

Yonkers man charged with animal fighting in pit bull case

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The Journal News

YONKERS — A Yonkers man who police said was running a pit bull fighting center out of his private house in the Dunwoodie section of the city has been charged in connection with that illegal operation, the Westchester County District Attorney's office said yesterday.

Peter Byrne, 25, of 34 Alida St., is charged with animal fighting, a felony under the agriculture and marketing laws, according to Lucian Chalfen, a spokesman for Westchester County District Attorney Janet DiFiore.

Byrne faces up to four years in state prison for the charge if found guilty, Chalfen said.

The case is being handled by an assistant district attorney who is versed in issues regarding animal cruelty, Chalfen said.

She was called to Byrne's Yonkers home to be present dur-

ing the police raid, Chalfen said.

Byrne and his co-defendant, Anthony Gonzalez, 24, of 2A Garfield St., are already facing felony drug charges.

In a drug raid of Byrne's house Tuesday, police said they confiscated 6 ounces of cocaine, \$15,980 in cash, a scale and drug packaging material.

Both men are charged with second-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, a felony, in connection with that charge.

Police also uncovered a pit bull fighting center when they rescued 15 starving, dehydrated, scarred and emaciated dogs from cages in Byrne's garage.

In his basement was a 3-foot-high plastic glass enclosure, treadmill for dogs, animal medication, chains and a whip. Police said that was evidence of dog training and fighting.

The dogs are being treated at the Yonkers Animal Shelter and by a veterinarian.

"None of them are at death's door, but they were all running

about 15 pounds underweight," said Kenneth D. Ross, head of the SPCA of Westchester.

Ross said the fate of the dogs is in limbo. The dogs remain Byrne's property until there is a disposition in his criminal case, Ross said.

"The law looks at the animals as property," said Ross. "They are held as property."

Unless Byrne signs a waiver, the dogs cannot be put up for adoption until his case is completed and would remain at the shelter, Ross said.

Ross said the shelter environment is only a good short-term solution.

"The shelter environment over a prolonged period is not good for the dogs," said Ross. "They can go kennel crazy."

"Long term in a shelter environment, a lot of these dogs don't do great," Ross said. "They get taken out of the fire and they get put back into the fire."

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