



HISTORY OF GREYHOUND RACING IN KANSAS

Overview

Greyhound history in Kansas goes back to the mid-nineteenth century, when farmers imported greyhounds to help control the jackrabbit population. Later in the century coursing – in which greyhounds chased live rabbits in an enclosed field – became a popular entertainment. The first regulated greyhound coursing match in the United States was held at Cheyenne Bottoms, Kansas in 1886.



One hundred years later, in 1986, Kansas voters decided by referendum to amend the state constitution to allow pari-mutuel wagering at racetracks. The Legislature passed the Kansas Parimutuel Racing Act the following year.

In 1989 two greyhound tracks opened within a week of one another: Wichita Greyhound Park, near Wichita; and The Woodlands near Kansas City, which later added a horse track. Camptown Greyhound Park, in Frontenac, opened in 1995 and closed six months later. Camptown reopened under new ownership in 2000 but again suffered heavy losses and closed before the end of the season.

The racing industry boasts that Kansas is the home of greyhound racing. The National Greyhound Association (NGA), which operates the national registry of racing greyhounds, is located in Abilene; so is the National Greyhound Hall of Fame. There are more than fifty greyhound breeding farms in the state, and among them they produced 6,500 of the 35,800 greyhounds whelped in 1998. Yet pari-mutuel greyhound racing is a dying industry here, as it is everywhere in the country.

Since The Woodlands opened in 1989 attendance has steadily declined, from a peak of over 1,700,000 in 1990 to fewer than 400,000 in 2000. The track filed for bankruptcy in 1996 but is still in operation.



Wichita Greyhound Park

Wichita Greyhound Park saw a similar slide, from just under 800,000 in 1990 to half that in 1996, the last year for which figures are available. In 1997 the Wichita track was purchased by Phil Ruffin, Sr., of Wichita, owner of the Frontier Casino in Las Vegas and the Crystal Palace Resort and Casino in the Bahamas. Ruffin also owns the ill-fated Camptown track.

Throughout the past decade, while profits and patronage for greyhound racing have plummeted, the racing industry and its political allies have repeatedly

begged the Legislature to authorize slot machines at the tracks. Slot machines would bring vastly expanded gambling opportunities, which in turn would mean increased profits for the racetracks. The industry holds out the

plum of increased tax revenues as an enticement to lawmakers. But in the few states where slot machines have been introduced, they have brought with them a host of social problems and a strong risk of political corruption. Of special concern is the fact that profits from slots are used to augment purses. In effect, slot machines at the tracks subsidize and perpetuate the suffering of racing greyhounds.

Capsule History, 1989-2003

- **1989**

Pari-mutuel racing begins in Kansas. Wichita Greyhound Park and The Woodlands open.

- **1993**

A proposal to put a constitutional amendment allowing privately owned casinos on a statewide ballot is approved in the Senate but fails in the House.¹

- **February 1995**

Jorge Anthony (Tony) Hughes is arrested with four others after selling 2.2 pounds of cocaine to an undercover FBI agent. Two of Hughes's companions are armed and a third is transporting arms in his car. In an FBI affidavit, an informant states that on three previous occasions Hughes had sold him illegal steroids (testosterone). Hughes is vice president of Hughes Kennels, a greyhound kennel at The Woodlands.²

- **1995**

The Legislature authorizes four Kansas Indian tribes to open casinos on their lands in Northeast Kansas.

- **May 1995**

After five years of wrangling and lawsuits and two years of construction, Camptown Greyhound Park opens in May. The latest obstacle was strong public opposition over the use of \$2.3 million in taxpayers' money to fund sewer, water and street improvements during construction.³

- **Summer 1995**

The financially struggling Woodlands shortens its horse-racing season and eliminates Tuesday night greyhound racing. The track is losing about \$300,000 a month. In August five banks grant the track a six-month extension on a \$27.6 million mortgage payment due in January 1996; the amount due exceeds the entire previous year's operating revenue by \$8.1 million.⁴

- **November 1995**

Camptown Greyhound Park closes six months after opening and six weeks before the end of the racing season, having lost \$250,000 a month during its brief operation. Hundreds of greyhounds are left behind, their fate uncertain since suddenly they are a financial liability.⁵

- **November 1995**

The Racing Commission allows The Woodlands to suspend almost \$300,000 in charitable contributions, required by law. In return the TRAK East, the nonprofit organization through which the track is licensed by the state, will share in slot machine profits if slots legislation passes in 1996. Governor Bill Graves,

¹ *Kansas City Star*/John Petterson, March 20, 1993

² *Greyhound Network News*, Spring 1995; *Kansas City Star*/John T. Dauner, February 22, 1995

³ *Greyhound Network News*, Spring 1994, Summer 1995

⁴ *Greyhound Network News*, Fall 1995; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, August 7, 19, 31, 1995; /Bill Graham, August 13; *Associated Press*, July 8, 1995

⁵ *Kansas City Star*/John Petterson, November 4, 1995

previously opposed to expanded gambling, now says that the pari-mutuel industry is unlikely to survive without it.⁶

- **1996**

An audit of the Kansas Racing Commission finds significant failures to function according to state law and the commission's own regulations. Among the criticisms: Failure to test all winning greyhounds – or in some instances any greyhounds at all – for controlled substances; failure to impose meaningful penalties when such substances were found; failure to complete investigations in a timely manner; and allowing unlicensed individuals to judge races. A newly appointed executive director promises better performance in the future.⁷

- **Spring 1996**

A proposal that would have placed a constitutional amendment to allow gambling expansion on a statewide ballot fails in the Senate. Other expanded gambling bills, aimed mostly at bailing out the failing Woodlands track, are defeated. Shortly after the Legislature adjourns The Woodlands files for bankruptcy protection. Liabilities include \$28.7 million in bank loans and \$1.7 million in unpaid taxes.⁸

- **August 1996**

In an attempt to bail out The Woodlands, the Kansas City city council includes on the city's primary ballot a measure to amend the city's home rule charter to allow slot machines at The Woodlands. The measure is overwhelmingly approved. The state Attorney General says the vote was unconstitutional: "If slot machines are brought into the county, I will file criminal charges."⁹

- **1996-97**

At The Woodlands, betting in 1996 was down 17 percent over the year, and attendance was down 31.9 percent. Attendance at Wichita Greyhound Park in 1996 was down 22 percent, while the handle (total amount wagered) dropped by \$12.6 million. Nevertheless, in 1997 the operators and lobbyist of Wichita Greyhound Park donate almost \$38,000 to political campaigns; the lobbyist himself is paid \$50,000 a year.¹⁰

- **1997**

In January Assistant State Attorney Christopher Holly files a petition with the Kansas Racing and Gaming Commission requesting hearings into illegal betting at The Woodlands. Specifically, the petition alleges that seven current or former Woodlands employees accepted illegal bets from a high-stakes Florida gambler, placed through local third parties, eleven times between February 1993 and October 1996. The petition seeks \$55,000 in civil fines.

In February a Wyandotte County district judge issues a restraining order blocking the hearings.

In April the Commission drops all charges in exchange for a \$15,000 settlement. The track's attorney says their denials have been vindicated. Holly says, "Our position is that something did happen." (Note:

⁶ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 1995-96; *Kansas City Star*/John Petterson, November 18, 1995

⁷ *Greyhound Network News*, Spring 1996; *Kansas City Star*/John Petterson, January 30, 1996

⁸ *Greyhound Network News*, Summer 1996; *Kansas State Collegian/Associated Press*, April 17 1996; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, May 18, 1996

⁹ *Greyhound Network News*, Fall 1996; *Kansas City Star*/Ann Lamoy, August 8, 1996

¹⁰ *Greyhound Network News*, Spring 1997; *Kansas City Star*, January 4, 1997; *Associated Press*/John Hanna, April 7 and 14, 1997

