

Animal advocates lukewarm on Vick's sentence

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A 23-month sentence for Michael Vick proved bittersweet for local animal advocates battling against animal abuse, especially dogfighting.

U.S. District Court Judge Henry Hudson on Monday sentenced the former Atlanta Falcons quarterback to 23 months in federal prison, three years of supervised release and ordered him to pay \$928,000 for the care of the more than 45 dogs that survived the organized fights.

While some local advocates see the sentence as a strong statement, one Chicago man who has worked intimately with fighting dogs said Vick's sentence only scratched the surface.

"I'm not super happy (about the sentence) but I'm glad he got something," said Curtis Scott, who has helped rehabilitate dogs seized in a 2006 raid on a Calumet Township property and those taken in July from a South Holland property.

Scott said he is making plans to work with a Utah-based shelter to help some of the dogs Vick once owned.

In April, Vick and co-defendants killed about eight dogs, according to federal charges they've pleaded guilty to.

Scott, a program director for the Chicago Coalition to Stop Dog Fighting, said as a dog lover he would have liked the judge to sentence Vick for a year for

each dog he killed. At the very least, a maximum sentence would've set an example in a case that has drawn attention worldwide, he said.

However, some say the case already has boosted awareness about the problem.

Lake County Animal Control Director Matt Lubarski said one positive impact of the Vick case is that more people are aware of dogfighting.

"Also, now that the penalties for these types of horrendous crimes are becoming a little more severe, hopefully, it will make people think twice before they start fighting dogs," he said.

Laws are becoming more strict on the federal and state level.

"The federal law that allowed them to charge Vick will allow us to pursue dog fighters going across state lines between Illinois, Indiana and Michigan, and that's not small from what we can see," said Cynthia Bathurst, the executive director of the Dog Advisory Work Group in Chicago.

Society also is becoming more aware of the link between abuse of animals and abuse of humans, said Joan Murphy, a Crestwood Democrat who represents the 6th District on the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

Murphy, who also leads Partners Against Animal Cruelty, said Vick's sentence was fair because he "finally came forward and admitted he was a perpetrator and killed some animals."

But humane investigator Linda Bober, who runs Cause 4 Paws in the south suburbs, said celebrity status may have been in play.

"At least he did get some jail time so that's better than nothing," she said, adding she hopes the Vick case will have an impact locally.