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### Vick Receives 23 Months and a Lecture

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Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

Animal-rights activists lined the road Monday leading to the federal courthouse in Richmond.

By JULIET MACUR

Published: December 11, 2007

RICHMOND, Va., Dec. 10 — [Michael Vick](#), the former Atlanta Falcons star who has traded his No. 7 jersey for a black-and-white-striped jail uniform, stood expressionless in a federal courtroom Monday and apologized to the court and his family for his involvement in a dogfighting ring. But for the judge about to decide Vick's fate, those words were not enough.

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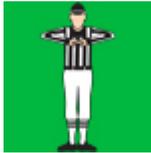
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“I think you need to apologize once again to the millions of people who look up to you,” United States District Court Judge Henry E. Hudson said.

“Yes, sir,” Vick answered.

Hudson then sentenced Vick to 23 months in prison, more than Vick’s co-defendants in the case — and also more than the 12 to 18 months prosecutors originally suggested, as part of Vick’s plea agreement.

Hudson said Vick had lied about the extent of his role in the dogfighting operation, which had lasted six years. The judge and prosecutors said Vick had an active role in the killing of pit bulls housed on his 15-acre property in rural southeastern Virginia.

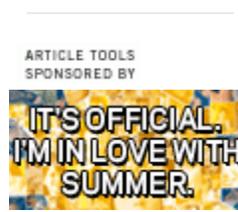
Because Vick had not admitted to his full participation in the execution of the dogs, the prosecutors agreed to the sentencing guidelines of 18 to 24 months. Michael Gill, an assistant United States attorney, asked Hudson to sentence Vick at the high end of that range.

“You were instrumental in facilitating, putting together, organizing and funding this cruel and inhumane sporting activity,” Hudson told Vick in a courtroom packed with animal-rights activists and Vick’s family and fans. “While you have acknowledged guilt and apologized, I’m convinced it was not a momentary lapse of judgment on

your part. You were a full partner.”

Vick, 27, pleaded guilty in August to bankrolling a dogfighting operation, Bad Newz Kennels, and to helping kill six to eight dogs. He voluntarily entered prison three weeks ago, in Warsaw, Va.

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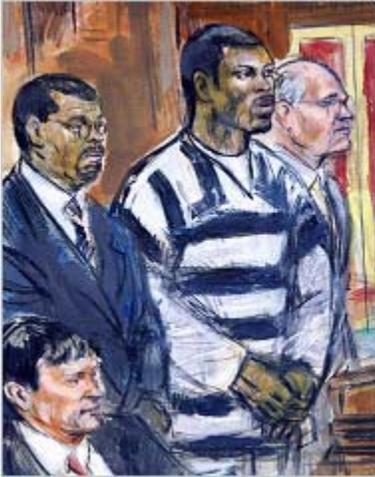
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Dayna Verkouteren/Associated Press

When sentencing Michael Vick, center, the judge said, "I'm convinced it was not a momentary lapse of judgment on your part."

Based on federal guidelines for good behavior, Vick's sentence could end as early as the summer of 2009, meaning he may be able to play that season. What complicates, and perhaps would prevent, a possible comeback are state dogfighting charges Vick faces in Virginia, for which he could serve additional jail time. That trial begins in April.

Representatives from animal-rights groups attending the sentencing applauded the judge's decision. While some were disappointed that Vick did not apologize specifically for killing the dogs, they said his case helped expose the brutality of dogfighting and the consequences of engaging in it.

"I think the judge sent a strong message to dogfighters that this is a dead-end activity, and for professional athletes, it's a career-killer," said John P. Goodwin, manager of animal fighting issues for the [Humane Society of the United States](#).

Monday's proceedings provided the next chapter in the dramatic and dizzying fall of Vick, who was once the highest-paid and one of the highest-profile players in the N.F.L. As the Falcons' franchise quarterback, he had a 10-year, \$130 million contract and lucrative endorsement deals. But now the N.F.L. has suspended him indefinitely. His major endorsements have vanished. Financial institutions have also started legal proceedings against him for defaulted loans. The Falcons are seeking to recover \$20 million in bonuses from him. Prosecutors forced Vick to pay more than \$928,000 for the evaluation and care of the 47 dogs that were taken from his property. Six other dogs that were seized have died or were euthanized.

The Falcons' owner, Arthur Blank, said the sentencing was only one step in Vick's legal journey.

"This is a difficult day for Michael's family and for a lot of us, including many of our players and fans who have been emotionally invested in Michael over the years," Blank said in a statement. "We sincerely hope that Michael will use this time to continue to focus his efforts on making positive changes in his life, and we wish him well in that regard."



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In addressing the judge yesterday, Vick said, "I hope I can move forward in my life and make better decisions."

As Vick spoke, his mother, Brenda Boddie, sat in the courtroom and wiped tears with a wad of wet, crumpled tissues. Her other son, Marcus, wrapped his arm around her. Other family members wept for the entire 45 minutes of the proceedings.

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*Judy Battista contributed reporting from Foxborough, Mass.*

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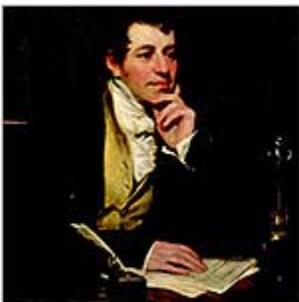
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