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## Dog deaths spur push to end greyhound racing in Florida

ORANGE PARK, Fla.- It was the 15th race of the day at bestbet's Orange Park dog track in November 2016, a 550-yard sprint to the finish by eight greyhounds trained to run fast. Shorty's BabyDoll was running out of the seventh position. She got off to a slow start but was making up ground at the first turn when tragedy struck. She was bumped by another dog and fell, breaking both front legs. She later had to be euthanized.

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What seems like a tragic accident happens often at a dozen dog tracks across the state, says a national non-profit dedicated to saving greyhounds and ending the practice of dog racing. Stats compiled by the state show that 367 dogs died at tracks in Florida since 2013, 52 of them at the track in Orange Park.

In a statement, bestbet says they put "the health and welfare of the dogs that perform at their Orange Park facility first and foremost. From time to time, there are unforeseen circumstances that regrettably result in the dogs needing medical attention. At all times first rate medical attention is provided to these dog athletes and all decisions on how to treat these animals is made in consultation with qualified veterinarian care specialists."



There are only 19 tracks in the United States that still run greyhounds. Twelve of them are in Florida. Forty states have banned greyhound racing. However, a quirk in Florida law actually encourages the tracks to keep running dogs, despite the fact that many of them lose money on the races.

Since the 1990's, pari-mutuel facilities including horse racing, dog racing, and jai-alai, have been allowed to operate lucrative poker rooms and in South Florida, slot casinos. However, to keep operating those highly

profitable gambling operations, the tracks are required to run at least 90% of the races that they ran in 1997, often in front of sparse crowds.

"We are fighting in Tallahassee to end the state dog racing mandate. This is often referred to as 'decoupling'" says Carey Theil, Executive Director of Grey2K USA.

The group claims decoupling would actually be good for the tracks. A state report in 2013 found the tracks lost a combined \$35 million on dog racing in 2012 alone.

"We have a product that the audience is not interested in." Dan Adkins, vice president of a Hallandale Beach track recently told lawmakers.

However, Greyhound owners are pushing back. Lobbyist for the industry Jeff Kottkamp told a [state senate committee](#) that 3000 dog owners would lose their livelihood and nearly 10,000 jobs would be lost for people who support the industry if decoupling passes.

"We're very close to winning this fight, but have unfortunately been pulled into a broader, murky legislative debate about gambling including the Seminole Compact," Theil said.

The Seminole Compact Theil references is a deal between the state and the Seminole Tribe of Indians. The tribe struck a deal with the state, giving them exclusive rights to operate casinos with "banked games" like blackjack and roulette. The tribe operates six casinos in Florida, including three in Broward County and one in Tampa. The Tampa facility is the fourth largest casino in America.

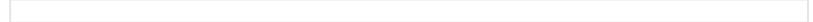
Combined, the Seminole casinos generated an [estimated \\$2.2 billion in 2015](#), according to the [Tampa Bay Times](#). The deal requires the casinos to share a cut of the profits with the state of Florida and their local governments. However, that deal expired in 2015 and the state legislature did not approve a new compact negotiated between the tribe and Governor Rick Scott.

State lawmakers are expected to look at bills to increase regulation of the greyhound industry, including testing for steroids (Senate Bill 512) and add a requirement that tracks report greyhound injuries to the public. They may also pass a bill that would end the dog racing requirement, but the change would not impact horse racing tracks.

Bestbet says they will not take a position on the legislation at the state capitol for now until they see how it unfolds.



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