CROWING FOR VICTORY — A champion rooster crows over his cowering opponent at the end of a cock fight in Sunset, La. The opponent was not killed in this fight, although the champion is sometimes the only one to live. A dispute has arisen over whether such fights are illegal. (AP Wirephoto)

Cockfighting Spurs Great Cackle In S. Louisiana

SUNSET, La. (AP) — The ancient spectacle of cockfighting has spurred a great cackle hereabouts on whether letting two roosters have at each other is a sport — or is immoral, cruel and illegal.

Debate includes Biblical quotations to back a contention that chickens are fowl, not animals.

Fowl Not Mentioned

The point has significance because Dist. Atty. Morgan Goudeau says fowl are not mentioned in Louisiana's law banning cruelty to animals.

"Whether they consider poultry to be vegetable or mineral, I don't know," fumed Nelson Dysart of New Orleans, director of the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

A shabby old amphitheater provides the controversial cockpit. It seats 300 to 500 spectators, looks rather like an old barn, and is named Sunset Recreation Club, Inc.

March Event

Cockfight derbies are staged four times a year. Dysart hopes to block the next one, scheduled in March.

He has asked the state attorney general for an opinion on how to stop what he considers a bloodthirsty and sadistic proceeding.

One of the club's 48 shareholders, who asked that he not be named, bristled at the SPCA accusation of cruelty.

"What's Cruel?"

"I'll tell you what's cruel and what they ought to be looking into," he said. "It's these chicken slaughter houses where six-week old chickens were boiled to death. Now that's cruel."

The SPCA turned to the attorney general after Dist. Atty. Goudeau minced no words in rejecting suggestions that he crackdown on cockfighting.

He sees it as an innocent, or at least nonsexy, pastime.

"It seems to me that game fighting as an amusement is less offensive than the dancing of naked women, carried on in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, and the X-rated movies," he said.

Goudeau said the Louisiana Supreme Court has never ruled on cockfighting, but the supreme courts of Arizona and Oklahoma have allowed it.

Both courts said laws forbidding cruelty to animals did not also specify fowl.

Biblical authority for separate classification includes Genesis 2:19: "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air..."

Goudeau concluded his statement with another line from the Bible. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

Test Case

Sheriff Adler LeDoux of St. Landry Parish (county) issued a three page statement saying the legal issue could not be settled short of a test case in court.

Dysart said his territory is New Orleans and as of now he lacks authority to file suit in St. Landry Parish.

"It appears possible we may have to ask the legislature to define the word 'animal' or clarify the anticruelty statute," he said.