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A Chicken or a Champion?

As the sport of cockfighting grows, so does the number of opponents to this “inhumane spectacle”. Critics, many of whom are animal rights activists, claim that it is prehistoric savageness to become excitedly crazy while watching one bird try to murder another. In addition, they believe that humans have no right to “force” these beautiful birds to fight to the death. The Animal Rights Association is fighting hard to ban cockfighting in the three states where it remains legal. Unfortunately, they are gaining support as a result of a widespread lack of knowledge about cockfighting. The majority of people who would vote to ban cockfighting have never been to a cockfight. People hear what the Animal Rights Association says about the sport and, without giving much thought, assume that cockfighting is a barbaric blood sport that should be illegal. In truth, cockfighting has to be one of the most misunderstood activities around. While on the surface cockfighting appears to be evil, it is actually a sport that benefits all birds and humans who are involved.

Cockfighting can be traced back to the days of the Roman Empire. The sport was introduced in America in the eighteenth century as a large-scale migration from England was taking place. Some of America’s greatest leaders, including George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln, were involved in cockfighting.

Before forming an opinion on the sport it is helpful to understand a little about the gamecock species. Gamecocks are not forced to fight, nor are they taught to fight. Fighting is their natural instinct. If gamecocks were allowed to run free on a farm, eventually the young roosters would begin to fight, and they would kill each other until only one remained. That is what they want to do. That is how the Creator made them. Felines sleep a lot, beavers chop down trees, certain animals eat their young as soon as they are born, and gamecocks fight with each other. Why? Because their instincts tell them to. Cock fighters are simply complying with the laws of nature. They prevent the young rooster from exercising his desire to fight until he is fit and has the best chance of winning.

I, along with the Animal Rights Association (ARA), believe that animals have certain rights. For example, antelope have the right to graze on the open plains, bears in Yellowstone have the right to dig through trash, and woodpeckers, as annoying as they may be, have the right to peck holes in telephone poles. These animals have the right to these actions because that is what their instincts tell them to do. To deprive them of these rights would be breaking the laws of nature. It is difficult to understand why animal rights activists insist on singling out cockfighting while ignoring similar types of animal violence. When was the last time you saw an activist jump in front of two charging big horn sheep to prevent one of them from getting hurt? I have never seen an animal rights extremist tackle a grizzly bear in order to stop him from murdering an innocent salmon. As ridiculous as these examples may seem, they help to expose the irrational thinking of the ARA. It is ironic that the ARA claims to be fighting for animal rights; yet they are desperately trying to deprive the gamecock of his most cherished right—the right to fight.

Cockfighting remains legal in three states today: Oklahoma, Louisiana, and New Mexico. To make the match a little quicker and less painful, spurs are attached to the birds’ legs. The fight begins when the leather sheaths of the spurs are removed and wiped with alcohol to remove any poison, and the birds are released. Contests may last from just a few seconds to a few minutes. They end when one bird is killed, or to the dismay of

it's owner, runs away. A losing bird must be picked up and dropped three times to see if it shows any signs of life before it's declared dead. Victory is only declared when the dominant cock pecks two times at its victim.

The life of a gamecock is seen under a different light when it is compared with the life of a factory chicken. Of the more than eight billion animals presently slaughtered in USDA inspected facilities each year, seven billion are broiler chickens. When these birds are hatched, they are crowded into a storage house where they can hardly move. Each chicken is given roughly ½ square foot to live in. The chickens also have their beaks cut off without the use of anesthesia. Their beaks are cut off for the purpose of reducing injury when the chickens follow their natural instinct to fight with each other. Factory chickens are also given steroids and other drugs that make them grow twice as fast as normal. Broilers (chickens) now grow so rapidly that the heart and lungs are not developed enough to support the remainder of the body, resulting in congestive heart failure and tremendous death rates. Because their legs are not able to support their abnormally heavy bodies, many chickens experience crippling leg injuries. Confined in this unhealthy environment, the chickens are also victims of heat prostration, infectious disease, and cancer.

