

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE**

**NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

**10<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY, 3<sup>RD</sup> SESSION**

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YELLOWKNIFE DOG TROTTERS ASSOCIATION  
P.O. Box 2212  
Yellowknife, N.W.T. X1A 1R8

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October 22, 1984

Mr. Mike Ballantyne  
M.L.A. Yellowknife North  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
P.O. Box 1320  
YELLOWKNIFE, N.W.T. X1A 2L9

Dear Sir:

The following is a little background information on the "Canadian Championship Dog Derby" and a request for financial assistance in funding the 30th Annual running of the "Canadian Championship Dog Derby".

The first Dog Derby was run in 1955, over a distance of 40 miles. It was won in a time of five hours 27 minutes by Alfred Drygeese of Yellowknife, using a team of six dogs. In 1956 the purse was raised from \$50 to \$500 and the 40 miles was covered in about four hours by Philip Goulet, also of Yellowknife. Yellowknife's domination of its Dog Derby came to an abrupt end in 1957 when Ray Beck of Rocher River, N.W.T. made the 40 miles in a little under four hours. To reach Yellowknife, Ray had driven his team of six dogs across the lake, a distance of about 100 miles, in two days, camping overnight at Caribou Island.

Ray Beck continued his domination of the Dog Derby for the next several years. And the race was lengthened to 50 miles and now run well out onto Great Slave Lake. Beck's string of victories was broken by Joe Toby of Yellowknife in 1961, but in 1962 he regained his title. The race had now been lengthened to 100 miles in two 50-mile heats.

In 1963, another Rocher River team, that of Danny McQueen took the championship, for the first of five consecutive years. The race which had always begun on Great Slave Lake took off uptown in 1964 and ran through the streets of Yellowknife before reaching the lake. Nineteen sixty four also marked the year that the race covered 150 miles over three days.

Until 1972 the Dog Derby remained largely a territorial race, with the vast majority of teams belonging to trappers from around Great Slave Lake. Everyone used trapping toboggans with canvas or hide carryalls and the traditional straightline work harness which were often gaily decorated for the occasion. Dog Derby was really the grand finale of the trapping season. The dogs and their mushers might have put on thousands of miles over the winter and all were in peak condition. The temptation to see whose team was the best was irresistible.

Outside of the territories, an extremely active racing circuit was developing and prize money was the major drawing card for the top teams. In 1972, the Yellowknife Rotary Club took over the Dog Derby (with the help of the Exhibition Association) and the total prize money offered skyrocketed from \$1,000 to \$15,000 with \$5,000 going to the winner. Seventeen teams from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Alaska and the Northwest Territories competed under International Sled Dog Association rules. Peter Sangris of Yellowknife was the winner with an overall time of 16:40.31 for 150 miles. He took home a total of \$7,500 in prize money. Larry Martin of Fort Chipewyan, Alberta was second and Murdoch Carriere of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan was third.

Many more professional mushers were attracted by the large purse and in 1974, 31 teams entered. Racing sleds, tandem harnesses and teams of up to 14 dogs appeared. But Great Slave Lake was unlike the groomed tracks that many southern teams and mushers are used to. A basic trail was marked with a bombardier, but when the wind would blow it would often be difficult to find.

Southern teams continued to compete in the race and they began to do better. In 1976 Adolphus Capot Blanc of Fort Nelson, B.C. captured first place and the next year, Tim White of Minnesota won with a time of 14:18:39 for 150 miles.

Several people in Yellowknife felt that the race was losing its uniqueness and noticed that fewer trappers were participating, so in 1978, some new rules were introduced. A limit of nine dogs was set and it was decided that the teams must pull trapping toboggans not less than seven feet long and weighing 100 pounds. Each toboggan was weighed before the start and sand bags added to bring up the weight, if necessary.

This meant that the dogs used would have to be slightly larger and stronger than the "sprint-style" dogs seen in many southern teams. These changes attracted more local trappers and 25 teams started the race. Grant Beck of Yellowknife won with a time of 13:55:15.

