



AP photo

Pete Sparks watches one of his dogs patrol the yard.

Starke man ignores complaints, raises pit bulls

The Associated Press

STARKE — The dogs Pete Sparks raises aren't "man's best friends."

Sparks, the dean of Florida pit bull breeders, measures a puppy's value by his fighting spirit and the power in his jaws.

"If he can't punish the other dog, and he doesn't have the biting power, then he's not going to be what you call a top dog," says the stooped, 83-year-old Starke resident.

Humane Society officials blame Sparks, along with the approximately 50 other pit bull breeders in the state, for tragedies such as the death last week of 9-week-old Daniel Lloyd Smith, who was killed by a pet pit bull while sleeping in his crib in Davie.

"Mr. Sparks really is the problem,

he and people like him," says Marc Paulhus, director of the Tallahassee office of the Humane Society of the United States. "For many years, he was perhaps the most visible advocate of dogfighting in this country."

Pit bulls are not mean by nature, but the variation of the family bred for fighting is extremely dangerous, Paulhus says. He claims most of the pit bulls which have attacked people in Florida in recent years are descendants of fighters bred by Sparks.

"If a pit bull attacks you, he means business," he says. "He's going to do damage, severe damage."

Sparks disagrees, blaming the accidents on genetic quirks.

"There are screwballs in this breed as well as in other breeds, and some of these dogs are emotionally unstable," Sparks says.

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PIT BULL ATTACKS IN S. FLORIDA

Herald Staff

Here are some of the worst pit bull attacks in South Florida in the last five years:

DEC. 1, 1979 -- Michael "Frankie" Scarbrough, then 6, was playing in his Hollywood yard when a pit bull ripped into his face and scalp. The boy was in a hospital for 30 days while doctors began what they said will be a 15-year process to rebuild his face.

JAN. 15, 1980 -- Ethel Tiggs, 71, stepped into the back yard of her northwest Miami home to find her two pit bulls loose. The dogs severely bit her on the buttocks, legs, back, head and face before police shot them dead.

JAN. 25, 1980 -- James Harris, 62, lost his thumb while trying to snatch his pet dachshund from the jaws of a 60-pound pit bull. Doctors reattached the retired Carol City banker's thumb. The dachshund died.

MAY 6, 1983 -- Letter carrier Jean Zambory was attacked by a pit bull as she made her rounds in Hollywood. She was hospitalized three times and missed more than three months of work. A Broward circuit jury awarded her \$300,000 earlier this year.

SEPT. 7, 1984 -- Four pit bulls attacked Lisa Gritzalis in Broward County. She required 400 stitches on her arms and legs.

DEC. 7, 1984 -- Daniel Lloyd Smith, 9 weeks old, died at Miami Children's Hospital five hours after a 9-year-old pit bull jumped into his crib at his Davie home. He received severe lacerations and broken ribs.

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1. **Miami Herald** - December 13, 1984 - 12BR BRWD

FATAL PIT BULL ATTACK ON INFANT RULED AN ACCIDENT

The fatal mauling of a 9-week-old Davie infant last Friday by a pit bull terrier has been ruled an accident by the Dade County medical examiner's office. Daniel Lloyd Smith died of massive head injuries at Miami Children's Hospital about six hours after the 2 p.m. attack, which took place at the home of Linda Jacques, 14201 SW 24th St. The baby and his mother, Lisa Smith, 16, had been guests in Jacques' home for a week. The infant also...

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