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Artest's dog woes aren't new

Since July, his pets have spent 77 nights at the pound at a cost of \$1,942 in fees.

**By Dorothy Korber and Christina Jewett - Bee Staff Writers
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Ron Artest says he loves dogs, but the Kings basketball star has a string of complaints on record in Placer County for failure to care for his own pets and letting them roam loose.

Since July, his four dogs have spent a total of 77 nights at the pound -- at a cost to their master of \$1,942 in boarding and impound fees.

The incidents culminated Sunday when animal control officers showed up at Artest's sprawling Loomis estate and seized Socks, his Great Dane, and began investigating Artest for failing "to provide proper sustenance." Socks was underweight, according to Artest's own account.

Under California law, Artest could be criminally charged for a misdemeanor or a felony, and potentially fined up to \$20,000, according to Placer County officials.

"We take a look at all the animals -- if one's not being cared for properly, we look at the others," said Tim Goffa, an official with Placer County Animal Services.

Artest blamed Socks' condition on improper feeding by his dog sitter. On Tuesday, he told The Bee that the sitter was feeding two of his dogs and that one of them, an American bulldog, "dominated all the food."

"The situation got out of hand" during a seven-day road trip, he said in an interview after practice Wednesday. "Then we got back and got a handle on it."

When animal control officers showed up to take the Great Dane on Sunday, they were already familiar with Artest's pets: Socks, Harley the pit bull, Biscuit the golden retriever, and a fourth dog the records did not name.

Before this week's incident, officers had gone to the Artest home six times since July in response to callers' complaints, documents from Placer County Animal Services show.

A July complaint stated: "Four dogs tied up not being fed for six wks. Aggressive when they get loose." An August complaint said the dogs "are loose often," and that their owner has been out of town for several months.

In October, a caller reported that a "loose pit bull" was in Artest's front yard. In December, officers

responded to a call that Socks had been struck by a car.

In a July interview with The Bee, Artest spoke of having seven dogs on his rural estate. Since then, the numbers have dwindled, and Artest conceded Wednesday there have been problems.

Socks suffered a broken leg in the auto accident. And Biscuit never was found after his last escape.

Another dog was killed in his yard, Artest wrote in an e-mail to The Bee.

"My other little puppy was killed by a wild animal up here in Roseville," said Artest, who suggested that a mountain lion or bobcat might have been to blame.

He said he'd sent some of the other dogs to Indiana "because my doggy watcher couldn't take care of all the dogs."

Allan Frumkin, president of the Sierra Ridge Estates Homeowners Association, is among 18 homeowners in Artest's gated Loomis community.

Frumkin said the loose dogs became a problem shortly after Artest and his family moved to their 5-acre Sierra Ridge property last spring. He noted that Artest was away much of the summer, when someone else periodically fed and watered the dogs.

"It became general knowledge that he wasn't taking good care of his dogs," said Frumkin. Neighbors felt compelled to look after the animals, he said. "One neighbor fed them and bought a watering machine for them."

Rosemary Frieborn is monitoring the Socks case in her role as president of Friends of Placer County Animal Shelter.

"This dog was a rack of bones," she said, adding she hopes Artest is charged for neglecting the dog.

But another observer said Artest is a good dog owner.

Oscar Navarro, a gardener who has tended Artest's property for the last four months, said he has seen no evidence that Artest neglects his dogs: "From what I've seen, he's doing everything right."

Navarro said Socks lived inside the house for the better part of a month while recuperating from her injury.

"The dog was in a carpeted living room," he said. "She was living better than a lot of people."

In his e-mail to The Bee, Artest said he looks forward to getting his Great Dane back. And, to help him manage the dogs, he said he has hired a new caretaker for his animals.

"I have a new professional doggy watcher from out of state that will help me train my dogs better," Artest wrote. "I'm horrible at that."

"I love dogs and think they should be able to live (as) freely as possible."

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