Christopher Holly is the assistant state attorney who filed the petition, but he also serves as an attorney for the Racing and Gaming Commission.)¹¹

- **Spring 1997**

In a now-familiar scenario, two expanded gambling bills fail in the Legislature. The lobbyist for Wichita Greyhound Park quits, burned out after five years.¹²

- **November 1997**

Phil Ruffin, Sr., who operates a dozen Marriott hotels and owns casinos in Las Vegas and the Bahamas, buys Wichita Greyhound Park for about \$10 million.¹³

- **1998**

Two years after The Woodlands first filed for bankruptcy, and following the failure of two reorganization plans, the track goes into liquidation. In December ownership passes to gaming and construction magnate William M. Grace, who holds 85 percent of the track's mortgage debt.¹⁴

- **July 1999**

A 19-year old maintenance worker at Wichita Greyhound Park is electrocuted before the eyes of 1,200 racing fans while trying to repair the trip wire that opens the gates.¹⁵

- **February-April 1999**

Another slot machine bill is introduced in the Senate at the behest of The Woodlands. It is defeated 27-13. According to Senator Lana Oleen, gambling bills have been brought before the Legislature sixteen times in the past nine years.¹⁶

- **October 13, 1999**

Phil Ruffin, Sr., who bought Wichita Greyhound Park in 1997, buys Camptown Greyhound Park from its present owners. He says administration of the two tracks will be merged.¹⁷

- **April 2000**

The latest slot machine bill dies in the Senate.¹⁸

- **Fall 2000**

Camptown Greyhound Park, which had reopened after being closed for five years, operates for 74 days before closing again. The track lost \$30,000 a week. New owner Phil Ruffin, Sr. bought Camptown in 1999 expecting that a slot machine bill would be passed. Without slots the track purchase was "a trial balloon," says the executive manager. Rescue groups organize a massive effort to save stranded greyhounds.¹⁹

¹¹ *Greyhound Network News*, Spring and Summer 1997; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, February 20 and April 26, 1997

¹² *Greyhound Network News*, Summer 1997; *Topeka Capital-Journal/Associated Press*/John Hanna, April 14, 1997

¹³ *Wichita Eagle/Associated Press*, November 8, 1997; /Joe Rodriguez, November 26, 1997

¹⁴ *Greyhound Network News*, Summer 1998; *Kansas City Star*/John T. Dauner, November 12 and December 17, 1998

¹⁵ *Greyhound Network News*, Fall 1999; *Wichita Eagle*/Quannah Leonard, July 10, 1999

¹⁶ *Topeka Capital-Journal/Carl Manning/Associated Press*, April 3, 1999

¹⁷ *Associated Press*, October 13, 1999

¹⁸ *Greyhound Network News*, Summer 2000; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, May 2, 2000

¹⁹ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 2000-01; *Wichita Eagle/Associated Press*, November 16, 2000

- **March 2001**

Slot machine bills go down in the Senate in March, in the House in April.²⁰

- **January 2002**

Governor Bill Graves says in his State of the State message that he is "willing to consider slot machines" to help fill a budget shortfall.²¹

- **February 2002**

The Kansas Racing and Gaming Commission is informed that funds possibly in excess of \$200,000 have been stolen from The Woodlands racetrack, apparently by employees cashing company checks for personal use. The commission's interim executive director cites "a lack of control, a lack of accounting by management." Six employees, including general manager August J. Masciota, two of his daughters, a son-in-law and the son-in-law's brother, have been fired.²²

- **Spring 2002**

On the heels of revelations of wrongdoing at The Woodlands, the latest bill to authorize slots is introduced in the House. Track owners repeat their perennial complaint that they need slot machines at the tracks in order to compete with casinos in neighboring Missouri. Testifying before the House Tourism Committee, Kevin Neuman of Kansas City REGAP (Retired Greyhounds as Pets) points out that attendance at The Woodlands has declined every year since the track opened in 1989, five years before the first casino opened in Missouri. He also reminds them that The Woodlands and one of the Missouri casinos share the same ownership.

