

Keeping the Dogs at Bay

Although Texas Greyhound racetracks are restricted to three coastal counties, Texas horse tracks may find themselves competing for fans — if trends in other states hold true here too

A joking remark overheard at an Austin polling precinct during the 1987 Texas referendum on pari-mutuel wagering:

"Why are we voting on horse and dog racing? A horse racing alongside a dog would look pretty silly, wouldn't it?"

It certainly would, except perhaps on television's "Those Amazing Animals." However, the subsequent passage of that statewide referendum decreed that horses and dogs WILL race together in Texas. And while "horse and dog" racing will of course take place at separate facilities for each type of animal, the attendance and handle at Thoroughbred tracks located near Greyhound tracks is likely to be adversely affected — if Texas follows the trend of other states where both entities exist.

Provisions in the Texas Racing Act (Senate Bill 15) may help alleviate, or at least minimize, fierce competition between dog and horse racing here. As with horse racing, the bill outlines the basic guidelines and rules for Texas Greyhound racetracks. Included is a restriction that limits the number of pari-mutuel Greyhound tracks to coastal counties with populations of 190,000 or more.

The three qualifying counties are Galveston, Nueces and Cameron. Only one track per county will be licensed for pari-mutuel Greyhound racing by the Texas Racing Commission (TRC).

As of the March 1 deadline, the TRC had received eight applications for Greyhound racetracks: one for Nueces County (Corpus Christi), two for Cameron County (Brownsville), and five for Galveston County (Houston area).

Applicant background investigations, application review and public

By ANNE LANG

hearings will take place between now and June, when the TRC is expected to award racetrack licenses to three (or possibly less) applicants.

Texas horse racing tracks are classified into divisions of Class I, II and III; Greyhound tracks are not. All three Greyhound tracks will be allowed 300 evening programs and 150 "matinee" programs (10:00 AM-5:00 PM any day except Sunday).

The National Picture

When Texas opens the pari-mutuel windows at its first Greyhound racetrack, it will join 15 other states with Greyhound racing already in existence, as well as fellow newcomers to the sport: Wisconsin and Kansas. As of the end of 1988, there were 48 Greyhound racetracks in operation in the U.S. The most Greyhound racing activity is seen in Florida, where there are 18 racetracks (and three major Thoroughbred tracks).

There have been numerous reports of already-existing Thoroughbred racetracks being hurt — primarily in handle and attendance — by the presence of Greyhound tracks in their area.

(In an attempt to alleviate such competition, a group in Kansas — whose voters passed pari-mutuel in a statewide referendum just shortly after Texas — put the theory of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" to the test in the creation of a unique complex called The Woodlands in Kansas City.

The Woodlands will offer Greyhound racing eight months of the year, and Thoroughbred racing the remaining four months. There will be two separate ovals and grandstands for each venue, with a shared parking lot and just one governing board.

Greyhound racing is slated to begin this September; Thoroughbred racing in June of 1990.)

Analyzing Competitive Trends

Two popular theories on the reasons why an average racing fan might prefer to go to a Greyhound track than a horse track are: (1) because the dogs race at the same track all season, their individual racing records are not going to be as varied; therefore they are less complicated to handicap, and (2) nighttime Greyhound cards are far more prevalent than nighttime Thoroughbred cards, thus appealing to the fan who works a regular eight-to-five weekday job.

Tony Chamblin, executive director of the Association of Racing Commissioners International, told the *Texas Thoroughbred* he supports the latter theory, but not the former.

"I would certainly agree that the Greyhounds are more available to a larger segment of the population because of evening racing," Chamblin stated. "But I'm not sure there's a higher percentage of winning dogs than there are horses. The national average [of favorite] horses has held at about 33 percent forever; I don't know what the national average is for dogs.

"I think the main attractions dog racing has for the betting public are that it's quicker, there are more races on one card, and more exotic betting opportunities, which the public seems to like."

In states where Greyhound racing competes for fans with Thoroughbred racing, Chamblin said he does think the dog tracks affect the handle and attendance of the horse tracks.

"Any time there are competing pari-mutuel interests within a given marketing area, there's bound to be

Continued

DOGS

continued

an impact on both entities," he said. "In Florida, for example, which is very heavily saturated with pari-mutuel facilities — Greyhounds, Thoroughbreds and jai alai — most entities have been able to survive financially, but they've certainly had an impact on each other. And more recently, you've got Council Bluffs [Greyhound track] open in Iowa, right across the river from Ak-Sar-Ben in Nebraska, which has definitely had an impact on Ak-Sar-Ben. By the same token, if Ak-Sar-Ben wasn't there, Council Bluffs would probably be doing much better than it is.

"I don't think there have been any in-depth studies done, but I believe that anybody who was objective would have to agree that all pari-mutuel facilities within a given market area have an effect on one another," Chamblin said.

In Texas, the most obvious location for potential competition between dog and horse racing is in the Houston area, where Class I horse racing will be allowed in Harris County, and Greyhound racing in nearby Galveston County.

The two types of tracks could conceivably be built within 30 minutes of one another. Consequently, Chamblin predicts the Houston horse track attendance could suffer as a result of the Greyhound track's close proximity.

"Both facilities would be impacted, for the same reasons I gave earlier," he said. "Even if the two tracks aren't racing at the same time, if they're only a half-hour apart, you're going to be taking a certain amount of the betting dollar out of existence prior to the opening of the other facility. And that's the major impact.

"If they handle, say, \$50 million at the Greyhound track, then whatever the tax money is on that takeout — the money that doesn't go back to the bettors — is gone, and it's no longer available to be wagered elsewhere," Chamblin continued. "I think in Iowa, for example, there was \$14 million in takeout the first year at Council Bluffs, so that was \$14 million that wasn't available when Ak-Sar-Ben opened."

That's assuming, he added, that there's a cross-over in bettors.

"It can be argued that you've got two separate sets of bettors, and that

"Any time there are competing pari-mutuel interests within a given marketing area, there's bound to be an impact on both entities"



Tony Chamblin

may be true to a degree, but there are some people who would go to both tracks — particularly in a new area like Houston."

Chamblin discussed ways in which dog and horse racing promoters might work together to boost attendance at both types of facilities, and to create a positive image for the racing industry.

"It would benefit the industry to start thinking as one large pari-mutuel group, because there are so many problems that are of common concern. For example, they could work to improve the industry's image: when a Greyhound track has a scandal, it adversely affects horse racing, and vice-versa, in my opinion.

"They should also be working together primarily to insure the improvement and integrity of the industry in all types of ways — pari-mutuel takeout, registration, track security, quality assurance in drug-testing, research into more effective drug-testing with tests for sophisticated drugs which can't be detected — these are all numerous ways in which the industry can and should be united," Chamblin summarized.

Viewpoint from the Commission Chairman

Hilary Doran, Chairman of the Texas Racing Commission, provided the Texas Thoroughbred with his perspective on the future of Greyhound racing vs. Thoroughbred racing in the Lone Star State.

Doran, one of five commissioners who vote on Greyhound-related issues at TRC meetings, said he expects "all three Greyhound tracks will be on-line next year, with the first of them being the Cameron County track in May [1990]. In all likelihood, Nueces and Galveston will follow three or four months later."

The chairman was asked if it's likely, then, that Texas will have Class II horse racing underway before the first Greyhound track opens.

"Oh yes," Doran replied. "I'm hopeful that we'll have Class II horse racing somewhere in Texas by this Labor Day. I was thinking August at first, but then I thought that if I had a Class II pari-mutuel license, I'd try to coordinate my track opening with Labor Day weekend."

Doran admitted he thinks the Texas Greyhound and Thoroughbred tracks will be competing for patrons, especially in Houston.

"From what I've been told by people whom I consider to be knowledgeable about both industries, you WILL have some impacting of Greyhound racing on Thoroughbred racing," he said. "The tracks really need to be separated by at least 50 miles, so if you're 20-25 miles away, you're going to have some impact on each other.

"However," he added, "with the huge population base in Houston, I think there's enough room for both entities to be successful there. But that's the one area where, in my opinion, there will be some impacting of dog racing on horse racing."

Doran also discussed the subject of whether or not in 5-10 years, when racing has been solidly established in Texas, the racing bill will be amended to allow Greyhound tracks to open in other parts of the state (as opposed to just the three coastal counties).

"My crystal ball's not very clear, but I don't think you will see any move to expand Greyhound racing in the near future," he said. "Now, 10 years from now, who knows? But as for the next four or five years, I don't

Continued

DOGS

continued

see any concerted effort to expand.

"At this time, I wouldn't be in support of such an amendment, because I want to get the first round of Class I horse racing tracks on-line and running before we start looking to open other Greyhound tracks. And I think that the commission as a whole would not look upon [such an amendment] favorably at this time," he concluded.

