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

Dear Mr. Goodell:

On behalf of the American Veterinary Medical Association, representing more than 75,000 member veterinarians, I encourage the National Football League to undertake efforts to discourage violence toward animals on the part of its players, coaches, staff, and fans. The dog fighting charges brought against Michael Vick have brought national attention to a long-standing and unconscionable subculture of violence. Public outcry in response to this particular case underscores the importance of animals in our nation's culture, as well as an expectation for responsible conduct when it comes to our interactions with them.

Many of our members are sports fans who recognize the value of sports in today's society. Participation in sports, whether at the professional or amateur level, can convey great benefits for both players and spectators. Responsible participation fosters positive attributes of self-discipline, self-esteem, character, teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair play.

Children model their behavior and attitudes on those of adults, particularly adults they admire, and athletes are—or can be—wonderful role models for children. In this age of 24/7 network and Internet coverage of sports and the professional athletes who play them, virtually any legal or ethical transgressions are constantly in the public spotlight. It is therefore imperative that athletes act as good role models.

A particularly disturbing consequence of a failure to address this subculture of violence is obvious when we recognize that numerous studies show that violent acts directed toward animals often indicate a tendency to commit violent acts toward people. This evidence is sufficiently strong that many states now require veterinarians to report cases of animal abuse to designated authorities so that this information can be shared with agencies providing social services for people.

The Vick case is a wake-up call for professional athletes and their organizations. We encourage the NFL and other professional sports organizations to consider the impact professional athletes, coaches, and staff can have as role models, and to develop consistent, enforceable punishments for those involved in violence against animals.

Sincerely,

Greg Hammer, DVM
President