

## CASE #10: OFF THE FIELD

Michael Vick made headlines in 2007 when authorities discovered his involvement in illegal dog-fighting.<sup>1</sup> Through the legal proceedings, the public learned that he had been a heavy hitter in the dog fighting world, engaging in the purchase, training, abuse, and inhumane killing of many animals. He pled guilty in August of 2007, and was released from prison in August of 2009.<sup>2</sup>

As Vick reenters society and seeks to reenter the role of professional football player, as well, many have called his character into question, asking whether he ought to be allowed to continue his role as a famous professional athlete.<sup>3</sup> Animal rights groups have expressed willingness to accept the actions that Vick has taken since his conviction to educate the public about the horrors of animal abuse, but also hold some reservations about his reentry into the public spotlight. As stated in the New York Times:

In May, the Humane Society broke ranks with other animal rights groups by announcing a partnership with Vick.... The relationship between Vick and the Humane Society is part of a well-manicured initiative that benefits Vick as well as the organization. Vick uses the Humane Society for validation. The society plans to use Vick to discuss the evils of dogfighting and animal cruelty with young adults in urban areas.<sup>4</sup>

While dog fighting is a horrific crime, resulting in terrible trauma to its victims, dogs are not the only ones subject to harsh treatment, particularly by NFL players. In 2000, Colts player, Steve Muhammed's wife died, and he faced charges of battery relating to her death.<sup>5</sup> In 2004, Dolphin's tight end, Randy McMichael was arrested for hitting his pregnant wife.<sup>6</sup> These are not the only violent episodes against the families of NFL players, but none has received as much press as Michael Vick's involvement in dog fighting.<sup>7</sup> Some people, such as comedian Chris

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<sup>1</sup> The Associated Press, "Vick linked to dog selling business,"

[http://www.usatoday.com/sports/football/nfl/falcons/2007-05-04-vick-website\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/sports/football/nfl/falcons/2007-05-04-vick-website_N.htm), *USA Today* (May 4, 2007); The Associated Press, "Summary of Michael Vick Dog Fighting Case," [http://www.philly.com/philly/wires/ap/news/state/pennsylvania/20090814\\_ap\\_summaryofmichaelvickdogfightingcase.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/wires/ap/news/state/pennsylvania/20090814_ap_summaryofmichaelvickdogfightingcase.html), *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Aug. 14, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> "Vick faces prison time after agreeing to plead guilty," <http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=2983121>, *ESPN News Services* (Aug. 21, 2007);

<sup>3</sup> Jeansonne, John, "Michael Vick gets mixed reaction from animal rights groups," <http://www.newsday.com/sports/football/vick-gets-mixed-reaction-from-animal-rights-groups-1.1370594>, *Newsday.com* (Aug. 14, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Rhoden, William C., "Vick's path to redemption is clear," <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/29/sports/football/29rhoden.html?em>, *The New York Times*, Aug. 28, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Huppke, Rex W., "NFL Wife's Death a Shadow on Playoffs," <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jan/16/news/mn-54467>, *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 16, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Associated Press, "Notebook: Miami TE arrested for hitting wife," [http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/sports/2001968573\\_nfl30.html](http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/sports/2001968573_nfl30.html), *Seattle Times* (June 30, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> See also, "Former NFL player charged in Lakewood Ranch attack," <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090506/ARTICLE/905069997?Title=Former-NFL-player-charged-in-Lakewood-Ranch-attack>, *Sarasota Herald Tribune* (May 6, 2009). For statistics on online published news articles, see Google's advanced news search, enter names of party and view number of articles by date. Over 11,000 articles on Michael Vick were published right around the time of his conviction for dog fighting.

Rock, question why people have become so outraged over Vick's actions, and think that the outrage may misunderstand the context in which the crime occurred.<sup>8</sup>

Wayne Pacelle, the Humane Society's president and CEO, recently discussed the partnership with Vick, and stated, "Do I believe that he cares about animals and wants to see dogfighting end? Yes.... In terms of the depth of his passion, I'm not a mind reader, but I believe he's going to say the right things to kids and that he's going to stick with the program."

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<sup>8</sup> Perloff, Andrew, "Chris Rock says outrage over dogfighting is forced," <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/danpatrick/blog/73901/index.html>, based on interview with Dan Patrick, *Sports Illustrated* (Aug. 12, 2009).