

Glossary of Cockfighting Terms

(Source: Humane Society of the United States)

Ace A gamecock who has won at least eight fights.

Anchor Knot The last knot that secures the string around a gaff. Anchor knots are usually tied below the

socket in order to give more stability to the leg.

Battle Royal The placement of several roosters into the pit at the same time with the last survivor being declared the winner. This is sometimes done at the end of a match using injured cocks or birds that the owners intend to cull.

Bill (Billing) When provoking the birds to fight, the handlers will cradle them in their arms so that only their heads and necks are free. The birds are then brought close together and allowed to peck at each other. Billing lasts from 10 to 30 seconds and is considered part of the fight.

Bishop A cock that has had his spurs sharpened or filed to give the appearance of being a stag. In matching a stag against a cock, 4 ounces in weight is usually given to the stag; i.e., a stag can weigh 4 ounces more than the cock. Substituting a bishop for a stag is an attempt to cheat by using a cock and gaining an advantage of four ounces. See “Stag.”

Blinder A handler who tries to place himself between the cocks and the referee in order to avoid a handle.

Blinker A cock or stag who is blind in one eye.

Blinker Derby A cockfighting event limited to birds who are blind in one eye.

Bloody Heel A term for a cock who cuts very accurately.

Blow 1. A strike or kick by a cock, usually resulting in a gaff piercing the opposing bird. 2. To blow on a bird: A method used to revive an injured cock where the handler blows warm air over the bird's head and neck in an attempt to stimulate blood flow to the brain.

Botana A wooden block, sometimes wrapped in leather, with a socket designed to fit over the natural spur of a gamecock. Necessary for fixing a Mexican slasher or short knife to the left leg of a rooster.

Brain Blow An injury, usually immediately fatal, caused by a gaff piercing the brain.

Break 1. To fly high at an opponent, usually several feet off the ground. 2. To break the count: See “Count.”

Breast 1. The forward end of a rooster's body. 2. To come to the breast or go to the breast: To move both cocks to the short score lines. See “Short Score Lines.”

Brush Fights Smaller, less organized cockfights involving “lesser quality” fowl and usually held in remote locations.

Bull A stag or cock that shows obvious superiority or strength over his opponent.

Bull Stag A gamecock between 15 months and 2 years of age that has not been through a complete molt.

Button Heel The youngest of stags, usually less than one year old, who are just beginning to develop their natural spurs.

Call Sheet A tally form used by pit officials to record the band numbers, entry numbers, and weights of cocks entered in a derby.

Catch Weight When two birds are fought without regard to matching their weights, they are said to be fought at catch weight. Most shakes are fought at catch weight. See “Shakes.”

Center Score Lines See “Short Score Lines.”

Check Weight The exact weight at which a bird is to be fought. Most cocks must weigh between 2 and 3 ounces of each other in order to be matched. Cocks are weighed immediately before a fight to determine their check weight.

Cock A mature gamecock (usually about 2 years of age) who has finished his first molt.

Cocker A shortened term for cockfighter or anyone who breeds gamefowl for cockfighting.

Cockhouse A building or shed equipped with coops or stalls for keeping cocks. The stalls, which are usually in tiers at one side of the room, each measure approximately 2 1/2 feet square and are equipped with a door. When cocks are to be fought, a cocker keeps them in the cockhouse while preparing them for battle.

Condition To prepare a bird for fighting by putting him through a rigorous training and feeding schedule called a keep for up to 2 weeks before a fight. There are many different methods of conditioning a bird, and some fighters closely guard their conditioning program since they believe it determines the outcome of the fight. See “Keep.”

Count The referee’s count, called out when no fighting occurs between two birds. The bird who made the last aggressive move has the advantage of the count while the other bird is being counted out. Usually, when one bird fails to attack, the handler of the opposing bird can call for a count. The complete count before a bird is declared a winner is three separate counts of 10 and one count of 20, with 15 to 20 seconds given between each count. After each count, the birds are handled and faced, and any aggressive move by the bird being counted out will end the count. After three counts of 10, the birds will be moved to the short score lines and remain there until the end of the fight. When a cock being counted out fights back, he is said to “break” the count. A cock breaking the count is entitled to the count himself if the opposing bird does not fight back. Rules may vary. For example, some fight rules will declare a winner after two counts of 10 and one count of 20.