The bill is narrowly approved after two votes on the House floor but dies in the Senate Judiciary Committee when the Legislature adjourns.²³

- **May 2002**

While the slots bill is still in committee, a federal grand jury indicts Richard J. Boushka, one of the original owners of The Woodlands, on 61 counts of felony fraud, involving the use of falsified documents to obtain \$19 million in loans from a Wichita bank.

Boushka owned 40 percent of The Woodlands from 1989 to 1994. Having originally invested \$800,000 in the track, he had received over \$12 million in salary, stock returns and consulting fees by 1995.²⁴

- **December 2, 2002**

Boushka reaches a plea agreement with federal investigators, pleading guilty to several counts of felony fraud in return for cooperation in further investigation.²⁵

- **December 2002**

In an interview, newly elected Governor Kathleen Sebelius declares her support for slot machines at the tracks.²⁶

²⁰ *Greyhound Network News* Spring 2001, Summer 2001; *Kansas City Star*/John Petterson and Jim Sullinger, March 23 and April 27, 2001

²¹ *Topeka Capital-Journal*/Chris Grenz, May 20, 2002

²² *Greyhound Network News*, Spring 2002; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, February 16, 2002

²³ *Greyhound Network News*, Spring and Summer 2002; *Topeka Capital-Journal*/Chris Grenz, May 20, 2002

²⁴ *Greyhound Network News*, Summer 2002; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, September 27, 1995; /James Fitzpatrick May 10, 2002; *Wichita Eagle*/Deb Gruver, December 3, 2002

²⁵ *Wichita Eagle*/Deb Gruver, December 3, 2002

²⁶ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 2002-03, Summer 2003; *Topeka Capital-Journal/Associated Press*/John Hanna, December 30, 2002

- **March 2003**

Eugene Brundige pleads guilty to stealing about \$74,000 from The Woodlands while he was employed there in 2001. Brundige is the son-in-law of former Woodlands manager August J. Masciotra, who has pled not guilty to three counts of felony theft. (See February 2002, above)²⁷

- **May 2003**

After extended debate, two gambling bills are killed in the Senate at the very end of the session. One would have allowed casino gambling in counties where voters and officials approved it. The other would have allowed racetracks to operate state-owned slot machines. The slot-machine bill was defeated 34-4, the casino bill by three votes. A House-approved expanded gambling bill did not reach the Senate floor.²⁸

- **August 2003**

Repeated attempts by gambling interests to expand gambling have failed, in part because of conflicts within the gambling industry. Horse and dog breeders, track owners, Indian tribes and others have all fought among themselves over who gets the biggest share of the pie. "There's tremendous greed," says Glenn Thompson of the anti-gambling group Stand Up for Kansas. "Greed is what's driving the diversity we see." Governor Kathleen Sebelius, who supports expanded gambling, establishes a 15-member committee in August to mediate among the conflicting interests and assess public opinion.²⁹

Phil Ruffin says he would like to sell Wichita Greyhound Park and build a new greyhound track and casino downtown. According to Ruffin, one percent of the revenue would go to the city, one percent to the county, and 25 percent or more to the state. Anti-gambling activist Glenn Thompson points out that the complex would generate about \$50 million a year in personal income for Ruffin.³⁰

- **November 2003**

Speaking only for himself, Tom Wright, chairman of the governor's committee on expanded gambling, says he opposes using slot machines at the tracks to prop up the dying racing industry. "That doesn't make a lot of sense to me," he says. "I don't know that that industry, as opposed to any other industry, needs to have the state's support to that extent."³¹

- **December 2003**

District Judge Terry Bullock rules that the state's method of funding public education is unconstitutional. He orders the legislature to fix the problem by July 1, 2004. The need for additional revenue stimulates discussion over expanded gambling at the tracks.³²

- **December 2003**

The governor's committee on expanded gambling issues its report. Members approve racetrack slot machines and casinos as possible sources of revenue, but say that large-scale gambling operations should be limited to Wyandotte County. They propose that racetrack slot machines be state-owned and that the number be limited to 300-600.

