, with an urn containing his ashes inside. He was displayed wearing a medal-covered coat, first at the Red Cross Museum and then at the Smithsonian Institute. Until recently, Stubby was largely forgotten, packed away in a crate in a back room of the Smithsonian. But in 2018, an animated movie about him renewed interest and Stubby is back on exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

The next Pit Bull to capture America's heart was Petey of *The Little Rascals* and *Our Gang* movie fame. Actually, Petey had already starred in several Buster Brown movies (as Tige) before becoming one of the most popular Rascals of all time. When the original Petey died, he was replaced with another Petey, an American Staffordshire Terrier registered as Lucenay's Peter. Whatever his role, Pete the Pup exemplified the Pit Bull in his role as a roguish buddy, furthering the breed's appeal.

Popular with families and welcomed throughout neighborhoods, the Pit Bull basked in his reputation as a fun-loving and patient member of the family.

This is not to say that things were always rosy, however. As far back as the late 1800s and early 1900s, breed bans were put in place against "bulldogs," as they were called in several cities, including Washington, D.C. Although people tend to think of Pit Bull attacks as a more recent trend, around the turn of the twentieth century, they had already been in the news for killing people, with many reporters calling for their banishment.

THE PETEY PAPERS

One of the earliest cinema dog stars was Petey, of *Our Gang.* Petey was modeled after Tige, Buster Brown's cartoon dog. Like other *Our Gang* members, Petey's life and death is surrounded by rumors. Some reliable sources say that the original Petey (played by a dog named Pal) was poisoned after about two years as a Little Rascal and replaced by his son, named Pete — explaining why Petey's painted-on circle around one eye switches sides partway through the series. Another piece of Petey trivia: He was the first Pit Bull to be both UKC and AKC-registered.

Overcoming Pride and Prejudice

Dog breeds often wax and wane in popularity, and so it has been with the Pit Bull. After World War II, the Pit Bull gradually faded from the public eye and the family home. True devotees, however, remained as loyal to their dogs as their dogs were to them. Some of the breed remained as steadfast pets, others continued as game pit dogs — and many performed both roles admirably.

Dog fighting, although illegal, continued to be carried out with minimal interference from law enforcement until the 1970s, when the American Dog Owner's Association (ADOA) formed to lobby against dogfights. The ADOA was successful in bringing public attention to the pit — helping to push dog fighting into the shadows and propelling pit dogs into an unflattering limelight.

As with many well-intentioned laws, some unforeseen problems accompanied the crackdown on dog fighting. Dog fighting continued; it just went underground. Its illegal nature attracted patrons whose major area of knowledge was in pay-offs and threats, not Pit Bulls. Knowledgeable *dogmen* (the term for serious breeders of fighting Pit Bulls) could no longer distribute information about training methods, leaving newcomers to dog fighting — who often believed scare tactic propaganda — to experiment using cruel practices. They trained the dogs using stolen puppies and dogs as "bait dogs" in an attempt to encourage them to kill, fed them gunpowder in an attempt to make them mean, and hired strangers to beat the dogs with clubs in an attempt to make them aggressive to strangers. Not surprisingly, their dogs seldom succeeded at matches, and they were often discarded. The harm done to these dogs made them difficult to place as pets, and the harm done to the breed's reputation was immeasurable.

A certain segment of the population has always wanted to have the toughest dog on the block. Various breeds have filled these shoes throughout the years, and beginning in the early 1980s the Pit Bull was on its way to becoming the "tough guy" poster dog.

GOOD SPORTS

Although illegal pit fighting still exists, Pit Bulls can legitimately compete in conformation, obedience, agility, and weight pulling competitions, and they are proving themselves helpful as boar hunters, search and rescue dogs, therapy dogs, and most of all, companions.

Growing in Popularity

Over the years, Pit Bulls have gradually become more and more popular. But popularity isn't all it's cracked up to be. In fact, it can be a big problem for any dog breed. The popularity of dog breeds is driven by fads. People copy celebrities who own a certain breed, neighbors and friends who own a breed, dogs they see in TV shows and movies, in advertisements, and on social media. With more than 200 breeds to choose from (not to mention an endless number of mixed-breed dogs available), dogs from only about 20 breeds make up more than half of all the dogs in North America. These super-popular breeds change through the years. And when people lose interest in a breed, those dogs can end up being abandoned to shelters.

It's hard to track the popularity of Pit Bulls because most Pit Bulls aren't registered with any dog registry. What we can do is look at statistics. According to Animals 24-7 (`www.animals24-7.org`), a group that, among other projects, tracks dog statistics, Pit Bulls made up approximately 8 percent of all dogs offered for sale in 2019, which translates to approximately 1.3 million Pit Bulls. That number doesn't include the 31 percent of all dogs offered for adoption, which amounted to an additional 1 million Pit Bulls available in 2019. Together, Pit Bulls made up almost 12 percent of the dogs looking for a home that year. Overall, Pit Bulls made up almost 6 percent of all the dogs in the United States, or about 4.5 million Pit Bulls.

