

Atlanta NAACP: Vick should get to come back

ATLANTA (AP) - An NAACP leader said Michael Vick should be allowed to return to the NFL, preferably the Atlanta Falcons, after serving his sentence for his role in a dogfighting operation.

"As a society, we should aid in his rehabilitation and welcome a new Michael Vick back into the community without a permanent loss of his career in football," said R.L. White, president of the

NAACP's Atlanta chapter. "We further ask the NFL, Falcons, and the sponsors not to permanently ban Mr. Vick from his ability to bring hours of enjoyment to fans all over this country."

White said the Falcons quarterback made a mistake and should be allowed to prove he has learned from that mistake.

On Monday, Vick said through a lawyer that he will plead guilty to a federal

charge of conspiracy to travel in interstate commerce in aid of unlawful activities and conspiracy to sponsor a dog in an animal fighting venture.

Three Vick associates have pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge and say Vick provided nearly all the gambling and operating funds for the "Bad Newz Kennels" dogfighting enterprise. Two of them also said Vick participated in executing at least eight underperforming dogs, raising the possibility of the ani-

mal cruelty charges. Last month, state and local leaders of the NAACP urged the public not to rush to judgment in the Vick case. The civil rights organization said animal rights groups, talk radio and the news media were vilifying the embattled athlete, and that his team and corporate sponsors were prematurely punishing Vick.

White said the Atlanta chapter supports Vick's decision to accept a plea bargain if it's in his best interest, but

he questioned the credibility of Vick's co-defendants, saying an admission of guilt might be more about cutting losses than the truth.

"At this point, you're not looking at guilt or innocence," White said, referring to the possible harsher sentence Vick could have received had he taken his case to trial and been found guilty.

"You're thinking, 'What I better do is cut my losses and take a plea.' But if he saw this as the best thing to do at this point for his future, then I

think he made the correct choice."

White said he regretted that the plea deal will mean all the facts of the case might never be known.

"Some have said things to save their own necks," White said. "Michael Vick has received more negative press than if he had killed a human being."

White said he does not support dogfighting and that he considers it as bad as hunting. "His crime is, it was a dog," White said.

Ex-Wolves player Griffin dies in crash

HOUSTON (AP)- Basketball always came easily to Eddie Griffin. It was life off the court that he had trouble handling.

The former Minnesota Timberwolves forward died last week when his sport utility vehicle collided with a freight train in a fiery crash, the Harris County medical examiner's office said Tuesday.

Investigators used dental records to identify Griffin, 25, who began his pro career with the Houston Rockets in 2001. He was waived by the Timberwolves in March.

The 6-foot-10 Griffin averaged 7.2 points, 5.8 rebounds and 1.71 blocks in five NBA seasons. Born in Philadelphia, Griffin was one of the nation's top freshmen at Seton Hall in 2000-2001 and was named to the NBA All-Rookie second team in 2002.

Not long after he left college, Griffin became more known for his troublesome,

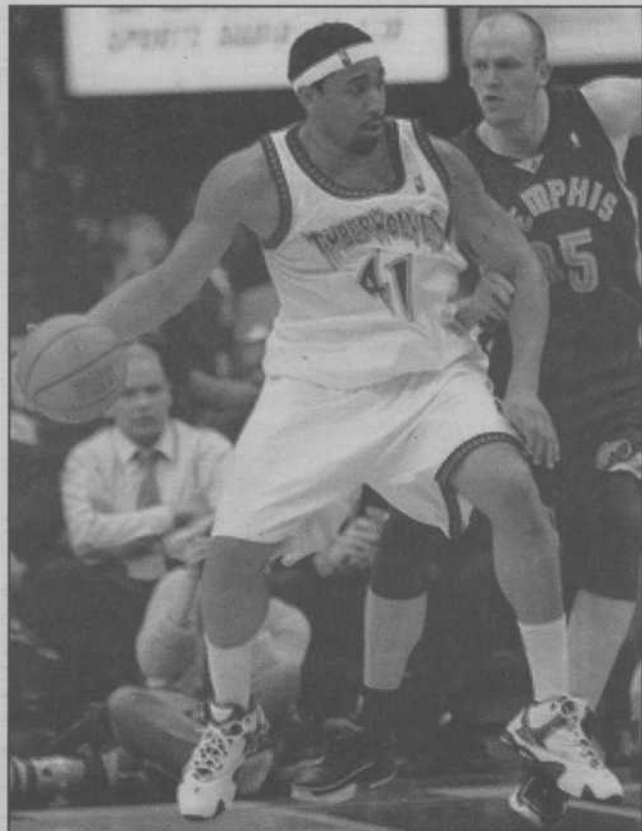
off-the-court behavior.

In November 2003, Griffin was charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, after a woman claiming to be his girlfriend accused him of punching her in the face and shooting a pistol at her car as she drove away.

Griffin missed practices and a team flight, and the Rockets suspended him, then waived him in December 2003.

"Basketball was never an issue with him. He needed more life lessons, and, unfortunately, he was never able to reach his potential," former Timberwolves coach Dwane Casey said.

Griffin pleaded guilty earlier in the '06-'07 season to inattentive driving after hitting a parked car while out late one night in Minneapolis. He was suspended by the NBA in January for five games for violating the anti-drug program. Minnesota waived him on March 13.



Eddie Griffin, former Timberwolves forward died last week when his sport utility vehicle collided with a freight train.

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