

Pit-Bull Ambassadors

Rescued from Michael Vick's dogfighting operation, these five pit bulls show their unquestionable love for people by giving back to their communities.

By Lisa A. Hanks

If I was sitting in my office, and Jonny was lying on the floor on his dog bed, and Mr. Vick came walking in, what would Jonny do?" asks Cris Cohen, the newly adoptive owner of one of the 54 dogs seized from Michael Vick's Bad Newz Kennels dogfighting operation in Surry County, Virginia. "Jonny would wag his tail and walk up to him and greet him. What does that tell you about dogs? They're such forgiving animals."

Dogs giving back

Jonny, now a certified therapy dog, is just one example of former Vick dogs making positive contributions to their communities – all thanks to a huge public uprising. "A lot of people wrote, called and petitioned to have the Vick dogs saved, which saved [Jonny's] life," Cohen says. "It's nice to take Jonny and give back to the community."

While Vick, former NFL starting quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, was on trial for felony dogfighting in late 2007, an enormous number of dog lovers demanded the pit bulls be saved from near-certain execution.

"Some people were saying the dogs should all be killed; they're killing machines. Others said they should all be saved," says Stephen Zawistowski, Ph.D., CAAB, an executive vice president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in New York.

Some vocal national groups held the position that all dogs confiscated in dogfighting cases are dangerous and should be euthanized once the trial ended. Other groups, including Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah, and Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls (BAD RAP), located in San Francisco, requested individual evaluations that would identify the dogs that were good candidates for rehabilitation and a new life.

"Fighting dogs, previous to the Vick case, were automatically put down without assessment," says Marthina McClay, certified professional dog trainer and founder of Our Pack Inc., a pit-bull rescue group in San Jose, Calif. "Any dog can be damaged in an abusive situation, but let's find out what's going on with the dog first."

Want to read the full story? Pick up the June 2009 issue of DOG WORLD today, or subscribe to receive the best dog articles, dog news, and dog information every month!