When it comes time for the chickens to go to the slaughterhouse, they are crammed into crates and loaded onto trucks. The birds are taken off the trucks with a crane and dumped onto conveyer belts. Next, the birds are hung upside down with shackles that are attached to a rail. The birds are then submerged headfirst into a stunning tank where they are immobilized by a very painful electric current. The intensity of the current has gradually been lowered over the years because of the growth in the rotisserie chicken and fast-food business. Too high of a current level can result in hemorrhaging which would damage the bird's carcass and diminish its value. As a result, the birds are immobilized but still capable of feeling pain. Many are still conscious after going through the stunning tank. After the stunning tank, the birds' throats are slashed with a mechanical blade. Inevitably, the blade maims some of the birds, and they proceed alive to their final destination, the scalding tank. Here each bird is submerged in boiling water. The millions of birds who are boiled alive each year are called "red skins" by those in the industry.

Compared to factory chickens, gamecocks live a life of royalty. Gamecocks receive a remarkable amount of care and support from their owners from the time they are a few weeks old. Good fighting roosters are very valuable and get first-class treatment, including high-quality feed and vitamins, plus regular baths and massages. There are some gamecocks that eat better than most people. It is common to see a cockfighting enthusiast strolling around caressing a rooster nestled in the crook of his arm. In small towns where the sport is practiced, one often sees some men squatting in the shade massaging, blowing smoke, and grooming their fighting roosters. It has even been said that in a fire a Filipino will rescue his fighting cock before his family or possessions.

Gamecocks participate in exercise programs that provide confidence while strengthening their wings and legs. Gamecocks get foot massages, gentle handling, and only the best food. When they become sick, gamecocks are cared for until they are better; whereas, a sick egg-laying chicken is killed instantly and thrown away. The average gamecock lives a life of 18 months compared to 6-8 weeks for a Kentucky Fried Chicken. Gamecocks are also allowed to do what they love – fight. A huge misconception is that gamecocks are forced to fight. While in a cockfight, if a gamecock refuses to fight or turns and runs from the other gamecock, the fight is stopped and that chicken will never be allowed to fight again. That situation rarely occurs though, as most chickens love to show their courage and fighting ability. If a gamecock displays great excellence in the pit over a number of fights, he can be retired from fighting and become a breeder, where he will live a true life of luxury for the next nine to ten years. Gamecocks enjoy a symbiotic

relationship with their owner that is greater than most animal-human relationships. A thoroughbred racehorse might be the only animal that receives more tender loving care than a world-champion gamecock.

Before forming an opinion on cockfighting, one should consider the life of a factory chicken. The reason is simple. When presented with the question of whether or not cockfighting should be legal, most people, without giving much thought, will reply, "No, it should not be legal". People will answer this way because they don't know much about the sport, and most of what they do know has come from animal rights extremists. At the same time, the vast majority of these people are meat eaters and include chicken as one of their main staples of sustenance. There is no question that gamecocks enjoy a higher quality of life than factory chickens. How, then is it possible for someone to eat chicken, thereby supporting the way these birds are processed, while being opposed to cockfighting at the same time? The answer is that it is not logically possible. Someone against cockfighting would argue that gamecocks suffer unnecessary pain just to bring humans happiness. However, if this same anti-cock fighter eats chicken, then he is indirectly arguing that it is ok for factory chickens to suffer through a horrible, short life, be tortured, and wind up in the meat section of a supermarket. All of this is ok because the food that comes from the factory chicken brings the anti-cock fighter happiness.

The bottom line is simple. If you are opposed to cockfighting, you had better be a vegetarian; otherwise your argument against cockfighting has no leg to stand on. I would also argue that it is ok to be opposed to the horrible life that factory chickens live and still support cockfighting. In fact, that is the stand that a perfectly logical person would take. Support cockfighting because of the high quality of life that gamecocks live. Not only do they live a high quality life, but also they get to die doing what they love. If you still want to eat chicken, but don't want to support the way factory chickens are processed, go to a cockfight, wait for one of the gamecocks to be killed, and then throw him on the grill. It will probably be the best chicken you have ever tasted because of the high quality food that the gamecock enjoyed throughout his life.

Now, if you are still opposed to cockfighting, and are an active vegetarian, there are a few other things that you will have to give up. These would include hunting, fishing, or attending a rodeo, bullfight, or circus. You also better throw away your entire stock of insect repellent, and don't even think about killing the next black widow or rattlesnake you see. Also, be prepared to suffer through your next case of strep throat without taking any penicillin. While experimenting on mice at Oxford University in 1940, penicillin was discovered. The list goes on and on, as does the extremity of the actions that follow as a result of being anti-cockfighting. All I ask is that you are reasonable in making your decision. Don't support one form of extreme animal cruelty (eating chicken) while being opposed to another form that is questionable at best (cockfighting).