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May 3, 2007

Roger Goodell
Commissioner
National Football League
280 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Goodell:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (The HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization, I am writing to you regarding recent dog fighting allegations against Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick. In light of these serious allegations and other incidents of illegal animal fighting involving NFL players, The HSUS is calling upon the NFL to collaborate with us in an organized effort to eradicate animal cruelty and illegal animal fighting activity from the ranks of the NFL.

As you and most of the public are keenly aware of by now, Michael Vick is the subject of an ongoing investigation into allegations that he operated an illegal dog fighting operation out of his Virginia home. During a drug-related raid on the home, authorities found over fifty pit bulls, all of whom were in various stages of physical deterioration, locked inside concrete kennels behind the home. Also found was an inventory of instruments specific to organized dog fighting operations. Confidential informants of The Humane Society of the United States have provided us with prior intelligence about Mr. Vick's participation in this practice.

We believe that the current situation involving Michael Vick is indicative of a larger subculture within the NFL of dog fighting and other forms of violence against animals. Indeed, dogfighters do not typically stage fights between two animals they own. Rather, they fight their dogs against the dogs of other aficionados. The HSUS tracks 10 underground dog fighting magazines and a laundry list of web sites, and we can assure you that this is a major underground criminal industry. You may be aware that former NFL player LeShon Johnson was recently convicted of illegal dog fighting after a raid in Oklahoma in which 141 fighting dogs were seized.

Likewise former Dallas Cowboys lineman Nate Newton was once arrested at a dog fight, and former Oakland Raider Tyrone Wheatley, a former pit-bull breeder, once glorified pit bull fighting by describing it as "instinctive" and "motivational" in a 2001 *Sports Illustrated* interview. Wheatley also reportedly even once bragged about having sold dogs for fighting.

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More recently, in February 2007, Atlanta Falcons Jonathan Babineaux was charged with animal cruelty for allegedly beating to death of his girlfriend's pit bull. Charges against Babineaux are still pending, but the case, like all of the aforementioned cases, underscores the need for the NFL to undertake a truly aggressive outreach program targeting the issue of illegal animal fighting and animal cruelty among its players.

The problem of illegal animal fighting and other forms of animal cruelty is widespread, but they have a particular significance where high-profile sports personalities are concerned because of the influence the behavior and habits of these athletes have over fans. As you yourself stated in announcing the NFL's recently-amended Personal Conduct Policy, "It is important that the NFL be represented consistently by outstanding people as well as great football players, coaches, and staff."

Dog fighting is a serious crime, not only causing appalling animal cruelty, but also often associated with other criminal activity, such as narcotics traffic, illegal gambling, and human violence. All 50 states ban dog fighting, and it is a felony in 48 states. The Congress just passed legislation making it a federal felony to move fighting dogs across state lines, with penalties *per violation* of 3 years in jail and fines up to \$250,000.

We invite you to join with The HSUS in crafting the guidelines for an effective, zero-tolerance policy for NFL players and staff regarding animal cruelty and illegal animal fighting. We feel such a partnership has the potential to positively impact millions of young people in communities who look up to NFL athletes as role models. Additionally, a partnership between the HSUS and the NFL will help support the NFL's stated goal of holding its employees to a higher standard and will help the NFL maintain its integrity in the face of increasing concerns over the conduct of its players.

Finally, we hope you will collaborate with The HSUS to combat animal cruelty and animal fighting in order to send a clear message to the public that the NFL does indeed intend to hold its players to the highest standards. By setting an example of compassion for the public, the NFL has the chance to tackle the problem of animal cruelty and animal fighting from the top down and to truly make a difference for our communities.

I would certainly be willing to meet with you at your earliest convenience to develop the elements of a pro-active plan to address this problem. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Pacelle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wayne Pacelle
President & CEO