

22 July 2024

DECISION

GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA

and

GERARD O'KEEFFE

- Date of hearing:** 27 June 2024
- Date of decision:** 27 June 2024
- Panel:** Judge Kathryn Kings (Deputy Chairperson) and Dr Andrew Gould.
- Appearances:** Mr Timothy Brook appeared on behalf of the Stewards.
Mr Gerard O'Keeffe represented himself.
- Charge:** Greyhounds Australasia Rule ("GAR") 141(1) states:
(1) The owner, trainer or other person in charge of a greyhound:
(a) nominated to compete in an Event;
(b) presented for a satisfactory trial or such other trial as provided for by the Rules; or
(c) presented for any test or examination for the purpose of a stand-down period being varied or revoked,
must present the greyhound free of any prohibited substance.
- Particulars:**
1. You are, and were at all relevant times, a trainer licensed by Greyhound Racing Victoria and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules.
 2. You were, at all relevant times, the trainer of the greyhound "Bagman".
 3. Bagman was nominated to compete in Race 1, SPORTSBET GREEN TICKS, Maiden, conducted by the Warragul Greyhound Racing Club at Warragul on 8 August 2023 (the Event).

4. On 8 August 2023, you presented Bagman at the Event not free of any prohibited substance, given that:

(a) A post-race sample of urine was taken from Bagman at the Event (the Sample);

(b) Sotalol was detected in the Sample.

Plea: Guilty

DECISION

Mr Gerard O’Keeffe is a trainer licensed by Greyhound Racing Victoria (“GRV”) and a person bound by the Greyhound Australasia Rules (“GAR”). Mr O’Keeffe has been in the industry for approximately 10 years.

At all relevant times, Mr O’Keeffe was the trainer of the greyhound, “Bagman”. Bagman was nominated to compete in Race 1 at Warragul on 8 August 2023. The greyhound was presented to the event not free of a prohibited substance, in that a post-race urine sample detected the presence of sotalol.

In a report dated 5 October 2023, Dr Steven Karamatic, Chief Veterinarian at GRV, confirmed that sotalol was present in the sample and is a prohibited substance. It is capable of affecting the cardiovascular, respiratory and urinary systems. Sotalol is placed in the category of stimulants, depressants, and other prohibited substances in the GRV Penalty Guidelines.

There was a product produced during the kennel inspection that contained sotalol, being personal medication prescribed to Mr O’Keeffe by his doctor. Dr Karamatic said that contamination from personal medication is a likely source of this positive sample. Possible side effects in a greyhound include weakened contraction of the heart, difficulty breathing, tightening of the airways, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, and vomiting. Sotalol is capable of affecting the condition and performance of a greyhound and any effect on performance is more likely to be negative.

In his report, Dr Karamatic referred to the Notices to the Industry published online and forwarded to participants, warning them of the potential risks arising from the use of personal medications and gives some guidance to minimising those risks.

Mr Joshua Goldberg, a Steward at GRV, attended at Mr O’Keeffe’s property on 12 September 2023. Mr O’Keeffe advised that he is the only person who has access to the kennels. He takes

heart medication, which contains sotalol. He said that he washes his hands assiduously before preparing the food for the greyhounds, but does not wear gloves.

In imposing a penalty, we take into account his plea of guilty, his cooperation with the Stewards and the importance of specific and general deterrence. We also acknowledge the importance of maintaining a level playing field by having a drug free industry.

Mr O’Keeffe has a prior conviction of a similar nature. That offence was in relation to the prohibited substance procaine and occurred in May 2022. This Tribunal heard and determined that offence on 23 November 2022 and imposed a penalty of a three month suspension, wholly suspended for 24 months and a fine of \$2,000 with \$1,000 suspended for 24 months “pending no further breach of the Rules of greyhound racing relating to prohibited substances”. Unfortunately for Mr O’Keeffe, this current offence was committed during the suspended period. As a result, the current offence triggers the activation of the three month suspension and the balance of the fine, being \$1,000.

In relation to the current offence, the Tribunal imposes a penalty of a fine of \$1,500 with \$1,000 suspended for 12 months pending no further relevant offences during that time.

The overall effective penalty is a three month suspension and a total fine payable of \$1,500. The suspension is to commence immediately.

In addition, Bagman is disqualified from Race 1 at Warragul on 8 August 2023 and the finishing order is amended accordingly.

Kathleen Scully
Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal