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Philadelphia Eagles: A Defense of the Much-Maligned Michael Vick



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Dec 23, 2012

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Michael Vick. The name itself easily elicits a strong response from football fans, animal rights proponents, and the general population alike.

There are a host of polarizing professional athletes-Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, and Tiger Woods, among others-but no current athlete has been more loved and hated than Vick.

And with the Philadelphia Eagles' 2012 playoff hopes dwindling with each week, Vick's supporters have disappeared even more quickly.

Fired only seven weeks into the season, former defensive coordinator Juan Castillo was the team's first scapegoat. The next in line on the chopping block is Vick.

Before the season, Vick believed that the Eagles were building a dynasty. Instead, the Eagles' playoff hopes are done this season, and Vick may be done as the franchise quarterback.

Vick's days in Philadelphia are clearly numbered. He is scheduled to earn [\\$15.5 million in base salary in 2013](#), the third year of his five-year, \$80 million contract. Vick's contract was unveiled as a six-year deal, but this final year voids if Vick has 35 percent playing-time in any season, and he played in 77.17 percent of the snaps last season.

If Vick is on the Eagles' roster on three days after the Super Bowl, \$3 million for "injury only" will become fully guaranteed. Count on the Eagles releasing Vick before that date to save \$15.5 million in cash and free up \$12.7 million in salary cap space.

Vick and coach Andy Reid both came into this season knowing they had to perform well to survive. The pressure has proven too great for both, with Reid crumbling under owner Jeffrey Lurie's "better than 8-8" ultimatum and Vick failing to justify his large 2013 salary.

Jim Mora, Sr. once called Vick a "coach-killer." His son was the second [Atlanta Falcons](#) coach to lose his job with Vick as his quarterback. Reid will endure a similar fate barring a miracle. But it would be extremely unfair to pin these past two disastrous seasons on Vick.

While it is all but certain that Eagles will ship him out of Philadelphia at the end of the season, his performance has hardly been the reason for the team's failures this season. Although it is customary to make the quarterback the center of a team's struggles, the level of blame that has been routinely placed on Vick has been far from deserved.

Vick makes questionable throws at times and has turned the ball over at an alarming rate this season, but he carries the Eagles in so many ways and puts them in position to win each week.

But when the stadium clock hits triple-zeros and the Eagles are not the victor on the scoreboard, all that Philly fans remember is Vick's miscues.

Vick has not been the problem. The entire team is the problem.

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Despite heavy criticism, he has handled the entire season with nothing but class, self-criticism, and hours in the film room. It is evident that more than a few Eagles have not given their all on the field, but Vick has been one of the select few playing with a sense of urgency, despite taking a beating every Sunday behind an offensive line missing four of its five starters.

Instead of scorn, Vick deserves praise for routinely stepping up in the pocket before getting leveled by a defensive lineman running through the turnstile that is the Eagles' offensive line.

If last year's hit rate on Vick was alarming, this season has been off the charts. For all the battering Vick endured a year ago, opposing defenses averaged five quarterback hits in games he played last season. This year, the average is over eight quarterback hits per outing.

Somehow Vick survived an eight-game beating. However, it was only a matter of time before his style of play and poor blocking caught up, and it did when suffered a "significant concussion" against the [Dallas Cowboys](#) in week ten.

In each week's post-game press conference, Vick has had the opportunity to point the finger at his makeshift offensive line, but instead he has taken full blame for each loss. Though this admirable attitude has not improved the team's fortunes, Vick deserves credit for handle everything the right way.

After a Monday night drubbing at the hands of the [New Orleans Saints](#), [Vick failed to fall for the reporters' bait](#) to cast blame at his teammates, instead using it as an opportunity to defend them.

"We are out there, fighting as hard as we can, giving it everything we got. I love each and every guy in that locker room. And if I could make every play right I would. And I know they would do the same."

As reporters pressed him further, noting how his offensive line has given him little time in the pocket, Vick instead criticized himself, citing how he should be getting rid of the ball quicker while also taking full responsibility for the team's weekly shortcomings.

"I am out there as a competitor trying to win. And I know I can do a better job in getting the ball out quicker. As the quarterback of this football team, I take full responsibility."

As an Eagle, Vick has been the consummate professional, exhibiting a blue-collar work ethic and displaying a subtle hint of humility in his voice. Yet there are still those who continue to root against the man for his troubled past.

Vick did sickening things, and he deserved to be punished. Dogfighting is a cruel enterprise that exists solely to entertain the bloodthirsty, the inhumane, and the greedy. Inflicting suffering onto any living creature should never be condoned.

However, no good comes from exiling him in shame and not letting him show how one can be rehabilitated after that sort of horrific behavior. If anything, animal rights proponents should root heartily for Vick, whose success builds a larger platform for the animal rights movement.

Moreover, dwelling on his past mistakes accomplishes little. Unlike many fans, Vick came to this realization during his 21-month stay at Leavenworth Penitentiary. After coming out of prison, he admitted his mistakes, became an animal rights advocate, and made no excuses for himself. He pieced his life back together, reentered football as a pariah, and showed real regret and dignity as he pursued his comeback.

In his second year with the Eagles, he eventually redeemed his career with a 2010 season of the ages that almost earned him MVP honors, showcasing the skills that the Atlanta Falcons recognized in him as they made him the first-overall pick in the 2001 draft. As the 2010 AP Comeback Player of the Year, Vick passed for over 3,000 yards and 30 touchdowns while leading them to the playoffs. More impressive than any statistic, though, was his historic six-TD performance against the [Washington Redskins](#) on Monday Night Football and his role in leading the "Miracle at the New Meadowlands," a miraculous comeback against the New York Giants.

Yet just as quickly, things disintegrated for him after his renaissance year. In February, he will likely become the first NFL player to sign two different \$100 million contract extensions that both fell through within two years. He crashed to earth last season and has struggled with inconsistency this season, and he has become an easy scapegoat for the Eagles' dismal season.

In fact one Eagles offensive player, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, [acknowledged that Vick had become a scapegoat](#) for the team that continues on its downward spiral.

"It [isn't] Mike's fault," the player said. "He hasn't been great. He'd tell you that. But we all haven't, from the coaches on down. The line hasn't helped. They've been beat up. The play-calling hasn't helped him, either."

Former Eagles' quarterback [Donovan McNabb](#) understands all too well the turmoil that comes with being the team's signal caller, and [he commented on the situation as well](#):

"Is this a situation where we begin to start mentioning some of the defensive players who need to be benched? Maybe the offensive linemen need to be benched. There are other people who need to be in this situation besides Michael Vick."

If Vick's concussion is as serious as many reports claim it to be, then football fans have almost certainly seen the last of the veteran as the Eagles' starting quarterback.

"Good riddance," most fans will likely say. Indeed, in this black-and-white, quick-to-judge sports world, it's easy to rip Vick. The man is a dog killer and a public villain. The Eagles gave him a second chance and he blew it. Ship the felon out of town. End of story.

However, the easy opinion is rarely the right opinion and almost never the fair opinion.

"If you look at my life over the last year, I've been trying to do all of the right things, whether it's in the community or on the field," Vick said at the Eagles' training camp back in 2010. "I'm just happy to be in the situation I'm in. I'm blessed, and [I just have to keep moving forward](#)."

Perhaps those calling for Vick's head can take a lesson from his words. Maybe it is time for them to move forward, stop casting blame, and embrace him while he is a member of the team. Let him leave in peace.

1. "Philadelphia Eagles - Player Contract Information", Rotoworld.
2. "Philadelphia Eagles Postgame Quotes", NewOrleansSaints.com.
3. Jeff McLane. "Michael Vick's days in Philadelphia appear to be numbered," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.
4. Kevin Patra. "Donovan McNabb defends Michael Vick as Eagles' QB," NFL.com.

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