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## The Iditarod: The Last Great Race on Earth -Florida HS Athletic Assn. Fails

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With the sun getting warmer, the days getting longer, and the azaleas in bloom, it is clear that spring has arrived in Florida. And so it is a curiosity in these early days of March to read of the exploits of some of the heartiest athletes in the world.

Beginning on the 29th of February and running through this week "The Last Great Race on Earth," more popularly known as the Iditarod, a 1,159 mile dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome, has been contested in Alaska, where spring is but a rumor. The race commemorates the transportation of serum by dog sled to Nome to fight a diphtheria epidemic in 1925. Dog-Sled racing itself goes back into the late 19th century as a competitive sport. The Iditarod was organized by Dorothy Page and Joe Reddington Sr. twenty years ago to save mushing from the growing trend toward snowmobiles.

This year's version of the race had 76 entries. More than 1,200 dogs with mushers from Alaska, the lower 48, and several European nations, competed for a purse of \$375,000, with \$50,000 to the winner.

On the second day the elements were displaying their fury on the trail. At Skwentna, 149 miles into the race, teams were bunching up because the trail ahead had been buried by blowing and drifting snow. Rick Swensen, five time winner of the Iditarod, predicted that the course record of 11 days, 1 hour, and 53 minutes set in 1990 by Susan Butcher would not be bested this year because of the elements.

By Tuesday it was being reported that strong winds and a rough trail had been compounded by overnight near minus 35 at Finger Lake. The place names are so expressive and exotic. Finger Lake, Rainy Pass, Koyak, Shaktoolik, Skwentna, the Yukon River, Cripple checkpoint. This is a test of man and animal against the power of nature, with the severe cold, the high winds, and whiteout snowstorms.

In the 1990 race it was in turn too warm, too cold, the snow drifts were insurmountable, there were Buffalo on the trail, and two sleds were attacked by Moose, who tangled the lines and

stomped the dogs. The mountains and the tundra offer challenges of epic proportion.

But despite the elements this year's Iditarod produced a record time. Martin Buser came onto Front Street in Nome at 4:17 a.m., 10 days, 19 hours, and 17 minutes after departing Anchorage. Buser led his nearest rivals by ten hours, and took about six hours off Susan Butcher's record.

The Swiss born Buser of Big Lake was competing in his ninth Iditarod. He finished second last year to Rick Swenson. Four-time champion Susan Butcher said that Buser's team of 13 dogs was simply far superior to the dog teams of other competitors. Buser and his team took the lead just about the half-way point of the course, and then literally ran away from the field. At the time Buser crossed the finish line the remaining mushers were scattered back along the course for over 600 miles. Only nine teams had dropped out, and it was expected to be a week before all the remaining competitors completed their runs.

The Last Great Race on Earth really does live up to its name. The Dogs and their best friends challenge the elements and one another in a test of skill, power, and endurance, over the course of 1,159 miles, almost any one of which can claim the life of a participant.

Meanwhile back in Florida sportsmen of another sort failed to meet their challenge. The 30 man executive board of the Florida High School Activities Association, the same body that failed to deal sensibly with an eligibility question last football season, were again faced with one of those incredibly difficult decisions that our leaders so often face. Lake County School Superintendent Tom Sanders asked officials to endorse his proposal to raise the statewide minimum requirement from 1.5 to 2.0 as the grade point average for participation in extracurricular activities. The proposal died on the floor without discussion.

Sanders said he wanted people to know that we are serious about academics. Well now people know. A "C" average in classes is just too much to expect of our high school students.

T.H. Poole, NAACP State President, says that he opposes raising this standard because "it is an instrument of denial." Actually Mr. Poole it is an instrument of incentive and an instrument of reality. Such a standard when set elsewhere has led students to work harder and raise their grades. And the reality is, if these

students can not perform at these minimal levels, then they are in for an extreme struggle to stay afloat in the real world.

Ron Davis, the commissioner of the Florida High School Activities Association, says that the extracurricular activities are all that some students come to school for, and to deny them these activities will lead to a higher drop out rate. If Mr. Davis is right, it may be time to eliminate all extracurricular activities from schools, and get our priorities straight. Or perhaps we should replace our schools with sport and recreation complexes, that would certainly take care of the Japanese challenge.

It's good to know that we have such great leadership in this state.

On Sport and Society the is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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