Taking An Open-Minded Look At The Competition

Wendle Scott of Nixon, Texas, is editor of the Texas Greyhound Association's monthly publication, *Texas Tracking*. A longtime Greyhound owner/breeder whose livelihood (in addition to writing) is Greyhound and cattle raising, Scott, who at any given time is raising 50-60 puppies at his farm near San Antonio, shared with the *Texas Thoroughbred* some similarities and differences between Greyhound racing and horse racing.

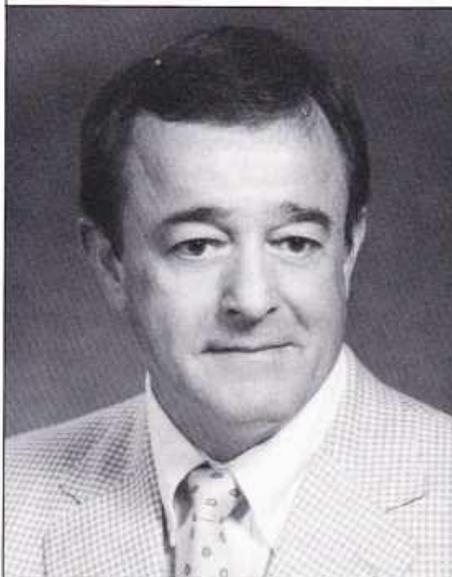
Like many others involved in Greyhounds, Scott will raise and train his dogs at home until they are "track-ready" (14-16 months old), then lease them to a person who has a kennel contract. This kennel owner will sign a contract with a particular track, guaranteeing a specific number of dogs that will live and race at that track during that year. Unlike a race horse, who is often shipped cross-country from track to track during a single racing season, in Texas a racing Greyhound will always stay at one track.

With regard to pari-mutuel racing, Scott explained: "There is no classification of age, and no distinction of sex. Males and females compete on an equal basis." There is no handicap racing in the Greyhound industry, no allowance racing, and no claiming racing, he added. The only "weight" the dog carries is a standard track-issued racing blanket with his post position number on it.

Race Distances And Purse Monies

The standard race distances for Greyhounds are 5/16ths of a mile and 3/8ths of a mile. There is no "furlong" measurement in dog racing. An average time for covering the 5/16th distance is 29 to 31 seconds, Scott said.

"I don't think you will see any move to expand Greyhound racing in the near future...but 10 years from now, who knows?"



Hilary Doran

The highest level of Greyhound racing is Grade AA, which is comparable to Grade I stakes for Thoroughbreds. Grade AA purses are always going to offer the most money, he said, and the longer the distance, the higher the purse.

As in Thoroughbred racing, each Greyhound track will offer several stakes per season, and many will argue that *their* biggest stakes race is the best one in the nation, Scott explained. An example he gave of a moderately large stakes race would be the Hollywoodian at Hollywood Racetrack in Florida: offering a purse of about \$15,000. Most tracks will add significant money to the purses, he added, "but not nearly as much as the Thoroughbred tracks add. The highest purse that's been distributed in Greyhound racing to date was \$125,000, for the 1986 Greyhound Race of Champions."

According to Tim Horan of the National Greyhound Association, "Greyhound purses are much lower than Thoroughbred purses, but then our expenses are much lower, too."

The total money paid out in 1988 Greyhound races was \$97,889,000,

Horan said, "not including added-money races. We have no statistics for those."

Horan also said that the average daily purse distribution at a top-end Greyhound track is about \$19,000; at a middle-sized track, about \$10,000; and at a bottom-end track, about \$3,000.

Prominent Greyhounds In History

Whereas today's Thoroughbred year-end champions might have easily won either side of a million dollars in just one season, even the top Greyhounds' earnings won't begin to approach that amount. A dog is considered to have done brilliantly if his annual bankroll adds up to over \$15,000.

The top money-earner in Greyhound history is a dog named Hometown Rowdy, who retired in 1987 after running out career winnings of nearly \$300,000, according to Scott. Hometown Rowdy now stands at stud in Lubbock, Texas for a \$750 fee.

(Greyhound stud dog fees can be as much as \$3,000 for a top dog, Scott said, with \$200 being at the bottom end of the range.)

As in the Thoroughbred industry, Greyhound syndications and limited partnerships do exist, albeit as a new concept. Scott spoke of the first sire syndication in modern Greyhound history: that of an outstanding race dog named Downing, owned and bred by TGA Committeeman Jim Frey. Downing was voted top sprinter when he won four sprint stakes and one distance stake in one year. Greyhound trade journals dubbed him the "Dog of the Decade" in the 1970's.

