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GARY BOGUE

Dogs' bad rap may be just that

Contra Costa Times
Article Created: 01/26/2008 02:59:01 AM PST

WILL MICHAEL VICK'S former pit bulls make suitable pets?

My guess is a qualified yes.

My understanding is that most of the dogs that BAD RAP -- Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls -- is going to find homes didn't have the dispositions to be fighters when Vick had them.

That considerably improves the odds that they will make good pets, especially after BAD RAP behaviorists finish working with them.

In any event, I'm sure BAD RAP won't find homes for any of these pit bulls until they feel the dogs are ready. They have a pretty good record for rehabilitating animals like this.

One of the best authorities on this issue is Richard Avanzino, president of Maddie's Fund, the Pet Rescue Foundation and former director

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of the San Francisco SPCA. He also started the St. Francis Terrier Program while running the San Francisco SPCA, which prepared pit bulls for adoption.

"They are totally devoted to their dogs and do a great job under normal circumstances," Avanzino said Friday. "With enough attention, time and devotion,

they will have success."

Avanzino, who emphasized that these are his personal opinions and not necessarily that of his employer, applauds BAD RAP's efforts. "I'm also a believer in second chances," he said.

He feels that in the hands of skilled behaviorists, all dogs are probably safe.

I'm a little more cynical and wouldn't say all. But most are probably going to be OK.

I also talked to Judie Howard, owner of Arydith

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Obedience School in Moraga. She has trained more than 40,000 dogs through the years and is considered one of the top dog trainers and behaviorists in the country. She's also the authority I turn to when readers pose tough dog questions.

Howard says BAD RAP's reputation depends on the kind of dogs it's finding homes for. In other words, it has a lot at stake in making sure the situation will work out for the owners -- and the dogs, too.

"I am quite sure that they will carefully screen prospective owners, and will not consider someone who just wants 'one of them Michael Vick dogs' for notoriety's sake," she said.

Howard brings up a good point: the dogs' notoriety. There has been a lot of national press on this subject in the past few months.

I suspect, as Howard said, there are people who would go nuts to own a Vick dog. In fact, finding the right owners for these pit bulls might be the hardest part. BAD RAP will have to be careful to make sure they filter those

kinds of potential adopters out of the mix.

Howard had one thing to add.

"These dogs have had an unfortunate start in life. Wouldn't it be a wonderful ending if they found stable, loving homes?"

Yes indeed.

Find more Gary in his blog at <http://www.ibabuzz.com/garyboque>; write Gary, P.O. Box 8099, Walnut Creek, CA 94596-8099; old columns at ContraCostaTimes.com, click on Columns; e-mail garybug@infinonline.net.



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