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Trainer's license revoked after greyhounds test positive for cocaine at Derby Lane



Malcom McAllister is seen in this undated photo from Derby Lane. The state revoked Malcolm McAllister's parimutuel racing license after five of his greyhounds tested positive for cocaine after running races in January, state records show.



Tony Marrero

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UPDATE: Derby Lane on Friday released the following statement:

"Derby Lane promotes responsible racing and provides individual kennel facilities for each greyhound operation contracted to race in St. Petersburg. Kennel Owners are expected to adhere to the guidelines set forth by the American Greyhound Council and the National Greyhound Association, as well as Derby Lane track rules and policies.

ST. PETERSBURG — One day last January, a greyhound named Flying Tidalwave ran the sixth race at Derby Lane, crossing the finish line in fourth place.

The dog, according to state records, had cocaine coursing through its veins.

Urine samples collected from four other dogs in veteran trainer Malcolm McAllister's kennel over the next 17 days would later test positive for cocaine metabolites, records show. The positive test results have ended a nearly 40-year career of a trainer that a Derby Lane executive once called a "wonderful patriarch of the industry."

The Division of Pari-Mutuel Racing in the state Department of Business and Professional Regulation permanently revoked McAllister's license effective April 24, according to a case file obtained by the Tampa Bay Times. McAllister, 70, opted not to dispute the findings and waived his right to a hearing.

In a written statement included in the file, McAllister expressed "great sadness and disbelief" and denied any knowledge of how the drugs wound up in the dogs' systems.

Although he was listed as the trainer during the time frame in which the dogs tested positive, McAllister wrote, he was in the process of hiring a new trainer for the kennel and had four "helpers" working for him.

"One of these undesirables had to have either dropped or administered the 'cocaine,' " he wrote. His only plea, he said, "is that it was not me."

He underlined the last four words for emphasis.

Records show the division has taken action against McAllister's license one prior time, in 2011, for failing to properly display his racing license.

State law prohibits the use of cocaine in dog racing and regulators routinely collect urine samples after races to test for banned substances. The trainer of record is responsible for the condition of horses and dogs entered into races, according to the Florida Administrative Code.

A sample collected from Flying Tidalwave on Jan. 11 later tested positive for cocaine and benzocgonine, a compound created when cocaine is metabolized by the liver.

A week later, on Jan. 18, a sample collected from P Kay Sweetmissy would later test positive for benzocgonine and ecgonine ethyl ester, another cocaine metabolite, records show. The dog finished fourth that day.

Three days later, on Jan. 21, samples collected from four dogs — Kiowa Wellington, Roc A By Sevenup, Flying Microsoft, and Flying Tidalwave — would later test positive for cocaine metabolites. Kiowa Wellington and Roc A By Sevenup finished sixth, Flying Microsoft came in eighth and Flying Tidalwave crossed the line first in their respective races.

How the cocaine got into the dogs' systems is unclear. So is the status of McAllister's kennel contract with Derby Lane. McAllister and Derby Lane officials did not return calls for comment.

There have been other cases of greyhounds testing positive for cocaine in the United States and Florida but never so many in such a short time frame in one kennel at one track, said Carey Theil, executive director of GREY2K USA, a nonprofit industry watchdog group.

"I'm not sure which is worse, that these were attempts to fix races or that individuals who are responsible for the dogs are doing cocaine," Theil said. "Both of those are very grave scenarios and raise serious questions about the welfare of the dogs and the integrity of the races at Derby Lane."

Theil's group has been a vocal critic of the Division of Pari-Mutuel Racing but said it deserves credit for permanently revoking McAllister's license. The division revoked another license in a similar case recently.

"Seeing two in such a short period of time is encouraging," he said. "It's obviously better for the dogs to have a strong regulatory agency and this agency is moving in the right direction."

At the same time, however, Theil said officials should investigate further in such cases to find out how the drugs got into the dogs' systems.

McAllister began his career in 1980 in Phoenix. He and his wife Barbara, who died in 2014, came to Derby Lane in 2005 and dominated for years. During his time at Derby Lane, McAllister has racked up more than 5,400 wins and more than \$900,000 in stakes prize money.

Times correspondent Don Jensen contributed to this report. Contact Tony Marrero at tmarrero@tampabay.com or (813) 226-3374. Follow @tmarrerotimes.