

TWENTY-THREE MONTHS IN THE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY -- A BLESSING IN DISGUISE FOR MIKE VICK.

Seven keys to restoring a battered reputation

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For Michael Vick, his is a personal crisis, with hope for total restoration.

Long before Michael Vick fell afoul of the law for dogfighting; was arrested, convicted and now sent to the federal prison, his football career and personal image were tittering on the brink. Now at a turning point, 23 months in the federal penitentiary may be a blessing in disguise.

This article presents seven steps to restore all he almost threw away.

In the 1992 movie *Sister Act*, Whoopi Goldberg's character, a floundering Lounge singer and mistress to a Mob boss who wanted her dead, was made to hide in a San Francisco conservative catholic convent as a nun for her personal safety. In the words of the head of the convent, Mother Superior, God brought Sister Mary Clarence (Whoopi) there. 'If I were you,' she told her, "I would use this time to think about my life and its direction or lack thereof."

Through divine intervention, Mike Vick has been taken off the streets and incarcerated. He "would use this time to think about his life and its direction or lack thereof."

As one of the most electrifying football players of his era, and one of the highest paid, (Vick signed a record 130 million dollars contract extension just three years ago), his on the field play in 2006 and part of the 2007 campaign, that had just begun, had become almost nonexistent. His Atlanta Falcons team was on a free fall record wise. Coming off the football field after one of those embarrassing loses, Michael Vick gave fans the middle finger. He tested positive for marijuana use, a probation violation for which he still faces prosecution in 2008; he barely escaped prosecution when suspicious substance in his water bottle at a Miami airport on January 22, 2007 was found not to be drugs. His list of transgressions goes on and on.

Here are seven keys to restore his battered reputation; football, career and personal life.

1. Accept full responsibility for his actions; Apologize and Apologize again.

After initial denials, Mike Vick took full responsibility beginning with his media statement during his mea culpa on August 27. He stopped blaming others, blaming other circumstances; and most importantly, stopped lying and apologized for his abuse of dogs. As if to underscore his desire to turn a new leaf in his life, after his guilty plea and subsequent conviction, he voluntarily reported to federal prison on November 19, 2007 a full three weeks ahead of his official sentencing date of December 10, 2007.

2. Find salvation.

One of the most important aspects of Vick's incarceration is being removed from the daily routine of everyday life, with increased possibilities of further jeopardizing his reputation and possibly his life. His daily life appeared to be spiraling out of control. With salvation and good behavior to boot, his time behind bars may actually be shorter than the federal mandatory 80 percent of the 23 months he was given.

3. Cut off some ties

Practically everyone who knows Mike Vick speaks of his intense loyalty to his “boys,” those with whom he grew up in the projects of New Port News, VA; most of whom he brought with him to Atlanta, GA when he was drafted in 2001. But, when the chips were down, it was these same “friends” who abandoned him, pled guilty and cut deals with the prosecution to testify against him. Obviously Vick’s loyalty to his friends had its limit.

4. Pay restitution

He had actually begun when he placed 900 thousand in an escrow to help surviving dogs from his Bad News dogfighting operations. To show true contrition, he could extend that payment.

5. Adopt a cause.

By adopting a cause, such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) or any others especially those with particular interest to dogs, he would be aligning himself with a key stakeholder group whose forgiveness and second chance he’d need if he is to make a successful comeback after prison life. He had visited PETA’s offices in Norfolk on Sept. 7 and met with Ingrid Newkirk, the group’s president. He could build on the substance of that visit.

Gradual approach--No, it is not to immediately request for membership and the like. It’d be just too soon; and the hurt still too raw. However, in his spare time, no pun intended, he could request and receive literature about the other aspects of responsible dog ownership. He’ll learn, among several other things, why dog owners over the world were so appalled by his acts.

Contribute—nothing indicates one’s interest in a cause than one’s financial contributions. Though some organizations may not accept his contributions earlier on, some will. Almost all non-profit organizations face the same challenges—funding. Since funding comes exclusively from individual donations, there’s a good chance someone even after initial rejections will reconsider and start accepting Michael Vick’s donations.

Count on Time and People’s forgiving spirits—People are forgiving. Over time, especially if Vick stays out of trouble in and, ultimately, out of prison, some would eventually extend an invitation for full membership.

6. Become an unpaid spokesperson

After the behind the scenes courtship, it’ll be time to embrace the cause openly, especially if overtures from the group or groups courted are encouraging and point to possible eventual reconciliation. Both sides could benefit from each other.

7. Keep his football skills sharp

Football fans, including this writer, would wait to see Mike Vick in an NFL uniform again; this time, in another number jersey, not 7; and maybe in another city. This time he’d have matured and ready to deliver what we always wanted to witness--an encore performance of his dazzling displays in his days at Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, VA

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