

January 22, 2009

Roger Goodell, Commissioner
National Football League
280 Park Ave., 15th Fl.
New York, NY 10017

1 pg. via fax: 212-681-7599

Dear Mr. Goodell:

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the largest animal rights group in the world, with more than 2 million members and supporters. Perhaps you do not know that PETA has been meeting for a year and a half with Michael Vick's legal, sports, personal, and other representatives, at their request, and, before his incarceration, with Michael himself. Our first involvement was in providing a custom-designed empathy training course, which Michael took at our offices, and then a follow-up exam. We have subsequently met because of Michael's promise to do a TV spot against dogfighting for PETA and, most recently, because Billy Martin, Joel Segal, and other Vick representatives have asked us not to protest in the event that Michael were to return to the NFL. I am writing to you now because we understand that you may shortly make a decision. We will share with you our concern about a matter we brought to the attention of all of Michael's representatives last November.

While we believe that dogfighting is among the lowest of crimes (because, like child abuse, it is a violent series of acts against defenseless victims) and while we have protested at court appearances, games, and stores before Michael was suspended, convicted, sentenced, and had his sponsorship dropped, we have always been open to working with him on rehabilitation. He has apologized publicly and to me personally. Whether that was out of contrition or simply feigned for the benefit of the public and the judge, we cannot know. Until now, we have given him the benefit of the doubt. Reluctantly, however, we must face one grave concern that now involves you.

Two months ago, the USDA released a new report of its investigation into Michael's conduct. As we told his lawyers then, this report is so disturbing that it cannot be dismissed by simply repeating that Michael had a bad upbringing and bad influences in his life. When the report was released, the world already knew that Michael had electrocuted, strangled, drowned, and shot dogs (although it now seems that he used a variety of guns, as if that in itself were a sport).

The last USDA report also shows that Michael wanted losing dogs killed rather than given away and that he put family pets into the pit with the fighting dogs. Rather than showing remorse for any of the suffering or death that he caused, Michael laughed when he saw dogs torn apart. He also killed dogs by slamming



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them to the ground, which broke their backs and necks and caused them to suffer a particularly painful, slow death.

As we told his counsel, this behavior seems to fit the established profile of antisocial personality disorder, as set out by criteria established by the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, and it could change our willingness to support Michael further. In common parlance, people with this disorder are referred to as "psychopaths."

Psychopaths lack the ability to put themselves in their victims' place (i.e., to feel empathy), fail to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior, are frequently manipulative and charming, lie easily, take pleasure in the suffering of others, and have difficulty controlling their impulses. Cruelty to animals is a well-established predictor of psychopathic behavior.

As you know, Michael has broken the law multiple times, and his acts show aggression and a failure to recognize suffering in others. In addition, not only did he tell blatant lies to the NFL, he also lied on his polygraph, only confessing when confronted with the polygraph's findings, which showed that he was lying. The USDA report shows his blatant lack of remorse before his involvement was exposed. That Michael claimed to be remorseful after being arrested does not change this fact.

The question arises about whether Michael can change. Unfortunately, the prognosis for antisocial personality disorder is abysmal. With behavior as aberrant as Michael's, we worry that, despite our wish that it were otherwise, there is scant reason for optimism.

Should any doubt remain in this regard, a psychiatric evaluation should be arranged. It could include a structured, standardized test (e.g. the Psychopathy Checklist, developed by Robert Hare) and new brain-scanning techniques (e.g. those developed by Kent Kiehl) that demonstrate brain dysfunction. If Michael emerges from these examinations without evidence of psychopathy, that may help him demonstrate a capacity to change what has so far been the life of a man who takes pleasure in hurting and killing living beings who are incapable of defending themselves.

However, the repeated cruelty and aggression demonstrated by Michael strongly suggests that he is not the kind of person who should be offered as a role model. Severe and repeated acts of cruelty to animals are, of course, not what football fans, particularly children, need to think about when they see a football star, or buy a jersey or an autographed picture. Michael's appalling acts of cruelty to animals will always be a part of his image. That will not go away. We look to the NFL for something very different.

Very truly yours,



Ingrid E. Newkirk
President