²⁷ *Greyhound Network News*, Spring 2003; *Kansas City Star*/Rick Alm, March 19, 2003

²⁸ *Kansas City Star*/John L. Petterson and Jim Sullinger, May 6, 2003

²⁹ *Associated Press*/John Milburn, August 10, 2003; *Lawrence Journal-World*/*Associated Press*/John Hanna, November 24, 2003

³⁰ *Wichita Eagle*/Dan Voorhis, August 10, 2003

³¹ *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 8, 2003

³² *Wichita Eagle*/Steve Painter, December 4, 2003

Phil Ruffin, Sr., owner of Wichita Greyhound Park, says he is "absolutely, adamantly opposed" to state ownership of slot machines. If slots were finally approved by the Legislature, Ruffin planned to install 2,000 machines and move the track to downtown Wichita. He also planned to build a large-scale downtown casino complex.

Governor Sebelius plans to propose legislation to expand gambling but says she does not want to limit slot machines to pari-mutuel facilities. The Legislature rejected proposals for expanded gambling earlier this year.³³

Humane Issues

Are Racing Greyhounds Dogs?

Not according to the state of Kansas. Because Kansas law classifies greyhounds as "livestock," they are not given the same protection from abuse normally accorded dogs, cats, and other companion animals. The only protection accorded Kansas greyhounds is federal legislation regulating the transportation and slaughter of farm animals, which is enforced – or notoriously unenforced – by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Interviewed for an article in *PitchWeekly*, a former Kansas trainer and kennel owner said, "Over the 15 years I was in the business, I probably killed about 1,500 dogs. I usually shot them in the headYou either retrain or kill the slower dogs. The owners don't want them back." They also don't want to pay the \$20 vets charge to euthanize a greyhound; it's cheaper to shoot them. The trainer, who left the business in 1994, says he has a bone pile in his back yard.³⁴

Bad Days for Greyhounds

- **November 1995**

The new Camptown track in Frontenac closes after only six months of operation, leaving an estimated 500 to 700 greyhounds stranded. Members of the Racing and Gaming Commission demand assurances that no dogs will be euthanized, and the track's general manager works to find alternate track bookings. Ultimately 78 dogs are put up for adoption, 33 of whom are still at the track on December 22. Also still there are 23 other greyhounds. Full details on the fate of all the dogs are unavailable.³⁵

- **September 1996**

Following an alert by the Greyhound Protection League (GPL), a search is instituted for 60 racing greyhounds discarded by a Florida racetrack and sent on a "kill run" to Texas. Sixteen are found, abandoned and barely alive, on a rural roadside in Texas. Several more have died or are rumored to be dead. An additional 32 of the Florida dogs and 19 other greyhounds, all of them ill, are discovered on the property of a Corsicana man who has recently died.

³³ *Topeka Capital-Journal*/John Millburn, December 13, 2003; *Wichita Eagle*/Steve Painter, December 19, 2003

³⁴ *Kansas City Pitch Weekly*/Nicki Watson Walker, June 24-30, 1999

³⁵ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 1995-96

Through a complicated series of negotiations, the industry-affiliated National Greyhound Association (NGA) arranges to transport 32 of the Florida greyhounds, along with two others, to their headquarters in Abilene. After the dogs' arrival, the GPL determines that at least ten in the shipment were not from the original Florida group. The fate of those missing dogs is in question, as is the identity of the added dogs and the apparently devious route the hauler followed from Corsicana. (See the *G/VV* article referenced below for details.)

