



HISTORY OF GREYHOUND RACING IN WISCONSIN

Overview

Today, there is one remaining dog track operating in Wisconsin: Dairyland Greyhound Park in Kenosha. Dairyland offers gambling on both live greyhound racing and simulcasting, and has been in operation since 1990. The Park has live racing year-round on Wednesdays through Sundays, and is open for simulcast gambling on Mondays and Tuesdays.¹ However, the Park is under increasing scrutiny due to its continued financial losses, which amounted to \$3.44 million in 2008, up from the \$2.82 million it lost in 2007.² In addition, the gap between what the state spends on the park (\$1.2 million in 2008) compared to what it takes in revenues from the park (\$1.33 million in 2008) has been closing.³



Dairyland Racetrack, 2009

In October 2009, Dairyland management announced that it was considering closing the track at the end of the year, citing continued financial losses.⁴

Though Dairyland Greyhound Park is the only track currently operating, the early 1990s saw the opening of four other tracks in Wisconsin, all of which have since been forced to close. Greyhound racing in Wisconsin began in 1990, with a total of four tracks opening in the same year, and a fifth opening in 1991. Track owners were initially optimistic about their prospects, although some experts predicted that not all the tracks could be successful because of their close proximity to each other. The first

year of racing was profitable for three out of the four dog tracks. However, only a year later all but one track showed a loss in profit.

Fox Valley Greyhound Park in Kaukauna was the first to fold, closing in 1993 less than three years after its opening. The track lost \$1.3 million in 1991 and \$3.4 million in 1992, and was forced to file for bankruptcy in January 1993.⁵ Wisconsin Dells Greyhound Park in Lake Delton, which was the state's first greyhound racetrack, closed in 1996 under pressure from mounting financial losses.⁶ The track lost \$1.2 million in the year prior to its closing, and cited competition from a new casino as a major factor in its demise.⁷ St. Croix Meadows Greyhound Racing Park in Hudson shut down in August of 2001 after a decade of declining attendance and losses estimated at over \$32 million, including \$25 million from 1990 to 1996 alone.⁸ The most recent track to fail, Geneva Lakes Kennel Club in

1 <http://www.dairylandgreyhoundpark.com>, last visited on October 7, 2009.

2 Don Walker, Is Dairyland a drain on the state? *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, April 29, 2008.

3 Id.

4 Mike Johnson, Dairyland Greyhound Park may close for good, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, October 10, 2009.

5 Court upholds foreclosure of dog track, *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 3, 1993.

6 Amy Rinard and Meg Jones, Dells dog track will close doors, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, July 8, 1996.

7 Owners to close Dells dog track, *Capital Times*, July 8, 1996.

8 Id.

Delavan, closed in 2005 after fifteen years of operation.⁹ The track had opened in 1990 but closed after years of steady decline in attendance and revenue.

In 2001 Governor Tommy Thompson secretly signed a gaming compact with the Menominee Nation to turn Dairyland into a tribal casino. Part of the agreement stated that if a Kenosha casino opened, it could offer blackjack and slot machines, along with dog racing. However, shortly afterward Thompson was succeeded by casino opponent Scott McCallum, making the proposed casino unlikely. In the winter of 2004, the owners of Dairyland announced that they had reached a purchase option agreement to sell the park for \$40.5 million to the Menominee Nation to build an off-reservation casino. The purchase option would expire in 2008. However, the project suffered another setback in the Spring of 2007 when Kenosha millionaire Dennis Troha, the driving force behind the casino push, was indicted on federal charges and accused of illegally funneling contributions to the campaign of Governor Jim Doyle.

In January of 2009 the federal government rejected the bid by the Menominee Nation to open a casino at Dairyland. However, a spokesman for the effort indicated that the tribe would continue to fight the decision in federal court.¹⁰

Humane Issues

- **September 1993**

The Wisconsin Gaming Commission announces the cancellation of several afternoon races at Dairyland Greyhound Park after commission Chairman John Tries calls the kennel area “an orthopedic ward.” The Commission voiced concern about complaints from dog owners that greyhounds suffer many leg and hip injuries on the Dairyland track surface. From June 1 through September 14, the commission’s Racing Division reports the number of minor and crippling injuries at Wisconsin tracks as follows: Dairyland 180, Geneva Lakes Kennel Club 60, St. Croix Meadows 42, and Wisconsin Dells 49.¹¹