In 1979 Peter Norberg, a professional musher from Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T. set a course record of 10:29:21 for 150 miles. His team averaged 14.3 mph pulling a 100 lb. toboggan. He was closely followed by Roger Beck of Fort Resolution, N.W.T.

In an attempt to make the race more accessible to spectators, the starting line was moved uptown in 1981. The teams had to race through the streets and then down a long winding hill to the lake. This undoubtedly made the start more exciting for the onlookers but the trappers, not used to driving dogs in crowded streets, shied away. Tim White of Minnesota won again, followed by the Beck brothers, Grant and Richard from Yellowknife.

In 1982 Dog Derby, even with a total purse of \$16,000, attracted only eight teams. Trapping teams, it was felt just didn't stand a chance against the professionals from Yellowknife and outside the territories. Costs were rising at an incredible rate and all hope seemed to be lost. However, as the first day wore on it became apparent that things weren't going as expected. It was hard going out on the lake. Soft and drifting snow had all but obliterated the track and the dogs were working hard. By the time the teams reached the final checkpoint, 12 miles from town, Yellowknife was buzzing with excitement. Twenty-one year old Raymond Beck of Rocher River, N.W.T., son of former champion Ray Beck, with his team of trapline dogs, was over 20 minutes ahead of his nearest competitor. On Yellowknife Bay hundreds of cheering onlookers watched in appreciation as Raymond's team of black dogs loped effortlessly across the finish line, having just broken trail for 50 miles.

Despite Tim White's lap record on the second day of 3:14:14 for 50 miles, a speed of 15.4 mph, Raymond made good enough time to retain first place.

For years people had been predicting that if the conditions were tough a trapline team could still win. Raymond Beck proved them right. His dogs, known locally as Talston River Huskies had been bred for generations on the south shore of Great Slave Lake, specifically for trapping. The team combined the speed, stamina and endurance required to become the Canadian Champions for 1982.

In 1983 times were slower - the conditions were again tough. Richard Beck of Yellowknife came in first in an overall time of 13 hours, 10 minutes and eight seconds.

In 1984 temperatures were warm and the track was dragged. The race started on Back Bay and Eddy Streeper of Fort Nelson, B.C. took the trophy in a time of 11 hours, nine minutes and nine seconds.

The 30th running of the Canadian Championship has yet another change. Ten dogs will be the maximum limit and the track will again be well-groomed. Many teams are expecting to again come and test themselves against the toughest in the world. But the Canadian Championship has one more draw-back.

Dogs are like marathon runners - they can not run both the short and the distance races during the same year or they will not place very well in either. To successfully compete in a race such as the Canadian Championship, which is the main attraction of the Caribou Carnival festivities at the end of March, requires a musher to "put all of his eggs in one basket". It is very difficult to buy or breed dogs with the strength and speed required to pull a 100-lb. toboggan on a bombardier trail for 150 miles. The dog (and the musher) that can do well in this race is very unique. They have to compete with mushers from Canada and the United States.

To have a competitive team of nine dogs requires a musher to have approximately 35 dogs in his kennel. Costs are astronomical as good commercial dog food in the Northwest Territories costs approximately \$27.00 a bag. Chicken, fish, veterinary supplies, gas, trucks, racing equipment, new stock are all costs that can never be regained even if the musher won most of the races in the Northwest Territories. The competition in the Canadian Championship is of very high calibre and to place within the top five positions is well-respected. (See Appendix A).

For a musher living in Yellowknife to take in the circuit of races that is required to be competitive, it would cost at least \$6,200, which does not include dog food, veterinarian bills or personal expenses while on the road. It also does not include his assistant's expenses, or the time that they take off work to go on the circuit. To be realistic, if a musher places, on the average, fourth spot, he would win approximately \$1,800.

