

Michael Vick: An analysis of press coverage on federal dogfighting charges.

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### Abstract

Michael Vick's superstar career as a quarterback in the National Football League seemingly came to an end when he pleaded guilty to dogfighting charges on August 20, 2007. This research studied press coverage of Vick's indictment, arraignment, and guilty plea in Richmond, Virginia by analyzing 243 primary documents from *The New York Times*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and *USA Today*. It offers a longitudinal examination of the scandal and elucidates the intersecting worlds of sport, media, race, and culture. This research adds to work on the cultural impact of media and sport, reinforces the criminal-athlete discourse, and elucidates the egregious practice of dogfighting.

# Michael Vick

## An Analysis of Press Coverage on Federal Dogfighting Charges

PAMELA C. LAUCELLA

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**M**ichael Vick was a "multi-million dollar sports icon," a National Football League (NFL) franchise quarterback, and a three-time Pro Bowler (Williams, 2007a, p. B1). His extraordinary talent earned him status as the No. 1 pick overall in the 2001 NFL draft, and Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank touted him a "Falcon for life" (Tucker, 2007, p. C1). He could scramble, throw a 70-yard pass, dodge defenders and run for first downs. He was an image of tenacity, power, agility, and charisma. However, that all changed when he pleaded guilty to dogfighting charges on August 20, 2007. He joined Adam "Pacman" Jones, Tank Johnson, Plaxico Burress and other NFL active and inactive players who battled the law. Vick's "fall from grace" became a "full-blown national media event" when a federal grand jury indicted him on dogfighting charges (Campbell, 2007b, p. B1; Starr, 2007).



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