



July 27, 2009

Mr. Roger Goodell  
Commissioner  
National Football League  
280 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Commissioner Goodell:

The No Kill Advocacy Center is a national animal protection organization working to end the systematic killing of animals in our nation's shelters. We do this by assisting animal activists throughout the country who are working to reform their local shelters by encouraging them to replace century old ways of operating which favor killing with innovative, life-affirming programs and services which save lives. Paradoxically, this work often involves challenging the large national animal protection organizations, such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the ASPCA, which - threatened by the growing success of programs they have historically opposed - often come to the defense of regressive shelter directors who refuse to innovate and modernize as humane ethics dictate.

Given this unfortunate reality, it is not surprising that the American public and grassroots activists often find themselves at cross purposes with these large national organizations, which do not faithfully reflect their progressive values relating to dogs and cats. There is no better proof of this disconnect than the National Football League's (NFL) recent decision to reinstate Michael Vick, and the tragic capitulation – and in the case of HSUS, that organization's rallying cry on behalf of – Michael Vick being reinstated in the NFL. In spite of their names and stated mission, these organizations do not reflect the values of the hundreds of thousands of animal rescuers throughout the country, nor the millions of animal loving Americans who were not only heartbroken and angered by the egregious acts of sadistic animal cruelty perpetrated by Michael Vick, but the NFL's recent decision to reinstate him as well.

History reveals that social progress does not occur in a steady, linear fashion. Often the most groundbreaking change occurs in response to tragic events which throw the issue into stark relief, and give us the opportunity as a people to define – through our collective response - what it is we stand for, as well as what we don't. For the animal protection movement, the Michael Vick case was one such seminal event. When the news broke of Michael Vick's atrocities, the entire nation was horrified, and

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the public's outrage was unequivocal. He was banned from the NFL. He was convicted by the federal courts. He was sent to prison. It was the correct response to such brutality, and a reflection of just how much the American people love dogs and want them to be protected. Those of us working to further the welfare and status of animals were relieved to witness the public's universal condemnation and the powerful precedent it fostered as it unfolded in the court of public opinion.

Now, the NFL has sacrificed this valuable precedent by allowing Vick to return to his former life, and by asking those of us who love animals to endure the obscene spectacle of a person capable of such cruelty once again in a stadium, before a cheering crowd. Working to dissipate the righteous anger, working to remove the consequences of Vick's actions, the NFL has opened a new chapter to a story that already had the best possible ending those who love dogs could have hoped for: When Vick was caught torturing innocent animals for sadistic enjoyment, he received what should have been permanent and lasting consequences. He lost his career. He lost his money. He lost his reputation. He lost virtually everything. And dog fighters everywhere witnessed the high cost of punishment, and received the powerful message that dog fighting will be met with swift, complete and permanent retribution. Having reversed this powerful precedent, the NFL has undermined all of these achievements.

Football is simply a game. The pain, suffering and killing Michael Vick inflicted on hundreds of dogs was not. Tragically, it was very real. Common decency, and the compassionate values that most Americans now hold, demand that we not allow anyone capable of such depravity – regardless of who they are, what regrets they may strategically and conveniently claim to now have, nor the allies in the animal protection field they may have converted to their perverted cause – a place in the American limelight.

The response by the American people when this tragedy first unfolded reveal that as a people, we are better than that – and therefore we deserve better – both from the NFL, which is a reflection of American popular culture, and the large, national animal protection organizations which claim, erroneously in this case, to speak on our behalf and on behalf of animals.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nathan J. Winograd". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "N".

Nathan J. Winograd