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## Vick's Return to NFL Casts Light on Corporate Sponsorships

**Sponsors Stick With Eagles, but Did Team Owe Them Any Advance Warning of Signing?**

By [Rich Thomaselli](#)  
Published: [August 18, 2009](#)



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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- No sponsors have defected from the Philadelphia Eagles or the National Football League in the wake of Michael Vick's return to the league, but last week's announcement cast a spotlight on the sometimes-tenuous relationship between team and corporate partner.

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Michael Vick

Should the Eagles have reached out to its 44 corporate sponsors with some advance notice that the team planned to sign Mr. Vick, who was imprisoned for 23 months after pleading guilty to bankrolling a dog-fighting operation and who killed and tortured some of the

under-performing dogs?

Typically, teams, leagues and even individual athletes do not give their sponsors advance notice of their activities, and are under no legal or contractual obligation to do so. "The sponsors signed a valid contract and must pay whether they sign Michael Vick or Joseph Stalin," said Robert Boland, sports marketing professor at New York University. "But what is legal isn't always what is good, or right."

**A heads-up**

Eagles President Joe Banner said that about a half-dozen of the team's sponsors called him following last Friday's press conference featuring Mr. Vick, Eagles coach Andy Reid and team owner Jeffrey Lurie. "One thing they wanted to do was find out what our thinking was. Another thing they said was that they wished we could have given them a heads-up so that they could have prepared their corporate communications people," Mr. Banner told the Philadelphia Daily News. "We will continue to talk to our corporate sponsors. We will reach back out to them. A couple have issued statements so far. As far as I know, nobody was angry and nobody threatened to cancel. But some did want to understand our thinking, and we spent some time with them."

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Mr. Banner's comments beg the question of whether the Eagles should have been proactive with their sponsors, but the answers aren't so clear cut. "The Eagles should have reached out and given their sponsors some sort of inside information. It's just good business in this current climate," said Mr. Boland. "It

creates a greater sense of connectivity in the relationship, and just

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giving a heads-up would help."

Not so fast, said sports marketing expert Marc Ganis, owner of Chicago-based consultancy SportsCorp. In this case, because of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding Mr. Vick, some of the sponsors might not have wanted to be informed of the signing ahead of time. "Some sponsors simply don't want that responsibility," Mr. Ganis said. "Because then, if word leaks out that the sponsor knew ahead of time, there's a public perception that [the sponsor] is somehow complicit in the deal. At this stage, in this particular instance with Michael Vick, no sponsor wants that."

Which is what one of the Eagles' main sponsors, Philadelphia-based Lincoln Financial Group -- which has its name on the team's stadium -- made clear in a statement it released in response to the Vick signing. "Our partnership includes a variety of community-related initiatives and reinforces our focus on supporting civic, cultural and educational programs in all the communities where we operate. We have no role in Eagles operations, including personnel decisions." Lincoln Financial committed \$140 million over 20 years in 2002 for naming rights to the stadium.

New Jersey-based sports and entertainment marketing expert Joe Favorito, who writes the popular blogs Sports Marketing and PR Roundup, said he would be surprised if the Eagles didn't somehow warn their biggest, highest-paying sponsors. "Maybe you don't call your three smallest sponsors, but if your big marketers have invested a lot of money, it could be a case of calling the most senior people and saying, 'Hey, look, if the sky changed tomorrow would you still do business with us?'" Mr. Favorito said.

### Get a pulse of the community

"In this day and age, the last thing you want to do is upset your partners. If you have the kind of solid relationship with the partner, it's also a good way to take the pulse of the rest of the business community. The teams and the brands that work best together have an open line of communication. Teams aren't under any obligation to notify their sponsors, but the last thing you want is for one of your sponsors to get a Twitter feed or even get a call from their neighbor breaking the news to them."

The Eagles did reach out to those they dub their "premium-service clients," or those who own expensive suites at Lincoln Financial field, sending them a note from Mr. Banner asking that ticket-holders "join us in our support and optimism for Michael as he commits himself to showing Philadelphia and the country he is a

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changed human being."

