

SPORTS

Vick case raises question of personal responsibility

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BLACK COLLEGE WIRE

"The System" has been a source of worry and woe for black men, since Africans in America learned how to pronounce the word "system." When it comes to blacks and brushes with the law, it is often the system that takes the blame for the crime, though the man is forced to do the time. No doubt the system is flawed, but at what point do we ask ourselves what role we play in our own demise?

That's probably the question that Michael Vick should be asking right now.

On July 30, one of Vick's co-defendants pleaded guilty to conspiracy to cross state lines to engage in illegal gambling. The charge was lodged in connection with accusations of an underground dogfighting conspiracy.

As part of a plea bargain, Tony Taylor promised to fully cooperate with the government in its prosecution of Vick and two other men accused of running the illegal interstate dogfighting ring on Vick's property. And boy, did Taylor ever cooperate.

A summary of facts signed by Taylor claims that Vick had initially purchased the property in Smithfield,

Va., with the intention of starting a dogfighting ring in 2001 and that the underperforming dogs were executed by drowning, hanging and electrocution. The statement also alleges that Vick attended several dogfights in Virginia and other states with his partners.

Prosecutors say the dogfights offered purses as high as \$26,000.

So here's the breakdown: Vick, star quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, is

(probably soon to be "was") one of the most beloved players in the NFL. He took criticism graciously, and exhibited a kind and compassionate character and a praiseworthy work ethic. He was touted by his fellow Falcons as a wonderful teammate and leader. It seemed that if Vick was in the wrong, he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Some fans believe "The System" wrongfully accuses many young black men who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. But how many times can one man be in the wrong place at the wrong time before he realizes he should probably just stop going to the wrong place?

This isn't Vick's first scrape with the law. In 2005, he was sued by a woman claiming he knowingly gave her a venereal disease and subsequently sought treatment under the alias "Ron Mexico" (that name will never get old). In the first half of the 2006-07 season, Vick was fined a total of \$20,000 for giving the ol' double bird (a.k.a. the poultry Big Mac) to unhappy hometown fans. In January, he was investigated after airport screeners seized a water bottle with a hidden compartment that supposedly contained a small amount of marijuana.

Through all of this, Michael Vick's fans, including myself, stood by him. But dogfighting? Come on!!!

A number of blogs and Web sites have hinted that Vick's indictment is racially motivated. The Atlanta branch of the NAACP even rushed to the star quarterback's defense, saying that the way that Vick has been vilified and turned on by the public is a crime. I don't know about the legal ramifications of turning on someone, but do you guys want to know what is a crime? Dogfighting!

Sadly, cases like Vick's are rather common. A star in the black community is indicted for doing something he shouldn't be doing, and "The System" comes under suspicion. I'm not

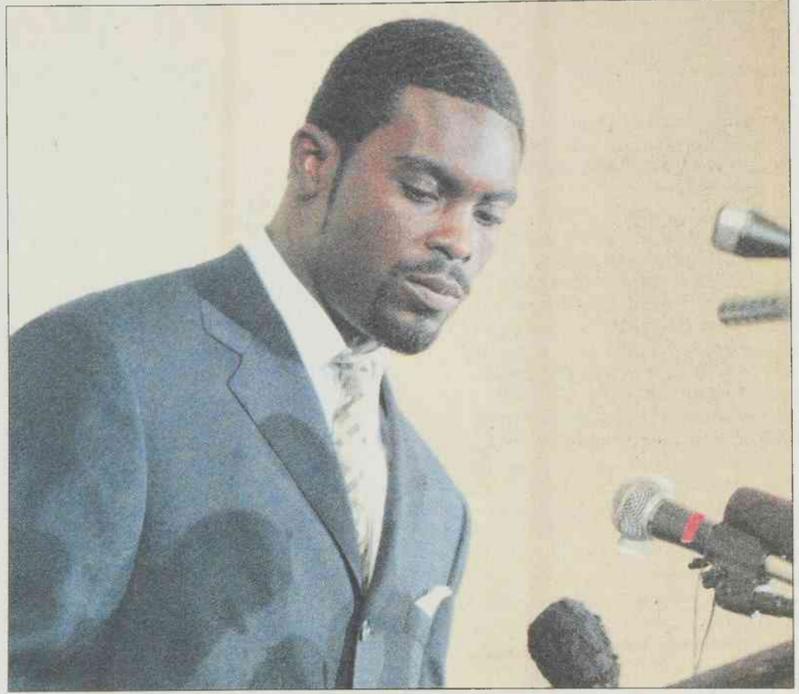


Photo courtesy of MCT Wire Service
Atlanta Falcons' Michael Vick makes an apology for his actions in Richmond, Va., following his plea hearing, which took place on August 27.

talking about a poor hungry child in the ghetto who gets life in prison for stealing food. Or the fact that black men are more likely to be pulled over and searched than white men. Clearly, those are flaws in the system.

But when R. Kelly is indicted for relieving himself on a 14-year-old or when Tennessee Titans cor-

nerback Adam "Pacman" Jones is involved in a triple shooting sparked by his desire to shower strippers with more than \$80,000 in cash, that's not the system. That's young black men being dumb. Who carries \$80,000 in cash?

You would be hard-pressed to find an African American in this country who enjoys the fact that the

justice system is racially biased. I certainly wish that things would change. But some of that change is within our control. When a high-profile black celebrity commits a crime, the question isn't why a white man gets a lesser sentence than a black man. The question is why a black man is committing the crime at all.

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In the meantime, the Rams' current practice field is being used not only by the football team, but also by the band, as well as the cross country and track-and-field teams.

Mike Ketchum, the Rams' defensive coordinator, believes a big reason for the current condition of the field is the fact that it has become a multi-purpose field.

"The far end is where the shot put is," Ketchum said, pointing to the far right of the field. "There are some holes down there. The band uses it, everybody uses it. It just gets used a lot."

In an e-mail, Athletic Director Dr. Chico Caldwell said the field is in about the same condition it is every year. He also said that his major concern is North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley's ban on watering for state institutions.

"With the team practicing every day, there is not much

that can be done about the field until the season is over," Caldwell said. "I think the team will be fine."

While most players said the condition of the field is something they didn't give much thought to, they are aware of the effect the ground has on their bodies.

"I don't really think about it too much," said one player who asked to be unidentified. "But after practice, my feet do hurt."



Are you ready for some Football?



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