

Sunderland

The greyhound track at Sunderland has had a varying past with affiliation to the NGRC on two separate occasions and a long stint as an independent track. It all started on the afternoon of Saturday 23 March 1940 at 3pm quickly followed by a second and third meeting on the Easter Monday and just to confuse matters the stadium would be known as the Newcastle Sports Stadium, the Boldon Greyhound Stadium and Sunderland Greyhound Stadium throughout its history.

The site chosen for the new Boldon Greyhound Stadium before the war was North of Sunderland and south-east of East Boldon on the place where the Sunderland and Newcastle Roads merged (1° 24' 33.805"W 54° 56' 24.914"N). It ran parallel with this road on its south side and the London & North Eastern Railway on its north side and on the opposite side of the road (slightly east) was the East Boldon hospital for infectious diseases which would later become the sanatorium. Incidentally Boldon had strong links to the mining community which was a common factor with new greyhound tracks.

The first licence application came in March of 1938 and despite police objections a licence was granted to Benjamin Slater on behalf of the Sportsdrome & Greyhound Track Company. Fred Gillespie was brought into the track to act as General and Racing Manager along with other officials A E Hawkins from the Coundon track and George Hall from the White City-Newcastle stadium. The opening meeting saw eight races over 450 yards and the meeting was advertised as the Sunderland super greyhound stadium with a wonder totalisator and three luxurious clubs, large covered enclosures and a free car park. The first ever winner was trap 2 'Percheron' at 5-2 in a time of 28.35 secs.

Despite opening during the war business slowly grew year on year until peaking in 1946. The make-up of the track included a large main glass fronted club on the home straight with ballroom attached, covered stand and clubs on the fourth bend, a covered stand on the back straight with the racing kennels and paddock on the first bend. There was also accommodation for 170 greyhounds adjoining the stadium which acted as the resident kennels. It was a 380 yards circumference track with an 'Inside Sumner' hare and distances of 348, 450 & 600 yards.

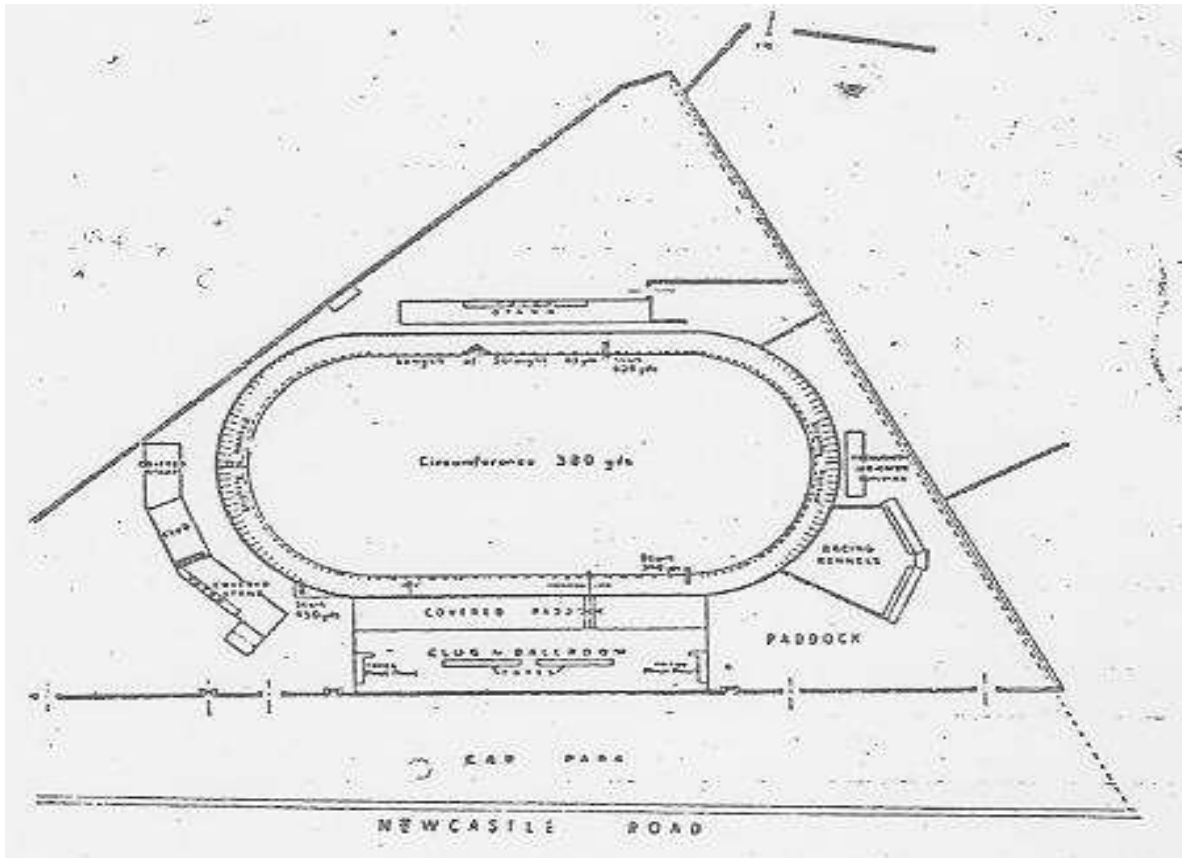
It is clear that the track joined the NGRC set up after the war but it is not known as to what year they made the switch from independent racing. The first attempt at racing under NGRC rules failed after only a few years with the track withdrawing from the club in 1951 (believed to be on 26 February). The reason for the change of mind seemed to be over the fact that the NGRC had a system called the 'Combine' which allowed tracks to run under rules similar to the latter day permit rules. Sunderland wanted owner-trainers that included many from the mining community to be able to race on separate race nights but the NGRC refused. With Sunderland also reliant on these forms of income the decision was made to leave.