Coupled A coupled cock is one who has received an injury to the spine or certain parts of the breast and lost control of his legs. Some cocks recover partially in a few minutes, while others give up quickly. Very few coupled cocks regain complete control of their legs.

Cut To inflict severe wounds with a knife or gaffs; to use a knife or gaffs accurately and effectively.

Cutter A gamecock who cuts in a superior manner.

Cutting Test A method of testing the cutting ability of a cock in which the cock to be tested is heeled and pitted against a bird fitted with muffs that a cocker intends to cull.

Derby A large cockfighting event in which a number of cockers pay an entry fee to enter a pre-set number of birds (usually from four to 12) of various weights in different fights, and, where possible, will not meet the same opponent more than once. The cocker winning the most fights is the winner and collects the purse, which is made up of all the entry fees. Some derbies have two money purses as well as options and other wagering means. Winnings may also be divided between the first- and second-place winners, minus a percentage for the pit operator.

Diamond A method of cheating in which a gaff is filed to a diamond point in order to give it a cutting edge.

Dora Dirza An ancient style of cockfighting from India that is currently being introduced to the United States. In this style of fight, cocks of Asil breeding are pitted against each other in timed bouts after their spurs have been wrapped with cloth and tape.

Drag and Drag Pit A drag pit is a smaller pit, separate from the main pit, where birds are placed to finish a fight when both cocks do not leave the score lines and the referee informs the handlers that time is going on. After the proper count to 20, both cocks will be moved to the short score lines in the center of the pit. The fight is now called a drag. Also, when one cock is awarded three counts of 10, both cocks will be moved to the short score lines for the last count of 20.

Draw When neither cock has the count and there is no further fighting for a specified period, the referee will declare the fight a draw or tie. In a derby, a draw counts as one-half win for each entry.

Dry Day (Drying Out) A day in which all water is withheld from a cock in order to dehydrate him in preparation for a fight. Many cockers believe the dehydration helps to lessen blood loss. The dry day is usually the day before or the day of the fight.

Dubbing (Clipping) The surgical removal of a rooster's comb, wattles, and earlobes. While exhibitors of gamefowl and cockfighters both believe this operation makes the gamecock look truer to breed, cockfighters know that it reduces the fighting cock's overall weight and lessens the opportunity for injury and sight impairment from bleeding during a fight.

Dubbing Shears Scissors used by cockers for dubbing.

Dunghill A term used to describe a bird who runs. Also a common reference by cockers to describe barnyard fowl.

Feeder (Conditioner) A person responsible for maintaining a bird's weight.

Flat A method of cheating in which a gaff is filed to a flat cutting edge at the point.

Flight Pens Larger exercise pens measuring approximately 4 feet wide, 8 to 10 feet long, and 6 to 10 feet high.

Flirt A method of conditioning that is intended to strengthen a cock's wings and help him to develop

balance while in the air. The bird is held with one hand under the breast and is tossed approximately 2 feet into the air over a bench. He is caught with the other hand and tossed back and

forth between both hands in a rhythm that keeps the bird continuously flapping his wings. Forward flirts are accomplished by holding the bird with both hands and tossing him in the air with a forward flipping motion.

Fly Any of several methods of conditioning in which one cock is held approximately 5 feet off the ground facing away from another cock held on the ground. The bird on the ground is then released to fly toward the bird being held in the air. Just as the birds are about to come into contact, the first bird is raised higher so that the flying bird misses. The process is repeated several times.

Gaff Case A carrying case, such as a tackle box, or shaving kit, used for storing gaffs and other items a cockfighter will need for a cockfight. A typical gaff case may contain several types of gaffs, moleskin strips, waxed string, scissors, a file and sharpening stone, a suture kit, and a rule book.