According to Animals 24-7, Pit Bulls and Pit Bull mixes make up about 33 percent of shelter intakes nationwide, with even higher numbers (up to 65 percent) in large cities. In fact, almost one-third of all Pit Bulls eventually find their way into shelters — a far higher percentage than any other breed in history. Why? For one thing, too many people get a Pit Bull because it's the in-style dog of the moment, without considering the special responsibilities that come with owning this breed. Also, Pits especially appeal to younger people, who may not have the maturity, experience, or resources to properly care for a dog of any breed, let alone a Pit Bull.

FAMOUS PIT BULL OWNERS

Famous Pit Bull lovers include Jessica Alba, Jennifer Aniston, Fiona Apple, Fred Astaire, Kevin Bacon, Lake Bell, Jessica Biel, Rachel Bilson, Humphrey Bogart, Tom Brady, Adam Brody, Sophia Bush, Kaley Cuoco, Jack Dempsey, Thomas Edison, Adrian Grenier, Tom Hardy, Katherine Heigl, Liam Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson, Marc Jacobs, Helen Keller, Miranda Lambert, Madonna, Cesar Millan, Judd Nelson, Pink, Rachael Ray, Norman Reedus, Theodore Roosevelt, Alicia Silverstone, Jon Stewart, Channing Tatum, Danny Trejo, Wil Wheaton, Betty White, Woodrow Wilson, and Serena Williams.

In the following sections, I dig deeper into why the Pit Bull is growing in popularity, and the consequences of that growth.

The Michael Vick influence

In 2007, football star Michael Vick was convicted for his actions related to dogfighting. At that time, Pit Bulls confiscated from dog-fighting rings were usually euthanized, but nearly all of the dozens of Pit Bulls taken from Vick's kennel were, instead, made the subjects of intensive rehabilitation efforts, each accompanied with a stipend of $5,000 to $20,000 toward their housing and training.

Vick's dogs became the faces of fundraising, and millions of dollars poured into Pit Bull rescue and advocacy groups. Even groups such as the Humane Society of the United States and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which initially spoke out against rehabilitating fighting dogs, changed their positions.

Some people suddenly saw a financial profit in promoting Pit Bulls. Whether motivated by money or love for animals (or both), they embraced the idea that all it took was a little love, and even the most bloodied gladiator could become a child's best friend. Although many of Vick's dogs were never able to leave the rehab facility, some were reportedly rehabbed successfully and went on to live as family pets. They became all the proof people needed that any Pit Bull, no matter the dog's background, could become a loving and trustworthy family member.

But only two years after Vick's conviction, serious Pit Bull attacks started to rise. It wasn't just that Pit Bull numbers were rising; it was that Pit Bull shelter adoptions were rising, too. All of a sudden, adopting a Pit Bull, especially one with an underdog story, was the fashionable thing to do. Totally convinced that all you add is love, well-meaning adopters made the shelter Pit Bull their pet project. That may sound great, but the results haven't always been as planned.

The consequences of no-kill shelters

The mid-1980s saw the birth of the no-kill shelter movement, in which the goal was to end euthanasia of any adoptable pet. To be labeled a no-kill shelter, a shelter must only euthanize terminally ill or obviously dangerous pets, and these euthanizations can make up no more than 90 percent of their shelter population. No-kill shelters may be eligible for funding and grants that other shelters are not, and they tend to receive far more support from the public.

Unfortunately, in an effort to keep that 90 percent adoption rate, some no-kill shelters resorted to refusing to accept less adoptable dogs (such as Pit Bulls), hiding the breed of some dogs (such as Pit Bulls) to make them more adoptable, not

disclosing behavioral problems such as aggression, or transferring "problem dogs" to other shelters, which may then, in turn, transfer them again and again.

These practices have resulted in a great increase in attacks by dogs adopted from shelters. Between 1858 and 2010, only five fatalities were attributed to adopted shelter dogs (two of those from wolf hybrids). Since 2010, shelter dogs have killed 45 people; of those, 32 were killed by Pit Bulls. Shelters are now being sued for irresponsibly adopting out some dogs in which they failed to disclose a history of aggression.

The increased public pressure to adopt rather than shop, along with neutering and spaying, has had the desirable effect of greatly reducing shelter dog populations, to the point that many shelters in some parts of the country now import shelter dogs (either from other parts of the United States or foreign countries). But despite the efforts of Pit Bull advocacy groups, Pit Bulls tend to be the last dogs to be adopted. Some shelters have only Pit Bulls left. Overpopulation is still a real thing when it comes to Pit Bulls. Nobody wants to euthanize healthy dogs, but some government-run shelters now won't adopt out any Pit Bulls because of liability issues.

