

It's Time to Stop Greyhound Racing in Its Tracks

By Twig Mowatt

LATE LAST MAY, MILLIONS OF TELEVISION viewers watched as Barbaro, the thoroughbred champion, shattered his right hind leg shortly after the start of the Preakness Stakes. Reaction to this heart-wrenching event was immediate and consistent; an animal in pain does not make for good entertainment. Days later, the editorials and op-eds were still flowing, nearly all of which called for a serious examination of the sport and a greater effort to ensure the horses' safety.



Imagine an accident like Barbaro's occurring every day in just one state. That's the situation in another "sport" involving racing animals. The difference is that the injuries happen out of the spotlight and the financial stakes are much lower. This so-called sport is Greyhound racing and it takes place at 42 tracks in 14 states.

How do we know about Greyhound injuries? Because GREY2K USA, the national group dedicated to phasing out Greyhound racing, has now spearheaded bills in two states—Massachusetts and New Hampshire—requiring that every injury to a racing dog be publicly recorded. The group has published its findings in separate reports to the respective state legislatures.

In Massachusetts, for instance, 481 racing injuries were reported in a three-year period (2002–2004) at the state's two tracks, an average of more than three each week. The most common injuries were broken back legs, fractures and dislocations, but there were also instances of cardiac arrest, spontaneous seizures, sudden collapse, spinal-cord paralysis, severed tails, bleeding toes, lacerated eyes and even a broken neck. The seri-

ousness of these injuries can be judged by the average recovery time: 29 weeks. Seventy-six of them were either career-ending or resulted in death or euthanasia.

The situation in New Hampshire appears even worse. In just one year, 2005, a total of 372 injuries were reported at the state's two tracks. That's more than one injury every day. In fact, on one day alone—January 16—nine dogs were injured at Hinsdale Greyhound Park. Nearly 40 percent of all the New Hampshire injuries were career-ending or resulted in euthanasia or death.

"JNB Amy Jo," for example, broke her left hock and was euthanized; "Mac's Princess" ruptured muscles in both back legs; and "Island Skipper" suffered paralysis in both hind legs.

While records for this year are still accumulating, in June GREY2K USA received the most chilling injury report ever to cross its desk. This was the case of "Amber," a 60-pound red female, who ran into the rail during a training run at Seabrook Greyhound Park, fractured her skull and died of massive brain damage.

Extrapolate the findings from the combined four tracks in Massachusetts and New Hampshire to the 38 tracks in states where record-keeping is not required, and the total number of injuries taking place around the country is likely to be staggering. In fact, that "staggering injury rate" was the reason given by one trainer from the Midwest in explaining his decision to get out of the sport. In an online industry forum, he wrote that by the end of 2005, only four of his original 23 racers were still healthy. That's an 83 percent injury rate.

Making these figures public through the reports generated by GREY2K USA is a crucial tool in the fight to end Greyhound racing. Massachusetts legislators were openly outraged when the "Injuries in Racing Greyhounds: A Report to the Massachusetts General Assembly" was issued in July 2005. State representatives, such as Susan Pope and Carl Sciortino, claim the atrocious injury rate was key to their decision to endorse the Dog Protection Act, which was to go before voters in November. This bill

would have introduced a broad range of dog-protection measures, including phasing out Greyhound racing by 2008, but was recently struck from the ballot by the State Supreme Judicial Court, which ruled in favor of a track owner who had filed suit claiming the elements in the bill were unrelated.

Injury statistics are such powerful information that special interest groups in some states have gone to great lengths to prevent their ever being made public. Take Florida for example. Last summer, Jack Cory, a lobbyist for the Florida and national Greyhound racing associations, noted on an industry website that he had persuaded Florida state Sen. Steve Geller and Rep. Yolly Roberson to file a record-keeping amendment "as a defensive move to help stop any last-minute amendments from GREY2K USA lobbyists." Filing the bill without actively pushing it not only ensured that it would wither on the vine, but also prevented GREY2K USA from filing its own record-keeping legislation. (In Florida, once one party has filed a piece of legislation, no one else can file anything similar.) True to plan, the record-keeping amendment was quickly tabled. Both Geller and Roberson say they filed the bill out of legitimate concern for the animals, and deny knowing they were being tricked.

When the story later broke in the *Miami Herald*, Cory defended his actions by saying that Greyhound racing is "a good sport: The animals love it." Since Cory has set a precedent for anthropomorphizing, how about this: I don't think Amber—or the other 852 Greyhounds with recorded injuries—loved racing. I think they love curling up on beds in their own homes. Phasing out racing is the only sure way to make that happen.

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