Pit Bull Gazette, Volume 1, Issue 3, 1977

Experience with dogs, horses, human athletes, cattle, hogs and chickens indicates that for everything that lives and breathes, there is an army of experts to tell you how that particular thing should look.

A lot of these experts seem to lack the ability to quantitatively distinguish one physical attribute from another. Most start with an animal they love and build a standard to fit, but some few are really awesome in their knowledge of which physical dimensions work best.

Those persons whose opinions on conformation have borne the test of years have, without exception, come from the ranks of the professionals who use the animals to make money. There are cattlemen who can look at two hundred calves and pick the ten best gainers by looking at their conformation. A year later those same calves bring more profit than their less well conformed brothers. Racehorse men are the most knowledgeable conformation people you will meet. They all like the same basic things in a horse; although they claim to differ greatly, their differences are minute. As evidence, look at the bidding at a yearling sale when a foal of good conformation is brought in and compare it with the prices offered for an equally well bred foal with conformation faults. Good cattlemen and good horsemen judge conformation by what the animal is suppose to do. Cattlemen know from experience that they will lose money feeding narrow shouldered, hollow backed, long legged calves. Horsemen know that shallow girthed, crooked legged horses with straight hocks seldom cross the finish line first, and that's where the money is.

Now, money doesn't give you good judgment, but it takes good judgement to hang on to it. You can bet that anyone dealing with cattle, horses or Pit Bulls for a long period of time professionally has been exercising good judgement.

Professionals look for an animal that can get a job done. Amateurs, because they have no way to test their theories, wind up feeding their imaginations.

So let's get to the point of establishing a conformation standard for the American Pit Bull Terrier. If we are going to be forced by the laws and todays social standards into breeding a dog for looks rather than performance, in the interest of preserving the most extraordinary animal that man has ever created, let's take a good look at what the American Pit Bull Terrier is suppose to do.

His existence today was not because he was bred only for gameness. He was not bred only for power. He sure as hell was not bred only for his intelligence, loyalty, boldness, round eye, rose ear, red nose, or his inclination for dragging children from the paths of speeding trains. He was bred to win. That's right folks, he was developed for competition.

The professional dogfighters have made him what he is, the professional dogfighters are improving him and when the professional dogfighters are gone, the real Pit Bull Terrier will gradually fade away. What we will have is something the amateurs have preserved that reminds us of the gladiators of old.

Thank God for the amateurs; professional dog fighting is a dying occupation. Preservation of this grand athlete that was bred to go to war is inevitably going to be in the hands of the amateurs. So, let's look to the profession of the dog in establishing our standard so that our grandchildren will at least see an authentic physical reproduction of a fighting dog.

If we start with the premise that conformation should reflect the ideal for the dogs usage and that this particular animal is suppose to win a dogfight, we come naturally to the question, what does it take to win?

Most of those who have backed their judgment with hard earned money would agree on the following to some degree or another.

1.   Gameness   (WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT)
2.   ~~Aggressiveness~~ ATTITUDE
3.   Stamina
4.   Wrestling ability
5.   Biting ability

Note that only one of these qualities, wrestling ability, is directly related to conformation. One other, stamina, may be partly due to conformation, but is probably as much reliant on inherited efficiency of the heart and circulatory system. Some people seem to feel that the shape of the head determines hard bite, but in practice, it seems there are a lot of other factors involved. Earl Tudor said that the great "Black Jack," who killed 4 opponents in 7 wins in big money fights, bit hard "because he wanted to bite hard." That about sums it up. Good biters seem to be where you find them regardless of the shapes of their heads.

When we talk of conformation we really only mean one thing wrestling ability. This is the reason the American Pit Bull Terrier varies so much in conformation. His wrestling by itself is not nearly as important as the sum total of gameness, aggressiveness, bite and natural stamina, none of which are directly related to conformation.

Any dogfighter will tell you, "If you've got a game dog with good air, he's worth a bet." I might add, "If he can also bite, put a second mortgage on the house and take him to a convention." In other words, never mind what he looks like.