Bill and Cher Oliver of Kansas City REGAP travel to Abilene and are given 13 male greyhounds to place for adoption. The NGA does not allow them to see the other dogs.³⁶

- **April 1998**

Employees preparing to mow the grass behind a utility substation in O'Fallon, Missouri discover 45 decomposing bodies of greyhounds. Almost all are puppies, but among them are nine adult dogs, their ears cut off to avoid identification. Although the bodies are in different stages of decomposition, all have been dumped since the last mowing two weeks earlier. With them are the bodies of three rabbits and a cat, small animals sometimes (illegally) used in training.

There are no greyhound tracks in Missouri and no breeders in the area. Nearby Highway 79 is part of the usual route between Kansas and Iowa, and representatives of the St. Louis chapter of REGAP believe that the bodies were dumped by an out-of-state breeder, possibly from Kansas. On May 2 150 members of Kansas City REGAP demonstrate in Kansas City in memory of the O'Fallon greyhounds and launch a petition drive to end pari-mutuel racing in Kansas.³⁷

- **Fall 1998**

Kansas City REGAP participates in another massive rescue when the Greyhound Protection League and rescue groups across the country launch an emergency action to save over 200 greyhounds. The dogs, many debilitated and four injured, were stranded when the notorious Greenetrack in Eutaw, Alabama closed prematurely on September 6. After several weeks of on-site rehabilitation, the dogs are trucked in groups over a period of several weeks to adoption organizations throughout the South and Midwest. In December the final haul delivers seven greyhounds, including the one most severely injured, to KC REGAP. In all, 212 greyhounds are saved. Another 150 Greenetrack dogs could not be rescued and were shipped to low-grade tracks in Florida, where they are at serious risk of being killed.³⁸

- **Fall 2000**

Over 700 greyhounds are stranded when Camptown Greyhound Park, which had reopened after being closed for five years, again shuts down prematurely in November. Most of the dogs are qualified only for low-grade races, which bodes ill for their chances of survival.

Louisiana-based adoption coordinator Cynthia Cash, who was also involved in the rescues described above, works with the Kansas Gaming and Racing Commission to place as many dogs as possible with adoption groups. By late December ten greyhounds have been adopted in Kansas

³⁶ *Greyhound Network News*, Fall 1996

³⁷ *Greyhound Network News*, Summer 1998

³⁸ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 1998-99

and 113 have been sent to adoption groups in several states. Another 73 remain at Camptown awaiting transport. Cash says full documentation was provided for each dog – a rarity in rescue operations – and that the dogs were generally in good condition.³⁹

- **Summer 2001**

Greyhound Network News obtains injury reports for the 2000 racing season from the Kansas Gaming and Racing Commission under a public records request. The language of the reports is imprecise and does not always describe the actual nature of the injury. The following is a summary:

At the Woodlands 173 greyhounds were injured. Of those, at least 47 suffered fractures, including 34 fractures of the hock alone. Other injuries (unspecified) involved fore and hind feet, long bones, and the carpal (wrist) joint of the foreleg. There were 53 muscle injuries. One dog was shocked by the live rail, another collided with the lure, and two collapsed with spinal injuries. Nine dogs were put to death.

Wichita Greyhound Park reported 81 injuries, including 25 described as fractures. Curiously, no hock fractures are reported, but there were 23 injuries (unspecified) to the hock joint. Four dogs were put to death.

Camptown Greyhound Park reported 21 greyhounds injured during its shortened racing season (Aug.4 - Nov. 14). Fifteen dogs suffered fractures of the legs and feet, and of those 15, 11 were put to death.

- **2002-2003**

A distemper outbreak at the Flying Eagles Kennel, a breeding farm in Abilene, kills about 100 greyhounds. The kennel owner, Vince Berland, claims the disease is contained on his farm. However, distemper breaks out in Massachusetts in December, with an undisclosed number of greyhounds euthanized. In the same month at least two cases are confirmed at Wichita Greyhound Park and the park is quarantined. In Arizona the following month 18 greyhounds are infected and euthanized. The disease also reaches Florida, killing greyhounds at Sarasota and Hialeah.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 2000-01

⁴⁰ *Greyhound Network News*, Winter 2002-03, Summer 2003