

State: Florida racing greyhounds test positive for cocaine

Tamara Lush, Associated Press Updated 8:18 pm, Saturday, July 8, 2017



Photo: MARK LEES, AP



At least 12 greyhound racing dogs in Florida have tested positive for cocaine, and their trainer has had his license suspended.

It's at least the second instance this year of racing greyhounds testing positive for cocaine. The dogs raced at Bestbet Orange Park in northeast Florida near Jacksonville. The state is home to 12 of the 19 dog tracks in the U.S., where 40 states have outlawed the sport.

Although supporters say the dogs are treated well, the industry faces intense scrutiny. Records show Florida's greyhound industry has had 62 cocaine positives since 2008. In the Jacksonville area case, first reported by WTLV-TV, the dogs tested positive in March and April for benzoylecgonine, a metabolite of cocaine, according to documents from the state Department of Business and Professional Regulation. The documents are dated June 9 and say that trainer Charles McClellan "is a threat to animals in his control, custody and care."

The Associated Press could not locate a phone number or email address for McClellan, but he told the TV station he had lost his job as a Greyhound trainer. The agency has scheduled a formal hearing on his case for Aug. 23.

In a statement to news outlets, Bestbet Orange Park said it supports the swift action taken by the state in suspending the trainer's license. During March and April, McClellan was an employee of the Steve Sarras Kennel.

Sarras, of West Virginia, did not respond to a Facebook message and did not answer a phone call seeking comment. He also serves on the National Greyhound Association Board.

Racing dogs often are owned by one or more people. They are then placed with a kennel and have a trainer. The trainers are often independent contractors and are responsible for the animals' well-being. They also are the ones disciplined if something amiss is discovered.

In May, the state revoked the license of a St. Petersburg trainer whose dogs tested positive for cocaine.

Carey Theil, executive director of GREY2K USA in Boston, a track monitoring group that opposes greyhound racing, called the most recent case "breathtaking" because of the number of dogs that tested positive.

Regulators don't typically investigate how the dogs got cocaine in their systems, and it's unclear in the latest case how that happened. But Theil said the most likely scenarios are someone trying to fix races, or the trainer using the drug and the dogs coming in contact by accident.

One of the dogs in the latest case tested positive six times, including during a race where it finished first. The records showed the dog had cocaine in its system for two of its best races, Theil said.