Other shelters have resorted to "empty the cages" days, in which dogs, including Pit Bulls, are offered at heavy discounts or for free. For-profit rescue groups often turn down Pit Bulls because they can't charge the high adoption fees they can charge for other dogs, especially small ones. But giving away dogs is not the way to match people and dogs. And sadly, too many people get a free or cheap dog on a whim, and give the dog up just as easily. The Pit Bull overpopulation continues to be a problem without a solution in sight.

Breed-specific legislation

As public outcry has increased following Pit Bull attacks, some communities have adopted breed-specific legislation (BSL) that either bans certain breeds (always including Pit Bulls) or makes owners follow more restrictive rules than owners of other breeds. These restrictions can include mandatory spay/neuter, muzzling in public, not allowing them in designated areas, requiring the installation of special fencing, or requiring owners to have liability insurance. Pit Bull lobbies formed to oppose BSL, ultimately giving rise to the well-funded Pit Bull lobbies of today (see the nearby sidebar). The lobbies persuaded many states to prohibit BSL, but local laws can still override the state laws in some cases. As of this writing, more than 800 communities have adopted BSL, all including Pit Bulls in their target breeds.

THE PIT BULL LOBBY

Pit Bulls are the only breed of dog to have their own lobby, Best Friends Animal Society (www.bestfriends.org), which works to fight BSL and promote Pit Bulls as family pets. Best Friends is funded by private donations and by the Animal Farm Foundation (www.animalfarmfoundation.org) to the tune of more than $100 million a year. The Animal Farm Foundation also funds the National Canine Research Council to conduct pro–Pit Bull research.

Opponents of BSL point to the toll on innocent Pit Bulls. Although in most cases, currently owned Pit Bulls are grandfathered in when BSL is adopted, many people ignore the laws and adopt Pit Bulls or move to a town with the Pit Bulls they already own. Opponents also point to the difficulty of labeling Pit Bulls. They further contend that BSL is difficult and expensive to uphold, and that a better solution would be to enforce laws regarding dangerous dogs that are already on the books.

Proponents of BSL contend that laws regarding dangerous dogs only address dogs *after* they've maimed or killed a person. They consider BSL proactive and laws regarding dangerous dogs reactive. They further point to lower dog fatality and serious mauling numbers after BSL is implemented in various communities.

BSL almost certainly saves lives. But it does so by casting a large net that also ensnares innocent dogs because of their breed or appearance.

Finding the Middle Ground

No more controversial family of dogs exists today than the Pit Bull. On one side you have Pit Bull owners and lovers who think they are angels on four legs. They love their dogs like their children and are justifiably upset when they feel Pit Bull haters may threaten them. On the other side you have Pit Bull victims and haters who think they are demons on four legs. Some have been victims of Pit Bull attacks and are justifiably frightened of them and want the breed to be banned.

The truth is in the middle. No family of dogs comes close to being responsible for as many deaths as the Pit Bull has been. These deaths include human and canine family members and human and canine strangers. The attacks are committed by both well-raised and poorly raised Pit Bulls. But that doesn't mean every Pit Bull is a mauler. In fact, most go through their entire lives being perfectly peaceful.

MAKING A NEW BREED: THE AMERICAN BULLY

In the early 1980s, several breeders began crossing American Pit Bull Terriers or American Staffordshire Terriers with Staffordshire Bull Terriers along with English Bulldogs, American Bulldogs, Olde English Bulldogges, and French Bulldogs. Their aim was to create a tougher-looking but sweeter-acting bully breed: the American Bully. By 2004, they had their own association, the American Bully Kennel Club (ABKC).

The breed has four sizes: pocket, standard, classic, and XL. The UKC recognized the American Bully in 2013. As of this writing, you can single-register your dog with the UKC if it looks enough like an American Bully to probably be one. (Single registration means the dog is registered based on its appearance rather than parentage.) This rule has caused controversy, however, because some Pit Bull owners who don't want the legal implications of Pit Bull ownership have single-registered their Pit Bulls as American Bullies. By doing so, they may be able to get around BSL that affects Pit Bulls but may not include American Bullies.



REMEMBER

It's up to Pit Bull owners to change the breed's reputation by being extremely responsible. If you own a Pit Bull, your dog must be impeccably trained and well behaved, and if you allow your dog to spend time in your yard, the yard must be escape-proof. You may know for a fact that your Pit Bull is a sweetie, but you have to be prepared for the unexpected. Dogs are dogs, and they often act and react in ways we would never have imagined. True, another dog owner may be at fault for allowing her dog to run up to yours, but that's not a deadly mistake with most dogs, and it can be with a Pit Bull. If your Pit Bull harms or kills another dog, you can be sure it will be the Pit Bull who gets the blame. As a Pit Bull owner, you must not only look out for your own dog's actions, but the actions of others as well. This level of vigilance is a big responsibility, but it's one every Pit Bull owner must assume.