Gaffs (Heels) The artificial steel spurs that are placed on gamecocks in place of their natural spurs. Sold in pairs,

each gaff consists of the spike or needle-like spur; the socket, or base that slips over the stump of the gamecock's natural spur; the upper and lower flanges at the end of the socket; and a leather strap that is sewn to the flanges and designed to wrap around the bird's leg in order to provide physical support for the gaff. There are many types of gaffs, each named for the way in which the spike protrudes from the socket (regulation, bayonets, drop and full drop, jagers, skeletons, etc.). Gaffs also come in various lengths, measured from the tip of the point to the top back edge of the socket. Gaffs measuring 2 1/8 inches and shorter are usually referred to as short heels, and gaffs measuring 2 1/4 inches and longer are referred to as long heels. A cocker will choose a particular type and length of gaff according to how a specific bird fights; e.g., a bird who stays close to the ground may do better with a drop heel and a long spike, while a bird who flies off the ground may perform better with regulation short heels. Before the gaffs are placed on a bird, strips of moleskin are wrapped around the bird's legs above and below the natural spur (to act as a cushion), and then around the stump of the spur itself. The gaffs are then fitted and the leather straps are wrapped around the bird's legs and secured with waxed string.

Game (Gameness) Term used to describe the quality of courage that permits an animal to continue fighting even when totally exhausted, seriously injured, or dying.

Gamefowl (Old Descendants of jungle fowl, gamefowl is a term given to the game (fighting) breeds and any English Games and of a breed of fowl used for cockfighting.

Gizzard Blow A wound to the bird's gizzard area sometimes resulting in paralysis.

Hack (Hacked Cock) A gamecock who will not show fight when presented to another cock. When a bird loses his courage or is dominated by another, he is said to be under hack.

Hack Fights A single cockfight, held independently of other fights. The impromptu fighting of extra birds brought to the fight location while awaiting the start of the organized matches.

Handle A term used by the referee requiring the handlers to pick up or separate their birds, often after one or both birds have a gaff hung in the other, or in the pit wall or floor. After each handle the birds are again faced, and the fight resumes.

Hand Sparring A method of evaluating hitting ability. A cocker holds a cock or stag he intends to cull and uses the bird as a moving target for the bird being trained, who is fitted with sparring muffs.

Hang When one or both birds has a steel gaff stuck in his body and cannot dislodge it to continue the fight.

Heel The act of attaching gaffs or knives to the legs of the birds to be fought.

Heel By Band Number The act of heeling the birds according to the number on the leg band. See “Leg Band.”

Heels See “Gaffs.”

Hen Female chicken used for breeding.

Keep Refers to a program of intense training and conditioning of gamecocks prior to a match, especially the last two weeks before a fight. This period is often preceded by a pre-keep, which lasts about two weeks. A cock who is being conditioned is said to be in keep.

Knife (Slasher) A steel weapon resembling a curved blade. Varieties of slashers include the Filipino slasher or long knife, the Mexican slasher or short knife, and the socket knife. Usually, only one knife is attached to the left leg of each rooster in a knife fight.

Leg Band A small plastic or metal band placed around a cock’s leg in order to identify him. At a derby or other major fight, a bird will have a band placed on his leg by the pit operator after he has been weighed. A number on the band will be checked before the fight begins to ensure that another bird has not been substituted by a dishonest cocker.

Main A type of cockfight in which two parties agree to show a certain number of cocks and match all those who weigh within 2 ounces of each other. The winner of the majority of the battles wins the main.

Main Score Lines Parallel lines drawn approximately 6 to 8 feet apart on the floor of the main pit upon which the birds are released at the start of a cockfight.

Matchmaker The person responsible for matching birds according to such information as weight and band number.

Molt The word molt (or moult) means to cast or shed. When used in reference to fowl, it means the period when one suit of feathers is shed for another. The process is slow, lasting an average of about 4 months from the time the feathers begin to drop until the new feathers have hard quills. It is common for fowl to act lethargic during this period, which lasts from the latter part of July to about mid-November. Cockfighting activity also generally subsides during this period.

Mounting Blocks See “Botana.”

Muffs (Sparring or Padded muffs designed to be placed over a cock's or stag's natural spurs to prevent serious injuries from occurring during sparring matches.

Naked Heel A gamecock who is not equipped with artificial spurs. A term used to describe a cockfight without the use of gaffs or other artificial spurs.

Pit (Arena) 1. The pit is generally an enclosed area in which cockfights are staged. The pit can range from 15 to 20 feet in diameter. In some cases, an enclosure is not necessary. A space on the ground need only be cleared of rocks and debris so that the boundaries and score lines can be drawn in the dirt. 2. To set (cocks, etc.) in a pit to fight.

