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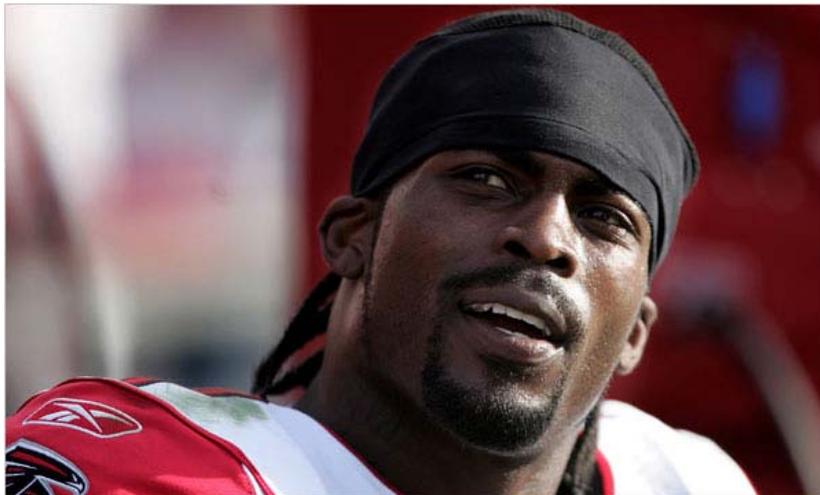
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In a Surprise, Vick Signs With the Eagles

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Doug Pensinger/Getty Images

Michael Vick has not played professional football since 2006.

By JUDY BATTISTA
Published: August 13, 2009

[Michael Vick](#), exiled from football for two seasons, finally has a new team, and it is not one anyone expected. The [Philadelphia Eagles](#), who have [Donovan McNabb](#) as their starting quarterback, sent a shock wave through the preseason Thursday night by signing Vick. He will give them a versatile backup who can run as well as pass, but who could also eventually compete for McNabb's job.

Coach Andy Reid [benched McNabb briefly last season](#) during a poor performance against the [Ravens](#). McNabb chafed at the move. But he rallied after that and led the Eagles to the National Football Conference championship game, where they lost to the [Arizona Cardinals](#).

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The N.F.C. East may be the [N.F.L.](#)'s most treacherous division, and the addition of Vick could help the Eagles establish supremacy over the [Giants](#).

"I'm a believer that as long as people go through the right process, they deserve a second chance," Reid said Thursday night after the Eagles lost to the [Patriots](#), 27-25, in a preseason game.

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Jason Reed/Reuters

Michael Vick's running ability set him apart from other N.F.L. quarterbacks. In Philadelphia, Vick, left, will be backing up Donovan McNabb, who defeated Vick in the N.F.C. championship game in January 2005, right.

"You're talking about one of the top quarterbacks in the league when he was playing," Reid added. "I talked to Michael and he's in a good place."

McNabb, 32, has never enjoyed universal fan support in Philadelphia. If he struggles during the season, there could be calls for Vick, 29, to take over.

Still, Reid dismissed suggestions that the addition of Vick would lead to a quarterback controversy.

"He comes into a good, stable unit here," Reid said of Vick. "Donovan and Michael are very close."

McNabb, who was rewarded with a \$5.3 million raise after last season and will make \$24.5 million over the next two years, will not have to look over his shoulder for a while. Vick, who was reinstated last month after serving 18 months in federal prison for his [role in a dogfighting ring](#), can begin practicing immediately, and he could play in the final two preseason games. But Commissioner [Roger Goodell](#) will decide by the sixth week of the season when Vick can play in a regular-season game.

"I pretty much lobbied to get him here," McNabb said. "I believe in second chances and what better place to get a second chance than here with this group of guys." McNabb added, "We had the opportunity to add another weapon to our offense."

The Eagles' decision to sign Vick drew a quick response from [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals](#), the animal-rights group.

PETA said in a statement: "What sort of message does this send to young fans who care about animals and don't want to see them be harmed? PETA certainly hopes that Vick has learned his lesson and feels truly remorseful for his crimes — but since he's given no public indication that that's the case, only time will tell." The Eagles will most likely use Vick as a backup and perhaps in a small package of plays that will take advantage of his ability to keep defenses guessing, perhaps in Wildcat-style formats where he could run or pass.

Reid has traditionally preferred a pass-oriented offense, which could hurt Vick, whose first instinct under pressure is to run with the ball. Vick struggled with his accuracy in 2006, when the Falcons went 7-9 and he completed just 52.6 percent of his passes.

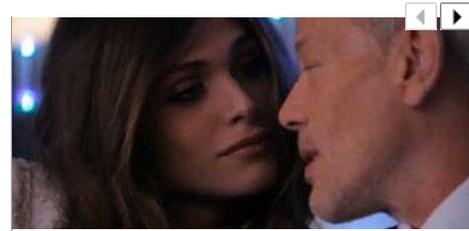
Still, Vick's scrambling ability is tantalizing, because it makes him so unpredictable. In 2006, he ran for 1,039 yards, and those who have seen Vick since his release from prison say he appears to be in fine physical condition.

Vick is the prototype for the many versatile players teams have drafted in recent years — including [Dolphins](#) quarterback Pat White and [Vikings](#) receiver Percy Harvin — to run [Wildcat-style plays](#).

Vick agreed to a one-year contract, with a one-year option, making this essentially a tryout and a chance for him to get reacclimated to the N.F.L.

[Tony Dungy](#), the former coach of the [Colts](#), has acted as Vick's mentor. Dungy has said that he spoke with several coaches about Vick, but that only a small number of teams were a good fit, particularly because owners feared an adverse reaction from fans.

The Eagles provide Vick with a stable organization to insulate him during what is sure to



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The Eagles provide Vick with a stable organization to insulate him during what is sure to

be a tumultuous return. No game may be more dramatic than when the Eagles visit Atlanta on Dec. 6. The Falcons once made Vick the highest-paid player in the N.F.L., but his new contract will pay him \$1.6 million in 2009, with an option for \$5.2 million, according to [FoxSports.com](#).

A version of this article appeared in print on August 14, 2009, on page B8 of the New York edition.

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