

By Erik Scalavino

Eighteen months in prison?

Please.

If I had my druthers, Michael Vick would've gotten a much tougher sentence for his unspeakable role in his dogfighting enterprise.

I'd have thrust him into one of his own rings, with nothing more than his considerable athletic ability to defend himself against one of those poor animals he helped breed to be a savage beast. And I'd have bet the farm on Fido.

Brett Favre?

Oh, I have alternative plans for him as well.

I'd strap him into the Space Shuttle on a solo mission. Give him a one-way ticket to ... I don't know ... anywhere but this galaxy. I'd set the controls to auto pilot and launch the damn thing, so that, for once in his pampered, prima donna life, Favre would, quite literally, be the center of his own universe. Forever.

Full disclosure - I'm a lifelong supporter (always morally, sometimes financially) of animal welfare groups. I also have an inveterate repulsion for transparent phonies who double as pretentious narcissists.

So, yeah ... I'm not too happy about Vick and Favre playing NFL football again.

I cling strongly to my beliefs, yes. However, I like to think I am justified in doing so because I'm equally open-minded. I arrive at my firmly held opinions after thoughtful, careful consideration of every point of view.

In Vick's case, I've heard them all.

"He served his time."

"He has a right to earn a living."

"America is all about second chances!"

I agree, on all counts.

Vick served the sentence handed to him, fair and square. OK, fine. He accepted the helping hand offered by a very good man, former Indianapolis Colts coach Tony Dungy. Since the suicide of one of his own sons in 2005, Dungy seems an even more devout person, eager to be a father figure to someone like Vick. I applaud Dungy's involvement.

He's doing and saying the right things right now, Vick is. Problem is, I just don't believe him. I don't believe prison scared him straight. I watched his introductory press conference with the Philadelphia Eagles. I wasn't buying what Vick was selling. He just didn't seem genuine to me. And I don't think I'm alone in that assessment.

Regardless, Vick has every right to earn a living now that he's out of prison. My argument is that he has no right to do so in the National Football League.

Think of it this way. Let's say Vick did every despicable thing he did with and to those dogs, only he was employed at the time as a computer programmer for Microsoft. Bill Gates would not be obligated to rehire him now. Vick could try to apply at Apple, but would Steve Jobs want him? Maybe, but he'd probably tell him to go find work somewhere else. My guess is Vick would wind up with some small-time tech firm, making a fraction of what he once did.

The same rules should apply here, in my view. If Vick wants a job in football, fine, but why does it have to be in the NFL? There's always Canada, or the fledgling United Football League, set to kick off this fall. Or better yet, go work as an equipment manager for some hole-in-the-wall high school or college program. Why should he be entitled to a second chance in the filthy-rich world of the NFL? You and I would not be treated so lavishly by our employers if we'd done what Vick did, I assure you.

When you fall from grace as far as Vick did, you should work your way back by starting at the bottom. I was extremely disappointed that Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie - in my book, one of the top five owners in the league, mind you - was complicit in bringing Vick back, offering the quarterback conditional millions of dollars over the next two years. Vick should be living and working in obscurity somewhere, making next to nothing, not being showered with so lucrative a contract as Lurie gave him.

I give Vick the slightest bit of credit in one respect. He did horrible, criminal things, but is, at least, making the effort (however minimal) to appear contrite. Fickle old Favre, on the other hand, has committed no legal offense, but he insists on doing and saying all the wrong things. All the time. And that is painfully annoying.

Worse, he actually thinks we:

- a) Give a rat's backside about his on-going melodrama for vengeance against his perceived offender, Packers GM Ted Thompson, and
- b) Believe the folderol he's been feeding us the past few years.

"I'm retiring as a Packer. My life in football is over. Boo hoo. Woe is me."

"Oh, wait, no it's not. I'm a Jet. All the way! Oops, I wasn't that good in New York, so I'm retiring again."

"Kidding! I'm back. Well, maybe ... no, no, I'm done."

"Oh, what the heck, maybe one more year. Or two. With the Vikings. Take that, Ted!"

"On second thought, my arm's too sore. Wait, I'll have surgery. No, that didn't work. Yes, it did!"

"Oh, y'all want me to go to training camp? Sorry, arm's not feeling so good anymore."

"What's that? Camp's over?! Hey, arm feels great!"

ENOUGH!!!! ENOUGH ALREADY, BRETT!!! JUST ... GO ... AWAY!!!!

But no, Brad "Major Dad" Childress insists on loading up his Viking ship and embarking on some quixotic quest with this querulous QB.

Meanwhile, the media is Favre's all-too-willing accomplice. Vapid TV newsrooms are committing vital resources like their networks' helicopters to capture footage of Favre landing at the airport, motorcading to meet Childress, walking up the steps of his new facility.

He's not a head of state, or a pope, or anyone close to being worthy of such obsessive coverage. He's a has-been, undisciplined gunslinger who has been atrocious when his teams needed him most in these latter years of his overstayed-welcome of a career.

He can't win big games. In fact, he's the reason the Packers lost so many of them this decade. He imploded on the Jets last season as the playoffs approached. They didn't get in because of him.

And this is the guy Minnesota hails as its savior.

Shame. Shame on the Eagles and Vikings for forcing us to endure these people any longer.