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By Abby Phillip

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Rescued Michael Vick Dogs Reunited 5 Years Later



They were battered and bruised but, ultimately, they were not broken.

Seven dogs rescued from NFL quarterback Michel Vick's Virginia property when he pleaded guilty to federal charges relating to dog fighting, were reunited in California Oct. 27, tails wagging, tongues out, happy.

Five years ago they had scars, some physical, all emotional. They wore bandannas at their reunion celebration, surrounded by 125 emotional guests and their proud owners.

“They’re very forgiving and they all really enjoy other dogs, which is probably the other big surprise that came out of the case,” said Donna Reynolds, director of Oakland-based BAD RAP, an advocacy group for “pit bull-type” dogs. “In fact, dogs were a comfort to them.”

Reynolds’ organization worked with prosecutors on the Vick case in 2007 to identify dogs that were taken from Vick’s property who could be rehabilitated. Of the 10 that Reynolds’ organization secreted out of Virginia in the back of an RV because of the ongoing investigation, seven returned to their ranch nearly unrecognizable from the dogs that they were before.



(Image Credit: Mark Rogers/www.markrogersphotography.com)

Hector, a brownish pit bull, has scars up and down his chest and missing teeth from his days in Vick’s dog-fighting arena.

“He’s got a notch out of his tongue, a notch out of his ear. He definitely had a poor life before now,” his owner Roo Yori said.

Nearly five years ago, Yori and his wife drove more than 35 hours from Minnesota to San Francisco to pick up Hector. He came back to their home almost as if nothing had happened.

“Hector, fortunately, was one of the dogs that wasn’t as affected as some of the other ones. Hector, he just kind of got out of there said, ‘That stunk, let’s move forward,’ and that was it. It was very obvious he had never lived in a house; he had never been a pet dog,” Yori said.

“He unpotted a potted plant because he wanted to play with it like a stick.”

Hector now fits in well with the family: Yori, wife Clara and their four other dogs.

At the ranch, the normally independent, 7-year-old Hector became uncharacteristically animated, wagging his tail wildly and wiggling in excitement upon being reunited with Donna Reynolds and Tim Racer, the founders of BAD RAP.

“Hector actually loved Tim and Donna ... you could totally tell,” Yori said. “He’s kind of an independent dog, he’s kind of aloof. When he saw Tim and Donna, he stared wiggling. You could tell he remembered them.”



(Image Credit: Mark Rogers/www.markrogersphotography.com)

All the dogs now lead full lives.

“Dogs live in the moment; they don’t dwell on the past,” BAD RAP’s Reynolds said. “Once they have enough positive experiences to draw on, they just run right into the present.”

Seven have Canine Good Citizen Certificates and three are therapy dogs in hospitals and children's literacy programs.

At least one, Jonny Justice, a black and white Staffordshire bull terrier with something of an eye patch, has become a bit of a celebrity.

Jonny appeared on "The Rachael Ray Show" in 2008 and next year will be the model for a stuffed dog made by manufacturer GUND as the winner of their "Top Dog" contest (<http://badrap-blog.blogspot.com/2012/09/huzzah-jonny-justice-for-every-child.html>).



(Image Credit: Mark Rogers/www.markrogersphotography.com)

Of the 10 dogs rescued, three did not make it to the reunion: one because of distance and another because of a last-minute emergency. A third, Ernie, was just busy being a dog, no longer a "Vick dog."

"Ernie's mom doesn't want him to be a Vick dog anymore, she just wants to have a dog," Reynolds said.



(Image Credit: Eric Risberg/AP Photo)

As the seven dogs and their owners posed for a glamour shot (<http://vimeo.com/52493758>), giggles and laughter rang out when the dogs tried to squirm their way to freedom.

“The tails were just flying around,” said photographer Mark Rogers, who valiantly tried to wrangle the disorderly group for a final photo.

But there were also tears that came mainly from the 125 members of the public who attended the event just to lend some support.

“There were lots of hugs, kisses, lots of crying. When people meet these dogs, they cry,” Reynolds said. “They understand that they are little pieces of positive history.”

