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***On The Heels Of The Michael Vick Investigation, Best Friends Animal Society Urges NFL, Other Pro Sports Leagues To Aggressively Address Dog Fighting***

KANAB, Utah (Thursday, June 14, 2007) — Best Friends Animal Society, the national animal welfare organization that rescued more than 6,000 homeless animals from the destruction of Hurricane Katrina—many of them pit bulls—has called upon American professional sports leagues to take a strong stand against dog fighting.

Communicating with its more than 250,000 supporting members across the country, Best Friends unveiled a petition that challenges the National Football League (NFL) and other professional sports leagues to establish policies that specifically address the illegal practice. The appeal follows recent investigations into alleged dog fighting involvement by Michael Vick, standout quarterback for the NFL's Atlanta Falcons, and urges leagues to deal harshly with any athlete/employee who associates with the dog fighting.

Carrying the slogan "Best Friends: It's Not Cool to be Cruel," the petition asks professional sports organizations to be proactive in rooting out evidence of dog fighting activities by athletes and employees. Signatures from the petition will be distributed to the offices of Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Soccer (MLS), as well as the NFL.

Best Friends, which operates the nation's largest no-kill animal sanctuary, calls on the leagues to address dog fighting by taking the following actions:

- Announce no tolerance policies that condemn dog fighting as a cruel, illegal activity that will not be tolerated
- Aggressively investigate allegations of participation in dog fighting by athletes
- Educate athletes about the illegality and cruelty of dog fighting
- Establish public service campaigns that inform the public about dog fighting and how harmful it can be to communities

Julie Castle, director of community programs and services for Best Friends Animal Society said that recent investigations point to a dog fighting subculture in the world of professional sports and entertainment, one characterized by high-stakes, illegal gambling, violence, weapons and drugs.

"Because professional athletes and entertainment personalities are held in such high esteem by young people, we hope that the NFL and other sports leagues will encourage their athletes to speak out against dog fighting," Castle said. "By doing so, they will let the youth of America know that the sports heroes they love want animals to live in peace without being immersed in a ruthless activity that pits one animal against another."

Dog fighting appears to have become a disturbing aspect of the lives of some sports stars and entertainers:

- In an interview with WAVY-TV in Norfolk, Va., Washington Redskins running back Clinton Portis said: "I don't know if he [Vick] was fighting dogs or not, but it's his property and it's his dog. If that's what he wants to do, do it." Portis didn't appear to know that dog fighting is a felony in 48 of 50 states.
- Former NFL running back LeShon Johnson received a deferred sentence of five years following the raid of a dog fighting operation.
- Qyntel Woods, who played with four different NBA teams from 2002-2006, was linked to dog fighting and eventually convicted of animal abuse charges in January of 2005.
- Entertainer/rapper Jay-Z, who happens to be a minority owner in the NBA New Jersey Nets, has appeared in videos that celebrate dog fighting.

Following disclosure of the Vick investigation several weeks ago, the NFL issued the following statement:

"Dog fighting is cruel, degrading, and illegal. We support a thorough investigation into any allegations of this type of activity. Any NFL employee proved to be involved in this type of activity will be subject to prompt and significant discipline under our personal conduct policy."

"We are happy that the National Football League reacted to the Vick investigation with a statement that condemns dog fighting," Castle said. "But we would like to see the NFL take it a step farther by establishing stiff penalties, including fines and suspensions, for anyone associated with dog fighting. We hope that other professional sports leagues will follow suit by joining Best Friends and the other animal welfare groups to speak out against this horribly cruel activity."

Best Friends will utilize the slogan "It's Not Cool to be Cruel" over the coming months as it continues to work on expose dog fighting and advocate on behalf of animals that are trapped in this illegal activity.

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#### ***About Best Friends Animal Society***

Located on 33,000 acres in Kanab, Utah, Best Friends Animal Society operates the country's largest sanctuary for homeless animals and is home, on any given day, to about 1,500 dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, birds, and other animals. Best Friends works globally with animal shelters and rescue groups to bring about a time when there will be no more homeless pets. Best Friends advances initiatives nationwide that promote community approaches to make the world a better place through kindness to animals, including adoption, spay-neuter, and humane education programs.

**"Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us"**