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**Rescue group shows off "Vick dogs" at Oakland shelter**

*John Simerman, MediaNews*

Former Vick pitbulls were shown at the Oakland animal shelter on Friday. (Jay Solmonson/The Oakland Tribune) OAKLAND - Just nine months ago they were found chained up in Virginia, victims of what would unfold as the most infamous dog-fighting operation ever.

Then they spent months in shelters, some of them never seeing daylight as federal authorities pursued their case against then-NFL star Michael Vick and his Bad Newz Kennels associates.

But only the fight scars across Hector's chest and arms suggested trauma today as five former "**Vick dogs**" wagged and panted at the Oakland animal shelter in their first public showing since 10 of the pit bulls reached the Bay Area last fall.

With the last of the defendants sentenced Friday, a gag order was lifted and leaders of a local rescue and education group showed off the dogs. At the same time, the shelter and an Oakland Raider announced a new program to help pit bull owners better care for their pets.

Leaders of the Oakland-based rescue group Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls, or BADRAP, played a key role in evaluating nearly 50 dogs recovered from the operation that Vick bankrolled.

Vick, who also helped kill dogs that were deemed unwilling or poor fighters, is now serving a 23-month federal prison sentence.

Of the 22 dogs deemed likely to be adoptable after time and training, BADRAP took nine, along with one that will need a lifetime of specialized care. That dog will soon go to the same pit bull sanctuary that took in 22 other **Vick dogs** that could not be adopted.

Most of the dogs that BADRAP drove back to the Bay Area in an RV last October had never fought and would likely have died a brutal death had they remained with the dogfighting operation, said Donna Reynolds, the group's co-founder.

"Every single dog in here would have been hanged, tortured or electrocuted at Bad Newz Kennels for not showing enough fight drive," she said.

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They might have been euthanized afterward, as some leading national animal groups recommended during the federal prosecution. But BADRAP and other advocates helped sway federal officials to evaluate them - a first in a major dogfight bust, said Reynolds.

Only two of the pit bulls seized from Vick's property were put to sleep, one for temperament issues and another for a medical condition, according to court records.

Instead, Hector, Johnny Justice, Tutties, Dutch and Ernie all played tamely today with their foster parents, who said the dogs were similar to others they had helped ready for adoption.

Leslie Nuccio of Oakland scratched Hector's scarred stomach as he wagged in her arms.

"He's learning to be a pet instead of a dog. No one ever asked him to do anything - not anything good, anyway," said Nuccio, who took in Hector six weeks ago. "He's a remarkably stubborn dog, maybe out of self defense. The worst punishment is to ignore him."

Tim Racer, who accompanied the guardian/special master in the federal case to evaluate each of the **Vick dogs** in Virginia, said it's taken little rehabilitation to ready the dogs for adoption.

"They have not been through some phenomenal training regimen to get them to be normal dogs," he said.

Racer and Reynolds, who are married and founded BADRAP in 1999, hope the publicity around the Vick case will help them raise awareness around pit bulls as good, misunderstood pets.

Today they got help from Jarrod Cooper, a Raiders special teams player. He and other Raiders players are helping fund a new initiative called "Code 597," after the penal code violation for animal abuse. The goal is to educate the public on better care and to fund dog shelters and other gear for local pit bull owners.

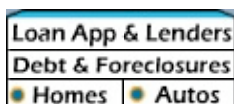
Cooper volunteers almost daily at the shelter, where pit bulls make up about half the animals that arrive at the shelter, and two-thirds of those euthanized, shelter officials said.

"My first impression was I didn't think it was really that bad - Vick got caught doing something dumb," he said. "I didn't realize how big it was. It's everywhere. Every weekend animals come here all scarred up."

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[Photo: A former Vick pitbull that was shown at the Oakland animal shelter. \(Jay Solmonson/The Oakland Tribune\)](#)

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