The next forty years would see independent racing only although the track survived with no particular problems. Racing was held every Thursday & Saturday evening, prize money was superb for a 'flapper' offering a substantial £75 winners prize for some race in the mid-sixties which eclipsed many NGRC tracks. It was an all-grass track still with an 'Inside Sumner' but there was now a 650 yard distance. Annual events included the Vaux Trophy and Milburn Trophy.

During the late seventies the track turned to an all-sand surface and raced mainly handicaps over 420 metres but underwent changes as the Sunderland Greyhound Racing Co pulled out. The betting licence was renewed but the track closed in June 1980 awaiting either an offer for the stadium or a lease agreement. The track was ageing badly and investment was also needed.

John Young eventually stepped in to become the owner and acting as General Manager and Racing Manager they also introduced whippet racing. Distances in the mid-eighties were 243, 420, 600, 777 & 957 metres.

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Sunderland layout in 1947

At the end of 1988 businessmen and race horse owner Terry Robson and Harry Williams got together and decided to take on Sunderland and make it something to be proud of. Williams a respected former trainer at Brough Park helped design the new track and over £1 million was spent rebuilding the facilities. There was a new restaurant, private boxes and an application to the NGRC thrown in.

A whopping £20,000 sponsorship from the Mailcom business owned by Eddie Shotton was secured before the opening night to boost open race competitions; Shotton was a well-known greyhound owner. The all-sand track had an 'Outside McGee' and racing was set to be overseen by former Middlesbrough Racing Manager Ross Searle and Assistant Dave Baldwin on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings. Ten contracted trainers were brought in, Michael Brunnock, Graham Calvert, Kevin Donnelly, George Elliott, Terry Hart, Shirley Linley, Eddie McDermott, Ken Thwaites, Malcom Woods and Dawn Milligan forming the backbone of racing (Milligan had been lured to the track from Brough Park).

NGRC racing returned over 40 years after last being affiliated to the organisation with a bumper 12 race card on Wednesday 6 June 1990. The track was unrecognizable to the one that had existed just two years previous and ten days later open racing took place and attracted the one and only Ravage Again who was in the middle of his 29 consecutive winning streak.

