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Suspend Vick now

By failing to act, commissioner disgraces league

By **DIANE SULLIVAN** and **HOLLY VIETZKE**
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The recent indictment of National Football League quarterback Michael Vick, et al., contains some of the most egregious, wanton acts of inhumanity toward animals ever reported in the sports world. The evidence as a whole, much too gruesome and extensive to repeat, leaves most of us, even lawyers such as ourselves, with little doubt about its validity.

Yet Commissioner Roger Goodell has chosen to stand behind — actually next to, in his press conference — the quarterback, vowing to let the legal process "determine the facts." This is an interesting statement, considering his hard-line stance toward Adam "Pacman" Jones and Chris Henry just three months ago. If Vick were a second-string quarterback, would he still be in the huddle this fall?



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Dogfighting is illegal in every state in the U.S. and a felony in 48 of them. Nevertheless, some people continue to engage in this cruel and reprehensible practice for gambling and depraved amusement. Very few cases are prosecuted because it is difficult to discover dogfighting operations: They are secret. We now have one that has been uncovered and with it a chance to send a strong message. But what message is sent when the quarterback's own employer chooses to look the other way?

Goodell is hardly a pushover when it comes to meting out punishment. In his one year as commissioner, Goodell has issued no fewer than five significant suspensions, often for less serious crimes. The most recent suspensions of Jones (the 2007 season) and Henry (eight games) were for violations of the league's "personal conduct policy."

In explaining his decision to suspend those players, Goodell said, "The highest standards of conduct must be met by everyone in the NFL because it is a privilege to represent the NFL, not a right. These players ... have to make the right choices and decisions in their conduct on a consistent basis."

Those players did not have to wait for the legal process — something that could take years — to determine their fate. Their conduct was enough for Goodell to act swiftly. By failing to act in this instance, Goodell indicates that Vick's reprehensible acts were the "right choices" and that the NFL's "highest standards of conduct" are nothing more than public relations spin.

In addition to Jones (involvement in fight and shooting at a strip club) and Henry (four arrests for various offenses), Goodell has also suspended Albert Haynesworth (five games for stomping on an opponent's head during a game), Tank Johnson (eight games for violating probation on a gun charge), and Dominic Rhodes (four games for violating the league's substance abuse policy). Certainly fatally electrocuting, drowning, and hanging dogs rise to the level of these offenses. The difference, however, is that none of these players — nor Jones or Henry — sport the league's second-highest selling jersey.

Vick is accused of one of the most inhumane cases of cruelty we have read about, and as law professors specializing in this area, we have read some rather horrific cases. Immediately suspending Vick is not only warranted, it is crucial to a civilized society. Goodell is disgracing the league, its many honorable players, and himself to do otherwise.

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