However, wiser men than I have said, "The only game dogs are dead ones." Also, "under certain conditions most dogs will quit." I believe there's a lot of

truth to that, and reinforce the fact that conformation is important, remember that conformation and wrestling ability are very closely related and it's usually the <u>bottom</u> dog in the fight that quits. It's hard to stop even the rankest cur if he can stay on top. The dog whose muscle and bone structure don't permit him to wrestle on even terms needs more of everything else to win. He's always coming from behind. He frequently dies after the fight, win or lose. His career is short because each go takes so much out of him. So I believe that wrestling ability (and therefore conformation) is a very important ingredient in a fighting dog.

Our standard of conformation can not be based on what someone who never saw a dogfight <u>thinks</u> a fighting dog should look like, but should be based on those physical attributes displayed <u>on winning pit dogs.</u>

<u>AMERICAN PIT BULL TERRIER COMFORMATION</u>

Look first at the overall profile of the dog. Ideally, he should be "square" when viewed from the side. That is, about as long from the shoulder to the point of his hip as he is tall from the top of the shoulder to the ground. Such a dog will stand high and have maximum leverage for his weight. This means that standing normally with the hock slightly back of the hip, the dog's base, (where his feet are) will be slightly longer than his height. Using the hip and shoulder, as guides will keep the viewer from being fooled by the way the dog is standing.

Height to weight ratio is critical. Since dogs are fought at nearly identical weights, the bigger the dog you have at the weight, the better your chances. Hence, stocky dogs with long bodies, heavy shoulders and thick legs usually lose to taller, rangier opponents.

Nature usually blesses a tall rangy dog with a fairly long neck which is a tremendous advantage in that it enables him to reach a stifle when his opponent may have his front leg, take an ear to hold off a shorter necked opponent, or to reach the chest himself when the other dog is trying to hold him off. The neck should be heavily muscled right up to the base of the skull.

Secondly, look at his back end. That's the drive train of any four-legged animal. A Bulldog does 80% of his work off his hips and back legs.

A long sloping hip is most important. By its very length, it gives leverage to the femur or thigh bone. A long hip will give the dog a slightly roached back appearance. Hence the "low set" tail so often spoke of.

The hip should be broad. A broad hip will carry with it a broad loin and permits a large surface for the attachment of the gluteal and the biceps femoris muscles, the biggest drivers in the power train.

The femur or thigh bone should be shorter than the tibia, or lower leg bone. This means that the stifle joint will be in the upper one third of the hind leg. It is not uncommon to see dogs with a low stifle. They are usually impressively muscled because of the bigger biceps femoris, but are surprisingly weak and slow on the back legs because of leverage lost by the long thigh. A short femur and long tibia usually means a well bent stifle, which in turn leads to a well bent hock. This last is a really critical aspect of wrestling ability. When a dog finds himself being driven backward, he must rely on the natural springiness of the well bent hock and stifle to control his movement. Dogs with straight or the frequently seen double jointed hock of many of the Dibo bred dogs, will wrestle well as long as muscle power can sustain them, but if pushed, will tire in the back end more quickly and soon lose their wrestling ability.

Thirdly, look at the front end. He should have a deep rib cage, well sprung at the top, but tapering to the bottom. Deep and elliptical, almost narrow is preferred to the round and barrel chested. The rib cage houses the lungs which are not storage tanks, but pumps. The ribs are like bellows. Their efficiency is related to the difference in volume between contraction and expansion. A barrel chested dog, in addition to carrying more weight for his height, has a air pump with a short stroke. He must take more breaths to get the same volume of air. Depth of rib gives more room for large lungs.

Shoulders should be a little wider than the rib cage at the eight rib. Too narrow a shoulder does not support adequate musculature but too wide a shoulder makes a dog slow and adds unnecessary weight. The scapula (shoulder blade) should be at a 45 degree or less slope to the ground and broad and flat. The humerus should be at an equal angle in the opposite direction and long enough that the elbow comes below the bottom of the rib cage. The elbows should lie flat, the humerus running almost parallel to the spine; not out at elbows which gives a wide "English Bulldog" stance. This type of shoulder is more easily dislocated or broken.

