

Troubled Greyhound Trainer Gets Relicensed While Complaints Take Years to Resolve

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James "Barney" O'Donnell, 84, is a well-known greyhound trainer from Miami Lakes who has raced dogs around the country.

In 2011, O'Donnell was accused of forging a dead veterinarian's signature on paperwork for 94 dogs. In 2013, a raid of O'Donnell's cages at Florida Kennels in Hialeah turned up hypodermic syringes containing anabolic steroids as well as mysterious IV bags. Since 1995, O'Donnell has been charged with nine public (noncriminal) complaints, including animal abuse. He's been either reprimanded or fined three times, according to state records.

In February, the *Tampa Bay Times* reported that the cases could "end a career spanning more than half a century," but in fact, the opposite has occurred. On July 3, the state renewed O'Donnell's license to race dogs for three more years.

Three years after the allegations of forgery, the case status remains "open." The steroid case was

closed with no action taken.

According to Carey Thiel, president of the animal-rights group GREY2K, this is caused by a lag in the system that's unique to Florida. In any other state, he says, an investigation would take about two months, because the investigations and prosecutions are handled by a single agency. In Florida, however, one arm of the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation handles investigations while another arm can impose fines or revoke licenses.

"In my opinion, there's no other state in which O'Donnell would still be licensed," Thiel says. "The Division of Parimutuel Wagering has a very good investigative department, but the cases linger all while these individuals are still responsible for dogs." That's because the DBPR's Office of the General Counsel is slow to bring cases to justice, he says.

Tajiana Ancora-Brown, director of communications for the DBPR, chalks the lag up to due process. "The timeline is dependent upon the Administrative Procedures Act and other external factors," she says.

Thiel says that regardless of his official punishment, O'Donnell's reputation has been ruined. He's been banned from working at Mardi Gras Casino in Hallandale Beach, for instance, as well as at Best Bet in Jacksonville.

Still, "the fact that the state can't address a case from three years ago is outrageous," says Thiel. "What else needs to happen for these individuals to be disciplined?"

A formal hearing is scheduled for October, Ancora-Brown says.

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