

CAMEL WRESTLING: FAMOUS WINTER PASTIME IN TURKEY



Animals have been used for centuries all over the world for the purpose of human entertainment. Most people have heard of the much-maligned cock fighting and bull fighting. Away from the brutal and controversial 'sports', there are more civilised events involving animals such as greyhound racing and horse racing, both of which are most popular with the gamblers. Then, for the ultimate animal lovers, there are dog beauty contests. However, few people have heard of camel fighting, few people outside of Turkey that is.

Before the animal rights activists get off their chairs, these events are supposed to be harmless for the four-legged beasts. Most contests end with one of the animals running away in fear of its opponent. In this case, the spectators end up being in the biggest danger, along with being in the unenviable position of being frequently splattered with the saliva and urine of the fighting camels.

These camels are traditionally of the Tulu breed, which are purposefully overfed throughout their lives in order to be overweight. Furthermore, the ritual surrounding the 'fights' can be somewhat farcical. A female is shown to both male fighters in order to get them wound up and riled before the fighting begins. Victory is achieved when the opponent either falls, retreats, screams or if the beast's owner throws in the white towel.

Bouts take place during the mating season, which is in the winter. In the Aegean region of Turkey, however, temperatures during the winter are not that much of an issue for outdoor events.

There are an estimated 1200 camels involved in such activities in Turkey today although the numbers are expected to drop as the cost of keeping the animals continues to rise. In Turkey, the purpose of a camel is not only to fulfil the position of the desert legend with strange-looking humps.

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