Surprisingly, there has been little public backlash so far. Less than 10 season ticket-holders have canceled, and other than a call for a boycott of sponsors on the website [sackvick.net](http://sackvick.net), there has been little hostility shown toward the Eagles' corporate sponsors.



## 8 Comments



By rukallstar2 | Minneapolis, MN [August 18, 2009 07:06:56 pm](#):

good. i'm glad that sponsors, fans are acting sensibly. the man has done time, he's paid his debt to society. in a lot of ways this is classic imposition of white upper-middle class values on someone who did not grow up in that environment. imagine if dog fighting was a rich white man's sport, and horse racing was a poor black man's sport, how would we look at horses dying on the track then?

[Permalink](#)

By Rodney33 | FRISCO, TX [August 19, 2009 01:32:48 am](#):

The NFL has a long history of consistently delivering a coveted male audience and being rewarded handsomely for doing so.

According to Forbes, The NFL in totality is worth \$33.3B, up from \$11.6B 10 years ago.

19 NFL teams are valued at over \$1B. The New York Yankees are the only MLB team worth more than \$1B. The most valuable NBA team, the New York Knicks is valued at \$613M.

Major League Baseball's 30 clubs are worth \$14.1B all in, up from \$6.6B 10 years ago. The NBA teams are worth \$11.4 billion from \$5.3 billion, and the NHL, \$6.6B from \$3.6B.

Six of Forbes Top 10 Most Valuable Sports Franchises in the world are NFL teams.

1. Manchester United \$1.8B
2. Dallas Cowboys \$1.6
3. Washington Redskins \$1.5
4. New England Patriots \$1.32
5. New York Yankees \$1.3
6. Real Madrid \$1.29
7. Arsenal \$1.2
8. New York Giants \$1.18

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9. New York Jets \$1.17
10. Houston Texans \$1.17

The NFL achieved this position by being relentless in understanding and delivering it's large core audience.

MLB wouldn't allow Michael Vick on the field because MLB is "America's past time" and an "affordable family sport" that generates the majority of its revenue from licensing and ticket sales. That's why so many deserving players, who have done what most would deem lesser offenses than Michael Vick and many other Hall Of Fame NFL players, are purposely being kept out of the Baseball Hall Of Fame.

Baseball revenues include \$670M in TV rights, licensing \$3.3B, \$505M in corporate sponsorships, 79.6M fans in stands that net out to over \$2B in ticket and stadium sales.

The NFL nets well over \$4B in broadcast rights, \$3B in licensing, \$785M in sponsorships, over 17.6M fans that net out over \$1B in stadium sales, and still more revenue is earned through other special content and individual team deals.

According to Michael Vick's federal indictment, when dogs at his Bad Newz Kennels lost a fight, or didn't perform, they were regularly killed. Methods included electrocution, drowning and in one instance "slamming" the dog onto a concrete floor.

Vick is a good fit for a league dedicated to beating-itself every year by rolling with the punches and pulling out all the stops.

In an odd way, he is now in a similar position as his canine victims. He has to perform every time. If he fails early on, there won't be room for him in the NFL. You can also be certain that the players across the line from him are motivated to take him down.

"Vick Victorious!" or "Vick Slammed Down"? Either way, avid fans of the sport will be watching, betting and evaluating him based on his physical performance.

The NFL will review at the end of the season, determine which moves were good and which were bad as they plot their next playbook for global domination in the sports world.

Rodney Mason, CMO  
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By Kevin | Erie, PA [August 19, 2009 08:39:06 am](#):

I hope the Philadelphia Eagle's management team and their corporate sponsors rot in hell, just like Michael Vick. This is absolutely disgusting! I am embarrassed to be a native of Pennsylvania. It is all about money! Lincoln Financial Group is despicable. What kind of a company makes a statement like, "We have no role in Eagles operations, including personnel decisions"?

Personally, I will not attend another NFL event and I will not buy any sponsor's products who support the Philadelphia Eagles. I hope other American consumers will do the same. This is wrong. This man tortured and killed innocent animals. What kind of message are we sending to our children?

