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Jury orders Parx to pay \$7.8 million in jockey's death

By Dana DiFilippo

A jury yesterday awarded nearly \$7.8 million to the family of a jockey killed at Parx Racing after a race horse - spooked by roaming chickens - threw, dragged and kicked him.

Mario Calderon, 55, of Croydon, Bucks County, died after suffering 11 broken ribs and a bleed on his brain in the May 2010 mishap at the racetrack formerly known as Philadelphia Park, according to his attorney **Michael A. Trunk**.

A Philadelphia Common Pleas Court jury deliberated about six hours before announcing its verdict late yesterday afternoon. The verdict included \$5 million in punitive damages. A Parx spokeswoman couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

The lawsuit claimed that Parx created an unsafe work environment by letting chickens roam free on the racetrack, even though a jockey previously had been injured when a chicken frightened his horse. The chickens had been brought there many years earlier by horse owners and trainers.

Calderon was exercising a horse named Cassidy Blue near the track's outer rail when a chicken spread its wings and made a sudden movement as the horse approached. Although Calderon was thrown from the horse, his foot got stuck in a stirrup; he then was dragged upside down, while the horse repeatedly kicked him in the chest, for about 40 seconds, according to the lawsuit.

"The jury forced Parx to do what Parx refused to do on its own: take responsibility for the tragic and very preventable death of a long-time jockey and loving husband and father," Trunk said. "I'm hopeful that Parx will now get the message that the safety of jockeys and others on its premises is paramount to everything else, including profits from gambling."

Calderon, a married father of two, had been a jockey for more than 30 years.