

# Limerick to become home to premier greyhound stadium

After years of intensive lobbying, Limerick is finally to get its new greyhound stadium.

In a surprise announcement, the Irish Greyhound Board (IGB) confirmed earlier in the season that it had purchased an 11.5 acre site close to Limerick city for the provision of such a facility. The site, which will also accommodate the new headquarters of the IGB, is located adjacent to the Two Mile Inn on the Limerick-Ennis road. At present, the main offices of the IGB are located on Henry Street.

Already, the project has sought expressions of interest with relation to the provision of such a stadium – the cost is likely to be in the region of €15million.

"This will be something very special," promised Pascal Taggart, Chairman of the IGB. "It's a case of better late than never – the greyhound people of the mid-west having been waiting a very long time for this stadium, but I can assure the public that this facility will be worth that wait. It'll be a truly world class stadium. It will be similar to Cork and Tralee, but probably even better than those stadia."

It has long been the wish of Mr. Taggart that Limerick should get a new stadium, particularly since the IGB was based in the city. At one stage, it appeared that the current Markets Field Stadium site would be developed but it was later decided to move and for a while it looked as though the new amenity would be located in the old Limerick Racecourse at Greenomount. Now, however, the IGB has caught many punters by surprise with the acquisition of a green-field site some "four minutes drive from the city."

Added Gus Ryan, long-time Racing Manager at Limerick and champion of the cause for a new stadium for the area: "Greyhound people are absolutely over the moon about this development. The whole episode with relation to the

establishment of a new track for Limerick had been dragging of for far too long. The announcement, however, when it did come wasn't expected but it really is tremendous news for greyhound followers in the mid-west region."

Mr. Taggart predicted the cost of the new stadium would be in the region of € 15 million. "That would be the all-in cost of providing a top-class greyhound stadium in Limerick. The next step is to secure planning permission for the facility, after which the project will be sent to tender. My wish would be that the stadium would be completed within the next two and a half years," he told Business Limerick.

If so, greyhound racing at the new stadium will be happening in late 2007 or early 2008.

In the interim, the Market's Field Stadium has really come to life by virtue of a splendid upgrading, in terms of décor etc. – it's truly amazing how much this most famous of sporting grounds has come on following an injection of cash.

The IGB chairman also confirmed that the track will have an eight lane facility, but that six-dog racing would be the norm. Eight lane racing is popular in the United States and such an option in Limerick would attract buyers from overseas. It's unlikely, however, that eight-lane racing would take over from the standard style of racing in Limerick.

In recent times, new stadia have been developed at Cork and Tralee. – these remain exceptionally popular with seasoned racegoers, but also those with only a passing interest in the sport through magnificent dining, bar facilities and such like. For example, during the Summer months these venues have been drawing large

crowds for Barbeque Evenings and such like.

Also, in a novel development – exotic holidays have been up for grabs at every track in the country, with entry via losing tote docketts. Yes, it was as simple as that and the venture proved hugely popular with seasoned and new racegoers, alike. It's pretty evident that Greyhound Racing is now becoming as much a social outing as a sporting one.

Back in Limerick, the 2005 Final of the Kerry Agri-Business Irish St. Leger is down for decision on Saturday, July 9 – it's one of the oldest classics in the country and attracted a top-class entry of 72 dogs, including many from the leading kennels of Owen McKenna, Paul Hennessy, Graham Calvert and local handler Pat Buckley (Velvet Kennells, Doon), who provided us with last year's winner, the superbly named 'Never Give Up.'

The 2004 champion was a real people's winner for owner Padraig Heffernan of Adare – the hound was given to him by his family when, by his own admission, he was feeling a bit low following a by-pass operation. And, to the delight of the Heffernan clan and scores of friends, 'Never Give Up' lived-up to his billing when come from the proverbial next parish to sweep past his rivals and win the blue riband of greyhound racing in Limerick last July. Last year, the Leger victor won in the region of € 100,000 in prize-money.

The winning connections this year will scoop an impressive top-prize of €35,000.

\* Racing takes place at the Market's Field Stadium on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights all year round (7.50pm).



- Mal Keaveney

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