[Permalink](#)

By jkantor1 | St. Petersburg, FL [August 19, 2009 10:38:44 am](#):

But he's changed. He's learned his lesson and he's sorry. (I'd be sorry too - about anything you want me to be - if it means getting a million dollar contract.)

[Permalink](#)

By scaatyrs | Burlingame, CA [August 19, 2009 11:52:00 am](#):

...and the Eagles want to "BRAND" themselves with a low life like Michael Vick? A man who tortured and killed innocent dogs? I have been asked by clients to pull campaigns down for far less. At what point do sports enthusiasts draw the line over his "god given talents" with what he represents and who he is!? Are you going to point him out to your kid and say what a great example he is? He was given a once in a lifetime chance to play 'ball....I don't care if he served time for the crime...he makes my skin crawl. Yuck! I hope the sponsors have the chutzpah to walk!

[Permalink](#)

By Greg | Trumbull, CT [August 19, 2009 02:31:40 pm](#):

Wow...

I do not at all condone Mike Vick's actions but really...rot in hell?

Look, Michael Vick senselessly got involved in something that is routine in some circles and was shamelessly unconscious of how his actions were viewed other cultures. It took 2 years in prison and the loss of over \$130 million for him to fully understand how despicable his actions were.

Vick has sat before the national media and apologized publicly for his actions and has joined forces with the Humane Society to try to reach communities that were just as unconscious of this cruelty.

How much more should he have to pay or what does he have to do be able to resume his livelihood?

The irony in this story is that those are condemning him at this point are probably not tuned into their own consciousness...

Let's face it...Michael Vick is 29 and still an outstanding weapon. A Pro Bowl selection 2 years ago when we last saw him on the field.

There are a lot of teams that want him but were afraid of the press...the bad press will die quickly if he continues to show contrition.

Mike Vick was picked up for \$1.7 m (second year is Philly's option...no guarantee) and if he is who they think he is, he will garner trade value of over 10 million. The only time that you will see him this year is on specific plays for Philly to showcase him or after he is traded.

Kudos to Philadelphia for giving Vick a second chance and taking advantage of this opportunity.

I don't see any negative perceptions being stuck on sponsors.

Greg  
Trumbull, CT  
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By jimmyscores | costa mesa, CA [August 20, 2009 10:25:01 pm](#):

BOOOOOOOOO-- PHILADELPHIA  
BOOOOOOOOO-- VICK  
BOOOOOOO-- EAGLES  
BOOOOOOOOOOO-- VICK THE DOG TORTURER----

KARMA WILL GET VICK JUST LIKET IT GOT O.J.

PARENTS SHOULD BE ASHAMED TO TAKE THEIR KIDS TO A  
GAME AND CHEER VICK  
ON. LET THE KIDS KNOW THAT VICK DID FUN THINGS TO  
DOGS LIKE HANG THEM  
FROM TREES. BURN THEM ALIVE, STAB THE DOG OVER AND  
OVER TILL IT BLEED  
TO DEATH, ELECTROCUTED THE DOG, MADE RAPE STANDS  
FOR THE DOGS AND DONT  
FORGET THE DROWNING OF HUNDRED OF DOGS PLUS MUCH  
MUCH MORE! NOW GO  
WEAR YOUR EAGLES JERSEY PROUDLY AND CHEER FOR VICK!  
YEA! YEA! YEA!  
YEA!----

MY EAGLES JERSEY IS NOW MY BUTT WIPE

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By ijr213 | Tallahassee, FL [August 21, 2009 04:41:59 pm](#):

This isn't Nathaniel Hawthorne's the Scarlet Letter. As Vick has done the time, he should be given ample time to show that he has in fact reformed, which is the point of the penalty. If you put further sanctions on him, what's the point of letting him out? Might as well keep him in jail if you're going to keep him a prisoner.

As I have stated, jail is supposed to reform individuals. When they get out, and we automatically assume that they haven't reformed and don't give them second chances, then there is something wrong with our penal/judicial system. Perhaps we should be focusing more time on that then what Vick is doing.

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