The track was a huge success becoming a serious rival to Brough Park; the Mailcom races became major events in the calendar with the likes of Right Move and Seafield Quest winning the Mailcom Puppy Derby. David Mullins and Ted Soppitt arrived as trainers in 1991 showing the intent of the track and the first ever Sunday greyhound racing fixture was held during 1992 at Sunderland featuring the Mailcom Puppy Derby heats. Harry Williams with his trainers cap on again secured the Scottish Derby crown with New Level in 1993

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The ownership changed hands as first Lloyd Milligan became involved and then Dodds and Stephenson came into part ownership with Williams, Ross Searle left to be replaced by David Weatherall before Kevin Wilde became the latest owner in 1994. Wilde had of course been involved in the takeover of Brough Park where Williams now returned to take up training again. Jimmy Nunn arrived as the new Racing Manager from Owlerton.

Sunderland gained a lucrative BAGS contract but problems at Wilde's other track Brough Park actually resulted in a situation where receivers were called in following unpaid rent to Wilde. The situation then changed drastically for Sunderland because William Hill made it clear they were looking to invest in the industry (maybe due to the politics of the 'New Deal'). Following negotiations with Wilde they agreed the purchase Sunderland for £9.4 million in September 2002. Wilde remained as the director of greyhound stadia as William Hill then purchased Brough Park one year later.

The William Hill purchase led to significant changes including the renaming of Brough Park to Newcastle and the introduction of the William Hill Festival. The festival included two new major races, the William Hill Classic worth a remarkable £40,000 and the William Grand Prix for £25,000.

More recently Kelly Macari had kept Sunderland well and truly on the map with a conveyor belt of major victories headed by Pinpoint Maxi's 2013 Classic win. The Mill dogs Bling Bling and Pinpoint also secured decent victories and the Harry Williams trained Blue Artisan won Juvenile and Gymcrack titles.

Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
255m	Ravage Again	15.87	16.06.1990	
	Steamy Lass	15.85	11.07.1990	
	Ravage Again	15.65	20.07.1990	
	Intelligent Lad	15.64	12.09.1990	
261m	Gold Buster	15.60	10.02.1996	
	Ballymac Rooster	15.54	10.10.2006	
	Hes A Mystery	15.50	22.05.2009	
	Jimmy Lollie	15.38	09.07.2010	
	Walshes Hill	15.30	20.06.2015	
	405m	Harens Smokey	25.21	14.09.1990
Disc		25.05	21.09.1990	
Sunshine Slippy		24.97	03.12.1990	
450m		Mandies Supreme	27.55	16.06.1990
	Mandies Supreme	27.52	27.06.1990	
	Pinewood Rocky	27.47	22.08.1990	
	Slaneyside Hare	27.41	10.10.1990	
	Seafield Quest	27.38	10.11.1990	Mailcom Puppy Derby Final
	Gulleen Darkie	27.29	19.12.1990	
	Harsu Super	27.00	25.10.2000	
	Premier Marine	26.93	23.10.2004	
	Roxholme Silks	26.65	08.12.2004	Northern Puppy Derby semi
	Delwood Senior	26.80	11.08.2006	
	Mahers Boy	26.75	19.05.2007	William Hill Classic semi-final
	Groovy Stan	26.67	19.05.2007	William Hill Classic semi-final
580m	Meenala Cruiser	26.64	22.05.2007	
	Blonde Snapper	26.59	14.07.2011	William Hill Classic final
	Tomijo	36.00	16.06.1990	
	631m	Sir Alva	39.59	16.06.1990
640m	Autumn Tiger	38.97	22.10.1995	
776m	Glasha Band	50.66	27.07.1990	
	Chitral	49.91	25.08.1990	
782m	Always Dangerous	50.13	14.09.1990	
826m	Road Princess	52.99	16.06.1990	

828m	Elteen Heather	53.06	1997+	
	Doras Miller	52.46	13.02.2002	
	Blues Fancy	52.18	14.12.2004	
	Shes the Deal	51.98	20.12.2005	
	Shes the Deal	51.81	24.01.2006	

+ Date when record was held, not necessarily the year it was set.