

10 September 2024

## **DECISION**

**GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**JOHN PIZANIS**

- Date of hearing:** 4 September 2024
- Date of decision:** 4 September 2024
- Panel:** Judge Marilyn Harbison (Deputy Chairperson), Ms Amanda Dickens and Mr Josh Bornstein.
- Appearances:** Mr Steven Brnovic, instructed by Ms Yana Podolskaya, appeared on behalf of the Stewards.  
Mr John Pizanis represented himself.
- Charges:** Greyhounds Australasia Rule (“GAR”) 156(v) states:  
An offence is committed if a person (including an official):  
(v) in the opinion of the Controlling Body or its Stewards, is guilty of neglect or any dishonest, corrupt or improper act or practice in connection with the breeding, registration, sale or transfer of greyhounds, or has attempted such an act or practice.
- GAR 156 (d) states:  
An offence is committed if a person (including an official):  
(d) attempts or conspires with another person to commit a breach of the Rules.
- GAR 156(h) states:  
An offence is committed if a person (including an official):  
(h) disobeys or fails to comply with a lawful order of a Controlling Body, the Stewards, or another person authorised by a Controlling Body with official duties in relation to greyhound racing.

**Particulars:**

**Charge 1: GAR 156(v)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) (Member No. 313880) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.
2. On 8 October 2022, Steven Walters lodged an application with GRV (Member No. 329473) to be registered as a trainer.
3. On or about 20 October 2022, Steven Walters purchased the greyhound "Gai Water Star", and, with your knowledge, had its ownership placed in your name.
4. On 24 January 2023, Steven Walters' application for registration as a trainer lapsed.
5. To enable Gai Water Star to be eligible to race, with your knowledge, the ownership of the greyhound remained in your name.
6. In the opinion of the Stewards, you have engaged in a dishonest and/or improper act and/or practice in connection with the registration, sale, or transfer of the greyhound Gai Water Star.

**Charge 2: GAR 156(d)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) (Member No. 313880) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.
2. On 8 October 2022, Steven Walters lodged an application with GRV (Member No. 329473) to be registered as a trainer.

3. On or about 20 October 2022, Steven Walters purchased the greyhound “Gai Water Star”, and, with your knowledge, had its ownership placed in your name.

4. On 24 January 2023, Steven Walters’ application for registration as a trainer lapsed.

5. To enable Gai Water Star to be eligible to race, with your knowledge, the ownership of the greyhound remained in your name.

6. You conspired with another person, being Steven Walters, to commit a breach Greyhounds Australasia Rule (GAR) 156(v).

**Charge 3: GAR 156(h)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) (Member No. 313880) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.

2. On 30 March 2023, you were issued a lawful order which ordered that:

*“You are required to produce all documentation and correspondence including text messages with Steven Walters in connexion with greyhound Gai Water Star”.*

3. You failed to comply with that lawful order.

**Charge 4: GAR 156(h)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) (Member No. 313880) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.

2. On 30 March 2023, you were issued a lawful order which ordered that:

*“You are required to produce all documentation and correspondence including text messages with Elissa Franklin connexion with greyhound Gai Water Star (VJUYG)”.*

3. You failed to comply with that lawful order.

**Pleas:** Guilty to Charges 1 and 2

Charges 3 and 4 withdrawn by the Stewards

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## **DECISION**

1. Mr John Pizanis is a registered greyhound trainer. He agreed to assist Mr Steven Walters, whom he had not met before, to purchase a greyhound, “Gai Water Star”. Mr Walters ultimately purchased the greyhound with the assistance of Mr Pizanis and placed it for training with Mr Pasquale Derubeis, whose kennels are located on Phillip Island.
2. Unfortunately, Mr Walters had encountered some difficulties in obtaining registration as a greyhound trainer. He had been required to provide material in support of his registration and had failed to do so. He was keen to race Gai Water Star, but was unable to do so because he was not able to register the greyhound in his own name.
3. Mr Walters asked Mr Pizanis to register the greyhound in his (Mr Pizanis) own name in order to circumvent this problem. Mr Pizanis agreed to do so and the greyhound was registered in his name for three months on the understanding that Mr Walters would ultimately obtain his own registration and the ownership of the greyhound would then be transferred to him. During the time covered by these Charges, the greyhound had 16 starts. All the prize money that it earned in that time went to Mr Walters. Mr Walters made all relevant decisions regarding the greyhound.
4. Due to Mr Pizanis agreeing to this arrangement, he has been charged with two offences. The first is a Charge of having been guilty of a dishonest or improper act or practice in connection with the registration, sale or transfer of the greyhound.

5. The second Charge is a Charge of conspiring with Mr Walters to commit the offence described in the first Charge.
6. Two other Charges relating to an allegation of disobeying an order of the Stewards by not producing records have been withdrawn by the Stewards.
7. Mr Pizanis has pleaded guilty to Charges 1 and 2.
8. In the hearing before us, Mr Pizanis agreed that he had assisted Mr Walters to buy the greyhound and that because Mr Walters could not register that the greyhound in his (Mr Pizanis) own name, he had agreed that the dog be registered in his name.
9. Mr Pizanis initially had argued to the Stewards that the arrangement was not dishonest. He told us that two weeks into the arrangement he had become concerned about this and so he had contacted Greyhound Racing Victoria (“GRV”) to ask if the dog could be registered in his name. He said that he was told that it could as long as he took responsibility for the dog. GRV has no record of this call. Our perception is that it is likely that whoever was spoken to was not aware of all the circumstances of the arrangement.
10. Mr Pizanis later told the Stewards that he could see that it made sense that the arrangement was a deception.
11. Each of these two Charges are very serious.
12. It is fundamental to the greyhound racing industry that industry participation records are accurate. A false record has the capacity to disrupt severely the public confidence in this sport. The betting public should be able to rely on the published records of GRV in assessing each greyhound permitted to race. In this case, the dog ran in 16 races with false information published as to who was the owner.
13. Proper records of industry participants are necessary to protect the industry and also to enable Stewards to carry out their functions. We agree with the Stewards’ submission that in sentencing we must firmly denounce what was in effect a scheme which circumvented the registration framework on which greyhound racing is based. Registration as a trainer is a privilege. It is only if a person is able to meet standards of honesty and integrity that this privilege is conferred on him or her. We also agree with the Stewards that, in this case, Mr Pizanis was effectively acting as a surrogate for Mr Walters, who was a person unable or unwilling to meet the requirements of registration.

14. We heard the following matters in mitigation. Mr Pizanis has been in the industry for eight years in Victoria and 20 years in South Australia. He has committed no prior offences in that time. He has pleaded guilty and is very remorseful. He was frank and cooperative when interviewed by the Stewards. The Stewards in their submissions have conceded that he was well intentioned, but point out he must have been aware as an experienced trainer that the arrangement was prohibited.

15. Taking all of these matters into account, the penalties we impose are as follows.

Charge 1: 3 month suspension and a \$2,000 fine with \$1,500 suspended for 12 months pending no further relevant offences during that time.

Charge 2: 3 month suspension and a \$2,000 fine with \$1,500 suspended for 12 months pending no further relevant offences during that time. This penalty is concurrent with the penalty imposed on Charge 1, given that it arises out of the same facts and circumstances.

16. The period of suspension is to commence immediately.

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Kathleen Scully  
Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal