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Florida Gaming Update

Pompano Beach, FL (December 1, 2011) – Articles below are the most recent on relevant issues that could affect the overall racing/breeding equine industry in Florida. We track the news and communicate daily with associations representing the competition breeds as we seek to inform the public and legislators on the economic impact of a strong industry.

Barrel race betting begins in Florida

By *BRENDAN FARRINGTON* | AP (12/1/2011)

GRETNA, Fla. (AP) — After Dixie Wonder Bugs circled three barrels and crossed the finish line a half second ahead of Jack's Eliminator on Thursday, Brenda Wolfran jumped up off the metal bleachers with her ticket and headed to the betting window.

"I'm going to be rich!" said Wolfran, 63, of Kinard, with more than a hint of exaggeration. She'd put \$10 down on the horse and rider Dallas Dewees. The bet paid \$15. As she walked back to the bleachers, she yelled to her friends, "I can't carry it all!"

It was the first race in what's believed to be the only place in the country where people can bet on barrel racing.

The owners, Gretna Racing, say it's a legitimate pari-mutuel event that will provide entertainment and jobs in this poor, rural Panhandle community. Opponents who breed and race quarter horses on traditional race tracks say it's a scam — an exploitation of a loophole that will allow the business to open a poker room and, if voters approve, possibly add slot machines. "We're racing," said James Dorris, president of facility operators PCI Gaming Authority, as he sat among a little more than 50 people in the bleachers. "We're very confident we're moving ahead."

While the operation is up and running, the [Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association](#) and Florida Quarter Horse Breeders & Owners Association are still challenging the state permit that allows pari-mutuel betting on the events. They say [quarter horse racing](#) is intended for tracks, not for riding cloverleaf patterns around three barrels in an arena.

"Barrel competition is not horse racing," said Dr. [Steve Fisch](#), a veterinarian who is president of both associations. "I'm disappointed for [Florida](#). I'm disappointed for [Gretna](#). Gretna and Gadsden County stood to gain the most with a true horse track over there."

Beyond what should and shouldn't be considered racing, Fisch points at the difference in jobs in operating barrel racing and traditional quarter horse racing. In Gretna, eight riders and horses went head-to-head in a bracketed, double elimination round off betting to eventually determine an overall winner. In all, 11 races were held. The winner and second place riders completed four races on the same horse. In flat track racing, horses run one race and are done for the next two weeks. There are more horses per race.

For example, the track in Hialeah is preparing to open and will have 1,000 or so horses in its stables, Fisch said. There are no permanent stables in Gretna. The owners take their horses home when the competition's done.

"There's your difference right there," said Fisch. "The economic impact of competing eight horses compared to 1,000."

Dorris acknowledges that the barrel racing will not be the big money maker at the facility if plans go the way he sees them. The poker room will be more lucrative and slot machines will be even more so. And yes, the barrel racing is the ticket to the other two forms of gambling, but Dorris said they are serious about running a quality product. He also said it is a source of entertainment that will draw people, much like concerts do at casinos.

"The charges that we're trying to bypass one thing to get another are pretty ridiculous," Dorris said, adding that they are following state laws and regulations.

Barrel racing is usually a women's rodeo event. This type of racing is unique in that bets are made. The Georgia-based National Barrel Horse Association says it knows of no other place in the country where pari-mutuel gambling is allowed on barrel racing. Dorris has not been able to say for certain it's done elsewhere and Fisch said he's tried to find an example of it in another state and can't. "It is not done anywhere else in the country," Fisch said. "If you're talking about this minute, there is not pari-mutuel barrel racing going on."

It made for some confusing moments at the betting booth for both customer and clerks at the windows. No, you can't bet a trifecta on a race, because there're only two riders, but you can on the overall performance. Is that a win bet on the race or the performance? Is the pick four for the overall performance or the first four races?

"I'll give it a try if I can figure it out," said Joe O'Brien, 60, of Havana, who has bet traditional horse racing and other pari-mutuels. He also wasn't concerned about the complaints that it

wasn't real racing. "To me it's just another type of horse racing. It's running in a circle versus running around barrels."

Also a little confusing was not having past performances on which to judge the riders and horses while trying to pick a winner.

"I just picked what looked like the best one coming around," O'Brien said after the horses were paraded in front of the sparse crowd before Race 1. "It's random at this point since it's the first race."

Florida Barrel Racing Set to Begin Dec. 1

By [Jim Freer](http://www.bloodhorse.com) (www.bloodhorse.com)

Updated: Thursday, December 1, 2011 9:59 AM

Gretna Racing is preparing to open Florida's first pari-mutuel barrel racing meet on Dec. 1 with 11 races in a head-to-head bracket format.

The website of the facility in Gretna, Fla., also shows that opening day purses will be \$2,000. But as of the morning Nov. 30, only limited information was readily available on the types of wagering, procedures for drug testing, names of stewards, and other operations of the controversial Gretna meet that will have 40 racing programs through Jan. 15, 2012. Gretna, a town of about 1,700, is about 25 miles west of Tallahassee in Florida's panhandle region

On Nov. 29, the Florida Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering was still seeking final clarification on the types of wagering at Gretna. Two top officials of Gretna Racing did not return phone calls from *The Blood-Horse* on Nov. 29. On that day, a directory assistance operator could not find any listings for Gretna Racing or several other names associated with the facility.

