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NEW VOICES

Pit bulls are dogged by lots of misinformation

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Nearly everyone has heard of vicious pit bull attacks in the news. Little do people know, however, that pit bulls aren't the monsters the media make them out to be. In fact, when these dogs have responsible owners, they're quite affectionate.

In some areas of our country, breed-specific legislation (commonly referred to as BSL) has made owning pit bulls - along with many other dog breeds - nearly impossible for responsible owners. Many must give up their family pets or even move out of the area to avoid having their loyal canine companions seized and destroyed. Owners of pit bulls also face restrictions on home insurance. Some insurance companies refuse to insure homes with pit bulls.

Contrary to popular belief, pit bulls were not bred to show aggression toward humans. In fact, they were bred not to. One requirement for organized dog fighting was that the referee be able to pick the dogs up while they were still involved in a fight without being bitten himself. Dogs that bit the referee were often disqualified and considered "worthless" by their owners. These dogs were cut from the breeding lines. This exclusion ensured that pit bulls kept an amiable disposition toward people.

Another myth concerns the pit bull's notorious "locking jaws." It's said that once a pit bull latches onto something, it cannot let go. Although it does have powerful jaws, they have no special locking mechanism. The structure of a pit bull's jaw and teeth are like those of any other dog. It is the undying loyalty and determination that are a pit's only advantage.



The breed's participation in protection sports such as schutzhund - a sport that tests a dog's suitability for police work, specific odor detection, search and rescue, and many other tasks - further debunks the locking-jaw myth. Being able to release the decoy's sleeve on command is a significant part of the sport, which many pit bulls achieve easily.

So do these dogs - loyal companions and loving family pets - deserve to be treated like monsters?

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