- **December 1993**

The Wisconsin Gaming Commission is informed that while Wisconsin dog tracks as a group have a 3.3% injury rate, meaning that a dog is injured in 3.3% of races, the rate at Dairyland Greyhound Park is as high as 10% for the first half of 1993. The Gaming Commission decides to meet with track managers, kennel owners, veterinarians and state officials to assess whether the injuries are due to the track surface at Dairyland and how to reduce injuries in the future.¹²

- **February 1999**

The state imposes a quarantine of dog tracks to prevent the outbreak of a virus that causes internal bleeding among dogs. Though the disease has not yet affected any racing dogs in Wisconsin, there has been an elevated incidence of kennel cough, an upper respiratory condition that can lead to a pneumonia-like illness. One quarter of the 900 dogs at Delavan’s Geneva Lakes Greyhound Track have kennel cough, and two dogs die of complications from kennel cough at Dairyland Greyhound Park in Kenosha.¹³

9 Kayla Bunge, Stores, homes still planned for former greyhound park, *Janesville Gazette*, June 23, 2008.

10 Cary Spivak, U.S. rejects plans for Kenosha casino, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, January 7, 2009.

11 Track punished for hurt dogs, *Capital Times*, September 17, 1993.

12 Greyhound injuries criticized, *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 17, 1993.

13 Quarantine imposed at dog tracks, *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 14, 1999.

- **April 2000**

A local newspaper reports that an investigation is underway into allegations that Wisconsin racing greyhounds have been illegally diverted from adoption programs, and instead given to a Minnesota research facility for use in medical experiments. Guidant Corporation, based in St. Paul, provides the U.S. Department of Agriculture with records of its dealings with greyhound kennel owner Daniel Shonka, who operates a kennel at St. Croix Meadows Racing Track. Investigators suspect that Shonka illegally sold over 200 Wisconsin greyhounds to the research facility after failing to obtain the owners' permission.¹⁴ Interviews and public records reveal that over 850 retired greyhounds that were supposed to have been adopted into homes were instead used in research experiments where most of them died.¹⁵

- **September 2002**

Jeremy J. Michaud, a trainer at Geneva Lakes Greyhound Track, loses his license after surveillance tapes show him injecting greyhounds on four different days with an unknown substance that later turns out to be an anabolic steroid. A state Gaming Division panel holds a hearing on the case and decides that Michaud and Janet Diercks, an owner of J & C Buttes Kennel, violated two gaming laws by illegally possessing an instrument to inject any chemical substance within a race track and possessing a substance to be injected into an animal. Michaud is also fined for shaking and holding a greyhound by its muzzle and kicking it in its chest and foot. The Gaming Division defends its surveillance by stating that state law allows authorities to conduct searches without warrants on racetrack grounds. The incidents are reported by local media outlets after they receive a tip from greyhound protection group GREY2K USA.¹⁶

- **February 2003**

Daniel Shonka is convicted of one count of felony theft and one count of misdemeanor theft after pleading no contest to charges stemming from his involvement in sending hundreds of retired racing greyhounds to their deaths in medical experiments. According to St. Croix County Circuit Court records, Shonka received at least \$374,000 by selling the dogs to Guidant Corp. from 1996 to 2000, a payment that covered approximately 935 dogs. Shonka is ordered to pay over \$110,000 in fines and restitution. As a result of shortcomings revealed in the investigation, which began in early 2000, Wisconsin becomes the first state in the country to require greyhound adoption agencies to register with state regulators.¹⁷

- **March 2003**

Dog injuries at Dairyland Greyhound Park increase by nearly 30% in 2002, as racing-related injuries at the track rise to 412 from 318 in 2001. Meanwhile, injuries at the Geneva Lakes track in Delavan climb 5.5%, to 227 from 215 in 2001. Greyhound advocates cite financial losses by the tracks, which could lead to poor track conditions and less rest for dogs between races, as possible reasons for the increase in injuries. Additionally, when tracks earn less, dog owners receive lower payouts and are less likely to spend money on trainers and caregivers for the dogs, according to Michigan Retired Greyhounds as Pets, a greyhound adoption group.¹⁸

