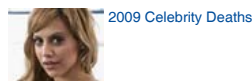


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Vick's Courage Award Sparks Controversy

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BALTIMORE (WJZ) — Baltimore is the focus of a nationwide controversy, all because of a decision by Michael Vick's teammates. The Ed Block Foundation just formally announced they will give Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Michael Vick—who has been convicted for dogfighting—their Courage Award.

Mike Helligren has the fallout.

Reporting
Mike Helligren

Vick's teammates on the Philadelphia Eagles selected him for this honor and they're not backing down. Despite the passion we're seeing online over this, Vick did not show up at the ceremony Tuesday, and neither did protesters.

"Our foundation has a great deal of respect for the Philadelphia Eagles organization, for head coach Andy Reid and the Eagles players," said Paul Mittermeier, Ed Block Foundation. "Michael Vick is just one of the 32 players who will receive an Ed Block Courage Award for 2009."

Vick lost his multi-million dollar NFL contract and spent time in federal prison after pleading guilty to bankrolling a dogfighting operation, where many animals were killed and tortured.

Last week, he said he deserved this award.

"You ask people to walk in my shoes, they probably couldn't do it--probably 95% of the people in this world--because nobody had to endure what I've been through," Vick said.

One player is chosen from each team who exemplifies not only courage, but sportsmanship, and who is a community role model.

The Ed Block Foundation helps abused and needy children and points out Eagles teammates alone selected Vick.

"I think it shows pretty poor judgment on the part of the Philadelphia Eagles. I'm sure that there are more worthy teammates on that team," said Maryland SPCA Executive Director Aileen Gabbey.

She believes it glamorizes dogfighting and that Vick isn't truly repentant.

"Michael Vick has talked about everything he has had to endure and his hardships and how hard it's been for him, but it's certainly nothing compared to what his innocent dogs have had to endure."

"I've had to overcome a lot, probably more than one single individual can handle," Vick said. "Having my teammates vote for me and grant me this award goes to show that I'm doing the right thing."

"The gracious thing to do would be to not accept the award," Gabbey said.

It's unclear whether that will happen.

"You just have to be strong and believe in yourself and be optimistic. That's what I've been able to do, and that's what I display," said Vick.

This is the 32nd year for the Ed Block Courage Awards. They will be given out in March.

The Ravens chose Dawan Landry as their recipient.

[Click here for more information.](#)

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Michael Vick #7 of the Philadelphia Eagles smiles after the Eagles defeat the Jacksonville Jaguars in the preseason game at Lincoln Financial Field on Aug. 27, 2009, in Philadelphia, Pa. Jim McIsaac/Getty Images

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