

The GAMECOCK

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LATEST UPDATES

By Roundhead Man

It's been a few months since I've written in. My last columns got a bit of a debate going. I hope that all of the discussing at least reminded people that at The Gamecock different views can be aired and we can have lively discussion that hopefully helps the entire gamefowl community. We at least need to know the truth about what's going on.

I'm afraid I don't have very much good news to report. We suffered a major loss in Tennessee this year. Yes, Tennessee. A rural Southern state actually voted in a new law that makes it a Class A misdemeanor to even attend a cockfight. The penalties are up to a year in prison and up to a \$2,500 fine. If you bring a child that's another offense and a fine of at least \$1,000.

For years cockers held off the Humane Society in Tennessee. This year was different. I don't know exactly what changed, but we lost the vote 90 to 2 in the House and 24 to 1 in the Senate. That's about as bad as it can possibly be. It looks like we have lost the elected officials of Tennessee. I fear that now that they have a strong spectator law, a first offense felony law will be the next bill they pass. When they are winning votes 90 to 2, they can probably get just about anything they want.

The bill also tightened up the part of the Tennessee law on "possessing a bird with intent to fight." That used to say that it was ok to own a bird to fight if it was being shipped somewhere that cockfighting was legal. The new law says that because of the federal law, that is no longer allowed. That is bad news for gamefowl farms in Tennessee and I bet we will start seeing farms get raided sooner rather than later.

I'm not sure what went wrong and what the UGBA and TGBA were doing to stop the bill so I won't comment there. I'm sure

they tried something. But one thing hurt us and hurt us bad. There was a magazine with a picture of a kid holding a gamecock on the cover. That magazine cover got published in a major Tennessee newspaper with a long article claiming that children were being corrupted by the cockfighters. That kind of bad publicity cost us votes in the legislature for sure! They never should have put that kid on the cover of the magazine. It really hurt us.

Going out west, I had praised Utah as a good state for cockers. It was the only state in the west that didn't have felony cockfighting law at least for those who get caught a couple of times. Well that just

isn't the case anymore. The Utah legislature passed a felony cockfighting law in March. The good news is that the new Utah law only goes felony on the third offense. That's still more lenient than most states. But it's a setback that a legislature who had stood firm for us the last few years turned around and gave the Humane Society yet another win.

By my count there are 42 states with felony laws now. Of those, 39 are on the first offense. The other 3 are second or third offense. Then 8 states still have misdemeanor laws, though some of them, like Tennessee's now, are as strong as a misdemeanor can get and even apply to spectators.

All of this is entirely separate from the federal law that was passed last year. The federal law gets used when state lines are



L/R: ZEKE BLACKSTOCK, Johnny Bill and the legend Mr. Mike Ratliff in Cross Plains, Texas at Mr. Ratliff residence.

crossed. That's a felony, and covers spectators, and applies throughout the United States.

One other bad law passed this year. The Colorado cockfighting law was made even stronger. It now has mandatory minimum penalties. They already had first offense felony. Now it's first offense felony and a fine of at least \$1,000.

There is other news besides all the laws passing. In Ohio the federal spectator law was used in a dogfighting case. Eight guys were convicted in the first use of the new spectator law. I think it's interesting they used it on the dogfighters first. I bet they figured no judge would overturn a law that was used in a dogfighting case, so they use this one on the dogmen and get some case law set that makes it harder for the first cockers that they use it on. This explains why they haven't used the spectator law on cockers yet as well. They wanted to get their test run with the dogmen done.

HSUS is a very tough opponent. They are pros and are far more of a threat to cockfighting than any of the other groups. We have to do anything and everything we can to discredit HSUS. A group called Humane Farming Association may be an ally. They don't oppose cockfighting and they hate HSUS. I don't know if it's because HSUS gets more attention than them or what, but Humane Farming Association is willing to stand up to HSUS and that helps the cockfighters!

A friend of mine is on contract with a large poultry company and raises a lot of chickens every year. The poultry company agent he deals with says Humane Farming Association is willing to stand up to HSUS on any issue. Now they probably can't publicly back cockfighting, but they have worked with agriculture groups like the pork and beef folks to combat HSUS legislation. Just something to think about. Just like infighting tears the gamefowl community apart, we should be doing all we can to encourage groups like the Humane Farming Association so they can do the same in their community.

It is very unlikely this sport will ever be

legal again. Our numbers are shrinking. Gamefowl farms are closing. Right when it looks like HSUS is wounded, they score a win. Example, Ringling Brothers circus beats them in a huge lawsuit. That's a win right? Next thing you know, Ringling Brothers gives up their elephant act and HSUS claims victory. How did they do that? What sort of deal did they cut with Ringling? If Ringling can't beat them outright, I don't know who can. But they have been beating the cockers badly for years and if public opinion isn't turned against them and fast, super fast, then you can count on it being lights out for any serious level of cocking in the United States.

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