BY STEPHEN MARSHAL

The locations are secret right up until a few hours before the fight. There is an underground newsletter with coded information about up-coming "sporting events." Admission is $25 per spectator with as much as $15,000 riding on the outcome, not including side-bets.

The dogs, usually pit bull terriers, average about 40 pounds of muscle and bone and are powerful enough to kill German Shepherds three times their weight. Their jaws are capable of snapping a man's arm in two. They are trained specifically for fighting, trained not to yelp in pain when injured so as to maintain the secret location of the brutal spectacle.

The popularity of the "sport" is growing with reports of fights being held nationwide. But Louisiana has the distinction of being at the top of the list.

"Come on down to Louisiana," the author of Pit-Pal Magazine wrote. "The law won't bother you here."

This statement is unfortunately accurate despite recent legislative attempts to stiffen penalties for organizing dog fights in Louisiana. Bills in both the House and Senate ended up as weak versions of proposals that would have carried felony prosecutions with convictions for organizing these blood and gore events.

"You are meddling with a people's way of life," Rep. John N. John, D-Crowley addressed the House recently: "Dogfighting is part of our heritage.

The new laws, gutted by legislators who seem dedicated to keeping the practice of dogfighting flourishing, are another example of such stimuli.

"It's as inhumane as inhuman can get," Roy Carlberg, executive secretary of the Kitten Society said. "The laws against such activities must become stricter. They have to be enforced and the public has to be made aware of how vile and rotten such activities are."

California has the toughest dogfighting law, calling for a maximum fine of $50,000. A dogfighting conviction in Oklahoma carries a sentence of from one to 10 years in prison and/or fines up to $2,000 to $25,000. Spectators are also liable for up to $100 fines. In April, Alabama made dogfighting a felony punishable by one to 10 years in prison and/or fines up to $5,000 for both organizers and spectators.

In Louisiana, the maximum penalty is a $1,000 fine for organizers of dog fights. Spectators are not liable.

Dogfighting is not as popular as the other "sports" but it brings in a lot of money, USUALLY from those who are not interested in the outcome of the fight.

A lot of the money floating on the mutts, the owners of the dogs say. They don't care about the outcome, they just care about winning.

One of the methods used to acquaint a dog with the "taste of blood" is the attack the other dog "scratching" or rushing the opponent.

"What do you see the way the animals love it," one dogfighter commented. "You wouldn't think it was cruel."

A Dallas dogfighter, who allows his trained killer dog to play with his children, said, "I don't have any qualms about the kids. Sooner or later they have to get to learn that a dog is just an animal and you shouldn't love it like a human."

"There's a lot of money floating on the mutts," he went on. "If you're in my position you can make a fine profit. But that's not all. You might call me sick but I like watching the fights."

Opponents of dogfighting feel differently, saying the activities are not natural. They claim the animals have to be bred and trained to fight the way they do.

The training device originated in South Louisiana. The training device involves putting a Live animal, usually a kitten, is put in a cage about five inches ahead of a dog on the treadmill. The dog is occasionally allowed to take a bite out of the kitten which is later fed to the dog after the training run.

The training device is a composite view of a dogfight compiled from articles in the Humane Society of the United States and eye witnesses. A fight is held after dark on a Saturday night. Spectators do not know the location but are led by promoters in car caravans to a rural site where they pay $25 to gain admission.

The animals have been matched by weight and sex according to agreements made between owners weeks prior to the fight. Before the match, owners examine each other's dogs for poison on the coats. They bring their dogs to opposite sides of a 10 foot circle surrounded by a three-foot wall. The crowd sits beyond the fence, making side-bets on the outcome. The owners have long since put up a few thousand dollars each on their animals.

On the command, "Release your dogs," the owners let the animals loose, remaining in the pit to urge their dogs on.

Each dog immediately tries to gain an advantage.

"They fight by trying to secure holds on each other. After a hold has been established, the dog will chew and shake the bitten area with its powerful jaws. Pit bull terriers hold with their front teeth and chew with the rear."

"As the dogs rip and tear at each other," a spectator reports, "blood, urine and saliva splash the sides of the pit and the clothes of the handlers. Frequently the only sounds are those of crunching bones and cartilage."

A dog gains advantage by causing swelling and bruising of the opponents face, which impairs breathing. Despite the bloody injuries the only "rounds" occur when a dog "turns" or refuses to fight. The animals are parted with a stick and returned to their corners where the owners have 15 seconds to separate off the blood. The dog on whom the turn was called has one minute to attack the other by "scratching" or rushing the opponent.

This continues until one of the dogs loses because it cannot or will not scratch its opponent.

But the dogs, bred to viciousness, rarely give up until one is dead.

If an owner senses his dog is about to quit, he will usually pick the dog up, thereby conceding the match. Picking up is preferred to the dog quitting, which is an embarrassment to the owner.

Many of the dogs that don't die in the pit are shot after the match since the injuries sustained during the fight are so grave.

This weekend an event like the one described above will take place in South Louisiana. Our legislators have failed to put teeth into a bill that would have at least discouraged dogfighting. So it remains, another example of man's fascination with violence that involves his best friend.