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## Trainers punished for abusing, neglecting greyhounds

by Dave Boucher  
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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Three men associated with greyhound racing in West Virginia were recently reprimanded for neglecting or abusing dogs.

The board of judges at the Wheeling Island racetrack punished all three in separate hearings during April and May, according to the West Virginia Racing Commission and information provided by Grey2KUSA, a nonprofit organization that is pushing for dog racing to be outlawed nationwide.

The three men are James Bloom, James Grace and Christopher Bever. Grace and Bever lost their operating permits, while Bloom's permit was suspended for six months, according to the rulings.

The rulings state Bloom, Grace and Bever abused, neglected or generally mistreated dogs but provide no further details about the actual transgressions. The racing commission provided the rulings on Bloom and Grace in response to a Freedom of Information Act request made by the Daily Mail.

The commission provided no details about the actual incidents that led to the punishment, and provided information on Bever for a different ruling than requested by the Daily Mail. Officials eventually provided the correct information about Bever, which was initially supplied by Grey2K.

Ralph Brehm, presiding judge at the board of judges in Wheeling, said he was not allowed to talk about the cases.

Jon Amores, Racing Commission executive director, said he didn't have further details about the circumstances that led to the punishments and judges aren't supposed to talk about the rulings.

There could have been witnesses to the incidents, or the judge could have viewed violations, Amores said. The commission typically doesn't keep any paper record of those witness statements at this level of the reprimanding process, he said.

There might be paperwork if someone appealed a ruling. Amores said the process is informal, and less documentation helps speed up the rulings. Other state agencies use similar timesaving measures, he said.

The rulings and punishments themselves are enough information in case anyone found guilty of an infraction tries to reapply for a permit, Amores said.

"That's why we keep them. Over time, the details of any particular infraction may be lost or misinterpreted, but the ruling is written. It's saved; it's clear as a bell," Amores said.

"The punishment is stated, it's unequivocal. That's the record that we keep . . . that you can't

explain away."

The board made separate decisions April 8 concerning Bloom and Grace. It found both deprived injured greyhounds of necessary care and neglected the daily care of a kennel. On May 3 the board made its decision to revoke Bever's permit.

Bloom's suspension took affect April 10. He will have to take the trainers exam again if he wants to go back to work, according to the report.

As of 2012 Grace and Bloom worked for Cardinal Kennel, according to the website for the National Greyhound Association. Cardinal Kennel has locations in Beech Bottom and Pennsylvania, according to the Secretary of State's website

Several telephone numbers listed for Cardinal Kennel and its owners were disconnected.

Bever was accused of abusing the greyhounds in his care, according to the report from Grey2KUSA. Bever did not appear at his hearing, so the permit was revoked, the report states.

The Facebook page for a Christopher Michael Bever shows pictures of three greyhounds. Bever also posted a link May 17 to a Pittsburgh-based media report about greyhound abuse at Wheeling Island.

"They (sic) a tightening the noose more and more on greyhound racing in Wheeling and across the country," Bever posted.

Carey Theil, Grey2K executive director, said it's important the public be kept informed of how the dogs are being treated.

"The public has a right to know about how greyhounds live at commercial racetracks. There is a direct relationship between transparency in the dog racing industry and greyhound welfare," Theil said.

The West Virginia Racing Commission must license anyone interested in participating in greyhound racing in West Virginia.

When infractions occur, the board of judges typically suggests a suspension or a fine and then sends it along to the commission, he said.

"The Racing Commission should be applauded for taking action against these individuals. At the same time, it is troubling that at least three people have been recently sanctioned for greyhound abuse and cruelty," Theil said.

Attempts to contact Grace, Bloom and Bever were unsuccessful.

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