Pittings The term used to describe the successive starts of a fight due to the referee's calling a handle. Time between pittings is 20 seconds.

Postiza An artificial spur made of aluminum, plastic, or turtle shell that is attached to the stumps of a gamecock's natural spur with glue and tape. Cockfights using such implements are popular in Puerto Rico, Central and South America, and parts of the United States.

Pullet Term for a young female fowl until she finishes her first molt.

Quitter A bird who fails to continue the attack, even if the other bird is dead. A quitter always loses.

Rattled A term used to describe a bird who is having trouble breathing due to a punctured lung. A rattled cock usually emits a gurgling sound due to the blood in the air passageways.

Round Head Specially bred rooster who has no comb or wattles to dub.

Run A conditioning method in which a bird is placed on a bench and pushed along with one hand, then turned around and run in the other direction with the other hand. This exercise is intended to build stamina.

Runner A bird who attempts to flee the pit to avoid a fight.

Score Lines See "Main Score Lines" and "Short Score Lines."

Shakes (Shakebags) Roosters weighing 6 pounds, 6 ounces and over.

Shoot To shoot another cock: To pierce an opposing cock with a gaff. Often shouted as words of encouragement, such as "Shoot 'em!"

Short Heels See "Gaffs."

Short Score Lines Parallel lines drawn 16 to 24 inches apart in the pit upon which the birds are released after being handled.

Show 1. A cockfight, derby, or tournament. 2. A cock who is eager to fight. 3. A cocker's collection of cocks, as in, "He brought a good show to the last derby."

Shuffle A combination of blows struck by a cock.

Shuffler A term used to describe a cock with the ability to strike many times very quickly.

Slasher See "Knife."

Slip Leg (Slip Spur, A term used to describe a cock who does not have a full natural spur on which to fasten a gaff. Slip Heel) Special materials must be used to attach a gaff to a slip leg cock.

Spar A brief cockfight between birds heeled with sparring muffs in order to determine fighting style and evaluate fighting ability or progress during a keep.

Sparring Muffs See “Muffs.”

Sparring Stags A method of evaluating a stag’s fighting ability from the age of 6 months to 1 year to determine which stags will be culled and which stags will be tested for gameness.

Spur Saw A small saw used to trim a cock’s natural spurs.

Stag Term for a young male fowl until he finishes his first molt (usually about 18 months of age).

Station The height of a bird as determined by the length of his legs. Gamecocks are said to be high, medium, or low stationed. The station of a cock is a factor in the type of gaff that will be chosen for him.

String Walk See “Walk.”

Sun Coop A portable pen that is set on the ground outside the cockhouse for a cock being conditioned so he is not confined in a stall all of the time.

Testing Any of a variety of methods used to determine the gameness of stags between about 10 months to 1 year of age in which the bird to be tested is pitted against other birds a number of times over a period of days. Because the tests are intended to be severe and because they are usually conducted with the combatants wearing heels, it is not unusual for a number of the birds to be killed.

Texas Twister A type of gaff that features a twisting spike.

Tie-out Cord A cord fastened to a leg of a cock and secured to a stake or pen in a yard. Tie-out cords prevent cocks from coming into contact with other cocks in a yard while allowing them to scratch freely and exercise.

Tournament A large cockfighting event in which every entry must meet each other entry one time. In a tournament, a cocker may fight as many as 16 different birds, and the elimination process is long and complex. The derby is now much more popular than the tournament in most regions.

Trimming Out The removal of certain feathers prior to a fight; usually includes the shortening of the long tail (sickle) feathers, wing primaries, and removal of some back (saddle) feathers and plumage around the vent.

Vent Cloaca, the anal area of a rooster.

Walk Any of several different methods for keeping and housing a cock. A country walk or farm walk allows the cock to run free and establish his own territory. This method is often used for young stags and older birds. A string walk places the birds on individual tie-out cords, each with

his own shelter. Often, more than 100 cocks can be kept in a yard on separate string walks. Birds who are kept in coops or pens are said to have a coop walk or pen walk.

Wheeler A rooster who attempts to tire and disorient his opponent by running in circles.

Wry Neck The puncturing of a bird's neck nerves by a gaff, causing partial to complete paralysis of the neck muscles.

Yard The area in which cocks are kept or housed when not being conditioned for a fight.