
Posted on Fri, Oct. 20, 2006

13 charged in scheme to fix greyhound races at Mobile track

GARRY MITCHELL
Associated Press

MOBILE, Ala. - Twelve men and one woman have been charged in a scheme to fix greyhound races at the Mobile track by drugging favored dogs with pills and collecting about \$67,000 in payouts, a prosecutor said Friday.

Mobile County District Attorney John Tyson Jr. said three track employees are among those accused of giving the greyhounds an herbal concoction, available at health food stores, which exhausts the greyhound by race time.

"They were slow. So the expected winners didn't win," Tyson said.

Tyson said the scheme netted about \$67,000 for those charged. He said arrests began Friday and could be completed within two weeks.

Tyson said tracks throughout the United States have been notified of the charges and that the suspects, all from Mobile and adjacent Baldwin counties, are immediately barred from any tracks.

Investigators declined to identify the product name at this point in the probe but said it was sold for "natural male enhancement."

Mobile track officials opened an investigation after detecting unusual betting patterns in 2005 and this year.

Tim Horan, editor of the Greyhound Review in Abilene, Kan., said a typical race-fixing scheme slows down the favorite and all states do drug testing to expose such activity. He said he's unaware of any other investigations that have led to as many arrests as the one in Mobile.

Charges include tampering with racing animals and transmission of racing information for illegal gambling purposes. A conviction on the felony charges could bring up to 10 years in prison.

Mobile County Racing Commission Chairman Eddie Menton identified the three track employees as kennel master Don Westley Wilson, 30, and leadout Thaddeus Burden Lett, 18, both of Mobile; and paddock judge Vertis Gerald Sealy, 70, of Theodore.

Two trainers who are not track employees, Joseph Edgar Hempfleng, 25, and Kenneth William Christopher, 24, both of Theodore, are among those charged.

Tyson identified Wilson, Sealy, Hempfleng and Christopher as the alleged ringleaders.

The others who allegedly placed bets as part of the scheme are identified as Michael Dangelo Varner, 26; Tony Wade Hendrix, 42; Christopher Samuel Copeland, 24; Christopher Wayne Taylor, 32; Dusty Dedrick Webb, 24; Michael Arthur Roach, 23; Whitney Leigh Bishop, 22; Mathew Davis Wade, 24.

Menton said he expects the arrests will restore confidence in the track's integrity. The track has operated for 30 years.

Menton said the track has reviewed its rules and regulations.

"You can't know somebody is going to commit a crime. You're always playing catch-up when you are a regulator like we are. They have to do it before we can get on to them," Menton said.

He said the track didn't lose money in the scheme, but the bettors "got robbed," because they didn't have a legitimate chance to win on the fixed races.

© 2006 AP Wire and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.ledgerenquirer.com>