In 1978, Downing retired from racing and became the first syndicated stud dog, paving the way for other Greyhound syndications that have since been formed. Downing was syndicated into 10 shares, 8 of which were offered and sold at \$15,000 each. His highly successful racing career has been followed by a large percentage of winners among his get. Dead now for several years, Downing once dominated the Greyhound Sire Standings.

One Greyhound, P's Rambling, was syndicated two years ago for a world-record \$500,000. Currently standing

Continued

DOGS

continued

at stud in Kansas, P's Rambling had great racing success against tough competition on Iowa and Florida tracks in the mid-1980's. His career came to an abrupt and dramatic end in 1987 when, after breaking a bone in his foot going around the first turn, he still hung on to win the race. P's Rambling's world record of 36:43 for 3/8ths of a mile is still unbeaten.

The Greyhound Equivalent To the TTBA

Approved by the Texas Racing Commission as the official breed registry for Texas-bred Greyhounds, the Texas Greyhound Association (TGA) has just over 400 members (almost all of whom are Greyhound breeders) who pay annual dues of \$25 each. All association record-keeping and paperwork is handled by the TGA secretary/treasurer, who lives in Abilene, Texas.

The TGA's officers, which include Committeeman Jim Frey of Waco, all reside in different parts of Texas. Frey handles responsibilities similar to those of an executive director at other breed organizations, only his time and effort is — like all the other officers — completely non-paid.

The TGA governing board consists of three officers and four executive committee members. The organization has been in existence for more than 25 years.

As with horse racing, the Texas Racing Act specifies what percentage of the pari-mutuel handle will go back to the breed registries and how much will go toward purses. The TGA will receive one-half of the breakage (the odd cents by which the amount payable on each dollar wagered exceeds a multiple of 10 cents) from Texas' pari-mutuel Greyhound tracks. Half of that amount is to be put back into stakes purses, with the remaining half to be allocated the TGA for Texas-bred races and administration expenses.

"Every Texas-bred Greyhound will receive a proportionate amount for every race that is won on a pari-mutuel racetrack in Texas," Wendle Scott explained. "If, let's say, 25 races are won by dogs that are listed in the Texas-bred registry, the amount of money that's left over will be divided by 25, and that amount

will go to the registered owners of those dogs."

Unlike horse racing, however, there is no requirement for a minimum of two Texas-bred Greyhound races to be included on each card. The Texas-bred Greyhounds will compete, generally, against any and all other Greyhounds, at their respective grade levels.



Jim Frey with Downing in the 1970's

Texas, despite the absence of pari-mutuel racing, is the second-largest Greyhound-producing state in the country. Florida registers an average of 7,500 Greyhounds a year, followed by Texas with an average of 5,500.

Candid Comments From The "Other Side"

TGA Committeeman Jim Frey, a lifetime Greyhound breeder and owner (no relation to Texas Racing Commissioner Dr. Demarious Frey), offered his opinions on the future of Texas racing, and his perspective on the national scene as well. He began by addressing the question of whether or not Texas horse tracks and dog tracks will be competing for the same fan base.

"Maybe they will in Harris County [Houston], but I think that horse racing and dog racing fans are more compatible than most people realize," Frey stated. "For example, a racing fan might attend the horse races during the day, then if he wants to add to his day of pari-mutuel entertainment, he will go to the Greyhound races in the evening. I don't think the two sports detract from one another nearly as much as the media, and perhaps even the horse people, would like the public to believe.

"You know, the horse racing industry has been suffering in recent years, and I think that perhaps they're looking for excuses to explain their dilemma. I don't think, in most cases, their problems are the result of Greyhound racing — unless the tracks are practically right next to each other, and running head-to-head."

Even though he was not a party to the initial legislative agreements, Frey said he feels the limitation of Texas Greyhound tracks to the three coastal counties is basically one agreed upon by horse and dog racing interests at that time.

"From a standpoint of revenue to be generated for the state, I would question [the limitation], but personally, I feel that a deal is a deal," he said. "I know that was the agreement that was made in the Texas Legislature when they passed the bill, and I would hesitate to argue with it. I know that more tracks would generate more money, but if that was their original intention, they wouldn't have made those restrictions."

With regard to the possibility of an amendment to the Texas Racing Act that would allow more Greyhound tracks throughout the state, Frey's outlook is similarly diplomatic.

"Again, I think that's something that would have to be a mutual agreement between all parties," he declared. "I consider the pari-mutuel racing industry to be a combination of three partners: the people who put on the show [breeders, owners, trainers], the track owners, and the State of Texas. And the general public is the catalyst that makes this partnership work. So if that decision is ever made in the future, I would hope that all parties would be in agreement on it." 