

## Cocaine found in Jacksonville racing greyhounds

Source URL: <http://jacksonville.com/news/crime/2010-07-13/story/2-jacksonville-racing-greyhounds-test-positive-cocaine>

By Kate Howard

Two Jacksonville greyhound trainers are facing possible sanctions after their racing dogs tested positive for tiny amounts of cocaine early this year.

The dogs were randomly selected for urine testing at separate events in January. Charges from the state's division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering followed against trainers Amy Willis and Gerald Rhodes, who race greyhounds at Orange Park Kennel Club.

Willis referred comment to her attorney. Rhodes could not be reached for comment, but he is represented by the same attorney, Leonard Chesler.

Chesler said it's too soon to speak to the facts of the cases, but he believes one rule puts dog trainers at an unfair disadvantage.

They're held responsible for their animals' welfare on race days, but the dogs are surrendered to track employees 1 1/2 hours before a race, Chesler said.

"If you're prohibited from watching and caring for an animal, it's very difficult to protect them, if not impossible," he said.

Willis' dog, Scotty Smalls, was tested before a winning race on Jan. 6. He was positive for 20 nanograms of benzoylecgonine, a metabolite produced from cocaine use. A pre-race test on Jan. 28 for Rhodes' greyhound, Gs Rae, later showed 134 nanograms of benzoylecgonine and 16 nanograms of another cocaine metabolite. He finished fourth. A nanogram is one billionth of a gram.

Both trainers face fines up to \$1,000 and possible suspension or revocation of their licenses.

Michael Munz, a spokesman for the Jacksonville Kennel Club, which runs the live racing in Orange Park, said animal welfare is the company's priority.

"Speaking in general, we would not tolerate anything that caused the health and welfare of the dogs raced at our facility any harm," Munz said.

Positive drugs tests are one of the many reasons the greyhound advocacy group Grey2K USA fights for the end of greyhound racing.

More attention was brought to the issue about six years ago, after widespread testing showed more than a hundred positive cocaine tests among racing dogs in Florida. Recently, there have been positive tests reported at dog tracks in Palm Beach and Birmingham, Ala.

Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2K USA, said he's glad to see the state taking the issue seriously.

"It's possible this was an attempt to alter the outcome of races, and it's also possible this was some kind of secondary transference positive from a human," Theil said. "It's hard to know which is more troubling."

But William Lambert, the head of the Jacksonville-based Greyhound Owners Association, said the cocaine levels found in the dogs are barely a trace and could've come from anywhere.

He doesn't think the doping was intentional or intended to have performance-enhancing effects.

"If you love them, take care of them and feed them good, they'll give you 100 percent every time they go out," Lambert said. "There's nothing you can give them that'll make them run faster."

*kate.howard@jacksonville.com, (904) 359-4697*