Meanwhile, two Quarter Horse associations that were unable to prevent Gretna Racing from starting its race meet are moving ahead with a state administrative complaint and plan to file a lawsuit that they hope will invalidate the racing license of Gretna Racing.

The Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association and the Florida Quarter Horse Breeders and Owners Association likely will file a suit within several days in the Florida court system's First District Court of Appeal, their Tallahassee-based attorney Michael Barry said on Nov. 29. Defendants would be the Florida DPMW and its parent Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation.

On Oct. 19, the Florida DPMW issued Gretna Racing a license under its Quarter Horse permit and Gretna Racing plans to use the license for pari-mutuel barrel racing http. The Augusta, Ga.-based National Barrel Horse Association is not aware of any other pari-mutuel barrel racing in the United States. Barrel racing is a rodeo-like event in a cloverleaf pattern around three barrels. It is popular in several parts of Florida, and in numerous other states

In early October, the Florida Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Association sent letters to the Florida DPMW and

its parent, asking them to reject Gretna Racing's application. The two Thoroughbred groups and the two Quarter Horse groups maintain that pari-mutuel barrel racing is not authorized under the state's laws.

However, Gretna Racing's plan includes having Quarter Horses as the majority of horses in its barrel races and thus meets a state law's requirement for the breeds that can be used under a Quarter Horse license.

The North Florida Horsemen's Association, which is not affiliated with the two Florida Quarter Horse associations, has an agreement to provide horses to Gretna Racing. Florida HBPA president Phil Combest said his association hopes the Florida legislature next year will amend state laws with a more precise definition of Quarter Horse racing. The Florida HBPA and its allied associations maintain that Gretna Racing is attempting to use barrel racing as a low-cost way to be eligible for a potentially lucrative poker room. All Florida pari-mutuels are eligible to have poker rooms that can be open 365 days a year.

Gretna Racing has applied with the Florida DPMW for a poker license, which can be approved after one racing card. The website for Gretna Racing, also known as Creek Entertainment Gretna, lists poker among its events. The site shows total race purses of \$2,000 for its opening day and of either \$2,000 or \$4,000 for 18 other race cards through Dec. 16. On most race days, primarily Fridays through Sundays, Gretna will have race cards at 1 p.m. and at 5 p.m. EST.

Hamilton Downs Horsetrack in Jasper, Fla., is the only other holder of a Quarter Horse racing permit that has applied for a license under which it would hold pari-mutuel barrel racing. Jasper is about 75 miles west of Jacksonville and about 75 miles east of Tallahassee. As of Nov. 29, the Florida DPMW was still reviewing the application Hamilton Downs filed on Nov. 4. Hamilton's application said it plans to begin racing on Dec. 10, 2011.

The Poarch Creek Indian Tribe, based in Atmore, Ala., owns 70% of Gretna Racing. David Romanik, a former Gulfstream Park president, and Marc Dunbar, a prominent Tallahassee attorney and lobbyist, each own 10% of Gretna Racing. Dunbar also represents Gulfstream, which is not affiliated with Gretna Racing. The Poarch Creek Tribe owns three casinos in Alabama.

Gretna is in Gadsden County. On Jan. 31, 2012 there will be a referendum in that county, open to all its voters, on the question of whether Gretna Racing will be able to have a casino with slot machines.

The two Quarter Horse associations are planning their lawsuit following the Florida DPMW's Nov. 18 dismissal of their request for that agency to reverse its decision on Gretna Racing's license or seek an administrative hearing on questions of the legality of that license. The Florida DPMW said it determined that the two groups did not establish legal standing or establish material facts needed to comply with various rules for requesting a hearing by the Florida Division of Administrative Hearings.

The Florida DPMW decision left the Quarter Horse groups with the options of filing an amended appeal or a lawsuit “We intend to file a lawsuit,” said Barry, a partner in the Tallahassee law firm Rutledge, Ecenia & Purnell. The suit would contend that the Florida DPMW does not have authority to issue a license under which pari-mutuel barrel racing will be conducted, Barry said. In addition, the suit would contend that the Florida DPMW approved Gretna Racing’s license application in a shorter timeframe than allowed under Florida laws.

In a separate action, the Division of Administrative Hearings has scheduled a hearing for Dec. 13-14 on the two Quarter Horse associations’ contention that the Florida DPMW does not have authority to issue the license it awarded Gretna Racing. A ruling is likely next January or February. The parties would have the prospect of appealing with a lawsuit in state courts.

On Nov, 29, a judge in a state circuit court in Tallahassee rejected a request by the Florida Quarter Horse Track Association to delay the administrative hearing scheduled for Dec. 13. That association’s members are Gretna Racing, Hamilton Downs, and several Quarter Horse permit holders that have not applied for racing licenses. Their suit in the circuit court challenges a state law provision that authorizes the Florida QHRA to negotiate purse contracts for Quarter Horse meets. Until September the Florida QHRA had hoped to negotiate a contract with Gretna Racing for a conventional Quarter Horse meet.

The Florida Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association, Inc. is a non-profit organization with the objective of promoting the Standardbred horse-breeding and racing industry in Florida. The FSBOA maintains a registry of Florida-bred Standardbred horses to promote and determine their eligibility for Florida-bred races. The FSBOA website contains information about stallions standing in Florida, special standardbred events taking place throughout the year, stake race information, including payment schedules, eligibilities, purses, and results. This site also will publish advertisements relating to standardbred services and articles offered for sale.