14 Research facility cooperating in greyhound probe, *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 17, 2000.

15 From dog track to their doom, *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 14, 2000.

16 Greyhound trainer, owner investigated, *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 20, 2002.

17 Man to pay \$110,000 for greyhound deaths, *Capital Times*, February 7, 2003.

18 Injuries to racing dogs at Dairyland up 30%, *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 16, 2003.

- **April 2005**

State gambling officials suspend and recommend revoking the license of Delavan greyhound trainer and kennel operator John Jachimowski. Inspectors in January 2005 examined an overflow kennel at Geneva Lakes Greyhound Track in Delavan, and found Jachimowski's dogs were neglected and in an unacceptable condition with feces in their crates, urine-soaked bedding, and food pans left from previous days. The incident is reported by local media after reporters receive a tip from greyhound protection group GREY2K USA.¹⁹

- **November 2006**

The license of Kenosha greyhound trainer Robert E. Johnson is revoked by state dog racing authorities following the heat related death of a dog in August. According to the Division of Gaming records, Johnson also violated the state's rules of racing by removing dogs from the state without notice and placing former racing dogs with an unapproved adoption agency in Virginia.²⁰

- **January 2007**

A pickup truck hauling dozens of racing greyhounds headed for Dairyland Greyhound Park in Kenosha crashes in Iowa, killing the driver and at least three dogs, who are run over by oncoming traffic.²¹

- **February 2008**

State records show that 76 greyhounds suffer broken legs in 2007, an increase of 18.7 percent. In total, 462 greyhound injuries are reported at Wisconsin dog tracks in 2007, a 19 percent increase from the previous year. Jenifer Barker, a state veterinarian who treats most of the injured dogs at Dairyland, the only remaining dog track in Wisconsin, says the condition of the track's surface and deterioration of the greyhound industry in general are to blame for the increase.²²

- **December 2008**

Despite the refusal of a state veterinarian to approve the track surface, Dairyland conducts their normal race schedule and three greyhounds suffer broken legs. State officials claim that they will more closely monitor the racetrack's heating system to ensure the surface conditions are safe.²³

- **October 2009**

A state investigation is launched after six greyhounds die at Dairyland Greyhound Park. According to state records, at least four of the dogs bled to death. State officials take samples of the food being used at Dairyland to determine whether the dogs died from a food-borne illness.²⁴

Laws & Regulations: How Dog Racing is Regulated in Wisconsin

Greyhound racing in the state of Wisconsin is governed by Wisconsin Statute Chapter 562, entitled "Regulation of Racing and On-Track Pari-Mutuel Wagering". Wis. Stats. Chapter 562. The statute consists of 13 sections dealing with racing operations, officials, employees, wagering, and interactions with animals. The first section of the statute,

19 Greyhound trainer may lose his license, *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 9, 2005.

20 George Hesselberg, Authorities yank dog trainer's license, *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 25, 2006.

21 Truck hauling greyhounds crashes, *Wisconsin State Journal*, January 12, 2007.

22 More dogs hurt at Dairyland Greyhound Park, *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 26, 2008; Injuries spike at dog track, *Capital Times*, February 25, 2008.

23 Don Walker, State officials to monitor heating at Kenosha greyhound track, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 3, 2009.

24 Don Walker, *Investigation launched into 6 greyhound deaths at Dairyland*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 21, 2009.

entitled "Humane treatment of animals," states that it is the intent of the Wisconsin legislature that animals which participate in races in this state and which are bred and trained for racing in the state shall be treated humanely, both on and off racetracks, throughout their lives. As set forth in Chapter 562, the Division of Gaming regulates racing and on-track pari-mutuel wagering, and in keeping with this directive, has promulgated various administrative rules. The Division employs staff with an office located at the racetrack, which includes two stewards, a veterinarian, veterinary assistants, and a licensing clerk, all of whom are responsible for the health, welfare and safety of racing greyhounds.

In addition, Wisconsin's Administrative Code has a chapter in its Game section dealing specifically with the regulation of greyhound racing in Wisconsin. The chapter's purpose, expressed in Game 7.01, is to "ensure that race meetings held in Wisconsin are of the highest quality and free from practices which are corrupt, incompetent, dishonest or unprincipled and maintain the appearance as well as the fact of complete honesty and integrity of pari-mutuel racing." Wis. Admin. Code, Chapter 7.01.

The state's felony animal cruelty statute, Wis. Stats. 951, was amended in 1997 and 1999, and details the meaning of and punishment for crimes against animals in the state. Wis. Stats. 951.

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