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## Trainer aims to reprogram public's view of pit bulls

By Gerry Smith

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Head, a 6-month-old pit bull with tattered ears and a passive demeanor, learned to sit on Saturday, a small but notable achievement for a dog once bred to fight.

On a sidewalk in Humboldt Park, Head was part of a small group of neighborhood pit bulls participating in a dog obedience class taught by Tony Gordon, whose mission is more than just turning around a few hostile canines.

Gordon, a disciple of Pavlov's theories, said he also hopes to educate pit bull owners and transform public perception about a breed that has been maligned by the media in high-profile attacks on children.



"The newspapers portray the pit bull as this vicious, mean, ferocious animal, when in fact, the pit bull is a kind, gentle, loyal animal," he said.

The seminar was the first in a series of biweekly sessions Gordon plans to hold on the West Side about pit bulls, which he said are "pound-for-pound the most powerful dogs in the world."

Tio Hardiman, founder of the Chicago Coalition to Stop Dog Fighting, estimated that organized dogfighting occurs in about 10 percent of blocks on the West Side, with owners competing for as much as \$5,000 or "just for the fun of it."

Signs that a dog has been involved in dogfighting include scars around its face, neck and chest, Gordon said. In addition, dogs involved in fighting display a defensive posture in the presence of other animals, with their ears back and tails tucked.

The seminar came less than a month after authorities made high-profile busts on organized dogfighting in suburban Chicago and across the country.

Last month, Atlanta Falcons star Michael Vick was indicted on dogfighting charges, and a South Holland man was charged with 74 counts of dogfighting and animal cruelty in connection with what officials said was a dogfighting operation at his home.

This year, the Chicago police animal crimes unit has made more than 40 arrests related to dogfighting

and animal abuse and recovered 120 to 150 abused dogs, according to Officer Tom Barker.

This fall, Hardiman plans to hold the Positive Pit Bull Olympics in Garfield Park, where dogs will compete in events that include pulling a weighted sled, jumping over hurdles and a beauty contest for the pit bull with the fewest scars.

As Gordon rewarded a pit bull named Gucci with a treat, Deandre Hill, 18, and Kione Ford, 15, watched closely.

"I think it's good that he's putting a positive image on something that people have made so negative," Hill said.

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