

## **13 dogs injured at Ebro in 2016; 1 euthanized**

By **JOHN HENDERSON**

**News Herald Reporter**

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Track owner Mark Hess said the 2016 Ebro racing season experienced a substantial reduction in both injured greyhounds and those humanely euthanized compared to the 2015 season.

EBRO — A group that wants to eliminate greyhound dog racing has discovered 13 greyhounds at Ebro Greyhound Park suffered serious injuries during the past live racing season.

One of the dogs suffered a serious broken leg and was euthanized, according to the group, GREY2K USA Worldwide, which discovered the injuries in a state report that was part of an investigation into the death of a greyhound named Braska Lickity, a 3-year-old red fawn dog euthanized Sept. 5 after suffering a broken leg during a race at Ebro.

Track owner Mark Hess said the 2016 Ebro racing season experienced a substantial reduction in both injured greyhounds and those humanely euthanized compared to the 2015 season.

“Racing is a high-speed contact sport participated by greyhounds that are born to run and love to compete,” he said. “As any sports with athletes competing with such enthusiasm, it’s inevitable on occasion they will experience injuries. It’s Ebro’s mission to continue to provide a safe racing surface with the best conditions available to them, coupled with Ebro veterinarians working with greyhound trainers and owners to ensure their greyhounds are healthy and fit to compete.”

Hess said he doesn’t want to play down the injuries at the track, but “it is inevitable. In any kind of contact sport we’re going to have some type of injuries.”

Hess said the track is doing all it can to reduce injuries, with veterinarians inspecting the dogs at weigh-in to make sure they are in good condition and the track doing its best to ensure the racing surface is in the best condition possible.

“If for some reason bad weather and racing conditions are not good, we cancel the race,” he said. “We did that once this year for the greyhounds. We canceled the whole nine” races.

According to the Ebro Treatment Log, 13 dogs suffered serious injuries requiring veterinary attention during an 11-week period between June 25 and Sept. 5. At least five of the dogs suffered broken legs. On two occasions, July 7 and Aug. 24, two dogs suffered broken legs at Ebro on the same day.

Eleven of the 13 injuries were either fatal or career-ending, according to GREY2K USA.

Hess said of the six dogs that suffered broken legs, five were rehabilitated by their owners or licensed veterinarians. He said Braska Lickity was euthanized by a licensed veterinarian at the direction of its owner.

Since 2013, 357 greyhound deaths have been reported at dog tracks statewide, including 35 at Ebro, GREY2K reports.

### **Greyhound legislation**

In March, the Florida Legislature included a provision in the state budget that requires the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering to implement injury reporting through the creation of a new administrative rule. The division took the first step toward creating this rule Aug. 3 by holding a public workshop in Tallahassee. The next step would be to issue a draft rule and hold a public hearing.

“This administrative process takes many months,” said Carey Theil, executive director of GREY2K USA Worldwide.

Oddly enough, GREY2K USA Worldwide and many track owners in general are on the same page when it comes to racing — they want it eliminated, but for different reasons. Track owners say racing no longer is profitable, and GREY2K wants it done away with because it believes it is animal cruelty. Under state law, tracks have to have racing if they have poker. Bills have been proposed to “decouple” those, but they haven’t passed. Hess said they haven’t made a decision whether racing would stay at the track if a decoupling bill does pass the Legislature some day.

“We’re not fighting decoupling,” he said. “If it happens, at that point in time we’ll look at the number and make a decision on what we are going to do.”

Many tracks want to continue poker and add slot machines to bolster business, but so far the state has not granted a permit for slot machines at Ebro even though Washington County voters approved it in a 2012 referendum.

A pending case being reviewed by the Florida Supreme Court could open the door for slots. Arguments the court heard in April center on whether Gretna Racing, a pari-mutuel facility in rural Gadsden County, should be able to offer slot machines without the express approval of the Legislature. A decision in that case likely will affect Ebro.

“We’re waiting for a decision,” Hess said. “It could be tomorrow.”

He said the slot machines would create 1,200 new jobs.

“A study shows 1.7 million additional people will visit Panama City Beach with slot machines,” he said.

According to the most recent data the track filed with the state in 2014, Ebro lost \$1.9 million on racing and made a profit of \$1.7 million on its card room. Overall, the track suffered an operating loss of \$155,328.