The forearm should be only slightly longer than the humerus and heavy and solid—nearly twice the thickness of the metatarsal bones at the back. The front legs and shoulders must be capable of sustaining tremendous punishment and heaviness can be an asset here.

The relationship between front legs and back should be, at first appearance, of a heavy front and a delicate back. This is because in an athletic dog, the metatarsal bones, hock and lower part of the tibia will be light, fine and springy. The front legs will be heavy and solid looking. The experienced Bulldog man however, will note the wide hip; loin and powerful thigh which make the back end the most muscular.

The head varies more in the present day Pit Bull more than any other part of the body, probably because its conformation has the least to do with whether he wins or loses. However, there are certain attributes, which appear to be

of advantage. First, it's overall size. Too big a head simply carries more weight and increases the chances of having to fight a bigger dog. Too small a head is easily punished by a nose fighter and is especially easy for a ear fighter to shake. In an otherwise well-proportioned dog, the head will appear to be about two-thirds the width of the shoulders and about 25% wider at the cheeks than the neck at the base of the skull. Back of the head to the stop should be about the same distance as from the stop to the tip of the nose. The bridge of nose should be well developed which will make the area directly under the eyes considerably wider than the head at the base of the ears. Depth from the top of the head t the bottom of the jaw is important. The jaw is closed by the Temporar Fossa muscle exerting pressure on the coronoid process. The deeper the head at this point, (that is, between the zygomatic arch and the angular process of the bottom of the jaw) the more likely the dog is to have leverage advantage both in closing the jaw and in keeping it closed. A straight, box-like muzzle and well developed mandible will not have much to do with biting power but will endure more punishment. "Lippy" dogs are continually fanging themselves in a fight which works greatly to their disadvantage. Teeth should meet in the front, but more importantly, the canines or fangs should slip tightly together, the upper behind the lower when the mouth is closed. The eye elliptical when viewed from the front, triangular when viewed from the side, small and deep set.

In general, such a head will be wedge shaped when viewed either from the top or side, round when viewed from the front.

Skin should be thick and loose, but not in folds. It should appear to fit the dog tightly except around the neck and chest. Here the skin should be loose enough to show vertical folds even in a well conditioned dog.

The set of the tail is most important, it should be low.

The length should come just above the point of the hock, thick at the base and tapering to a point at the end and should hang down like a pump handle when relaxed.

The feet should be small and set high on the pasterns. The gait of the dog should be light and springy.

Most of the above relates to skeletal features of the dog. When we look at the muscles, from the breeders standpoint, it is much more important to look at the genetic features of musculature than those features due to conditioning. A genetically powerful dog can be a winner in the hands of even an inept trainer, but a genetically weak dog needs a good matchmaker to win. Conditioning won't do much for him.

Think of bones as levers with the joints as the fulcrum and the muscles being the power source. The power being applied to the lever is more effective the farther away from the fulcrum it is applied. Muscles should be long, with

attachments deep down the bone, well past the joint. Short muscled dogs are impressive looking but not athletic. A muscle's power value lies in it's ability to contract. The greater the difference between its relaxed state and it's contracted state, the greater the power.

The coat of the dog can be any color or any combination of colors. It should be short and bristled. The gloss of the coat usually reflects the health of the dog and is important to an athletic Pit Bull.

Above all, the American Pit Bull Terrier is an all around athlete. His body is called on for speed, power agility and stamina. He must be balanced in all directions. Too much of one thing robs him of another. He is not a model formed according to human specialists. In his winning form he is a fighting machine - a thing of beauty.

In judging the American Pit Bull Terrier 100 points will be possible for the ideal dog. The break down is as follows:-

Overall appearance	20 points
Attitude of dog	10 points
Head and neck	15 points
Front end of dog	20 points
Back end of dog	30 points
Tail and coat	5 points
	100 points

Disqualification: Any dog that has been sexually altered, that is spay or neutered.