For a musher outside of the Northwest Territories, their costs are cheaper but they can not run all the short races they may have been running to offset costs - and Yellowknife is a long ways off their regular circuits. You will see by Appendix B that it is a fairly big risk to run the race unless you feel confident that you will finish in the top three positions.

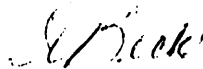
Since it is the 30th anniversary of the Canadian Championship, we are trying to get \$30,000 for this year's total purse. We are requesting the Government of the Northwest Territories to fund \$20,000 and the Caribou Carnival Association will come up with the rest. I feel it would not only help Yellowknife but the rest of the Northwest Territories as mushers compete from all the communities from around the lake.

The Chamber of Commerce, City of Yellowknife, Yellowknife Dog Trotters Association and Rotary Club are approaching the corporate sponsors to fund this traditional sport. If we can make this one of the biggest purses ever it will bring in more of the top competing mushers from the rest of Canada and the United States and show these sponsors that this is indeed a worthwhile project. With the funds and the mushers, it will keep the Canadian Championship Dog Derby in the North where it has been for the past 30 years.

I trust you will look upon this proposal favourably. If there is anything more that I can do, please do not hesitate to let me know. Enclosed is my business card where I can be reached most of the time.

Yours truly

Y.K. DOG TROTTERS ASSOC.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Vi Beck".

Vi Beck  
President

APPENDIX A

EXPENSES

Gas - Approx. 25 tanks of gas @ \$35.00/tank	=	\$ 875.00
Oil, Tires & Repairs -	=	\$1,500.00
Hotels - Approx. 20 nights @ \$40.00*	=	\$ 800.00
- for the assistant	=	\$ 800.00
Meals - 56 days x \$50.00/day	=	\$2,800.00
- for the assistant	=	\$2,800.00
Entry fees - 9 races @ \$25/per race	=	<u>\$ 225.00</u>
TOTAL	=	\$9,800.00

The list takes into account out of pocket expenses involved while on the circuit. It does not include the local races in Yellowknife (entry fees, etc.) which are held monthly. These races usually have very little prize monies involved (possibly \$75 for first place). It also does not include the costs of buying dogs, feeding them and caring for them.

At the very least, five new dogs are needed to be obtained every year to replace older dogs in the team and to strengthen the breeding lines. If time were ever considered, (training, feeding, etc.) I am sure that there would be no teams around. Dog team racing involves work at all times of the year (they need to be fed in the summer too), never mind the long, cold nights of -40 below weather when the teams are training.

The following is a list of the costs involved with regard to feeding and veterinarian costs, etc.

Commercial Dog Food - 75 bags at \$27/bag	=	\$2,025.00
Chicken - 50 blocks x \$10/block	=	\$ 500.00
Fish - 5,000 (3/\$1.00)	=	\$1,666.00
Replacement of dogs - 5 x \$500/ea.	=	\$2,500.00
Needles, deworming pills, vitamins, etc., approx.	=	<u>\$2,500.00</u>
TOTAL	=	\$9,191.00

\*Hotels are not required for the entire trip. Some towns supply billets for the mushers attending their races.

APPENDIX B

POSSIBLE REVENUES

1st	\$5,000
2nd	\$3,000
3rd	\$1,500
4th	\$ 850
5th	\$ 750
6th	\$ 650
7th	\$ 550
8th	\$ 450
9th	\$ 350
10th	\$ 250
11th	\$ 100
12th	\$ 50

Daily Lap Prizes

1st	\$ 250
2nd	\$ 150
3rd	\$ 100

N.W.T. Championship (sponsored by Fred H. Ross & Bathurst Inlet Lodge)

1st	\$ 500
2nd	\$ 300
3rd	\$ 200

Golden Checkpoint Award (sponsored by Husky Fever)

trophy

Yellowknifer Knife Award (sponsored by Yellowknifer newspaper)

Knife

Red Lantern Award (sponsored by Nova Equipment)

trophy