

August 28, 2005

Greetings to Iditarod Educators, Students and Race Fans,

While in Wisconsin, school begins no earlier than September 1st; I realize that schools in other states have already completed a week or more of the 2005-06 school year. Since learning last spring that I'd be representing teachers around the world on the Iditarod Trail, I've been pondering and planning what to share during my year as Teacher on the Trail™. Physical Education activities are on the top of my list, so look for a new activity each month. Of course there will be activities for each of the core subjects as well as art, physics, technology, animal science, health & safety, motivation, goal setting and character education. Check the Iditarod site around the end of each month for new postings and standards based lessons.

Lessons posted for September include an Aerobic Checkpoint or Scavenger Hunt, the H.A.W & L Checkup and the Eight Traits of IDITAROD. Following you'll find a brief summary of each activity. Specific details and standards can be found with each lesson.

Aerobic Scavenger or Checkpoint Hunt: Students should be in teams of 3 or 4. On a large area such as a football or soccer field, spread 26 cones out and conceal slips of paper with checkpoint names under them. One member of each team stands in the middle of the field as the "checker." The other team members hook arms and take off jogging, looking for the cone that conceals the first checkpoint, Eagle River. Once found, the runners return to the checker to check off Eagle River. The checker becomes one of the runners while one of the runners stays in the middle of the field to be the checker. Again, off the runners go seeking Wasilla. The hunt continues for a predetermined period of time or until a team finds all 26 checkpoints in order. A variation would be to use 26 items of mushing gear instead of checkpoints. An item can be concealed under each cone along with slips of paper indicating the item under the cone. Again, the runners need to find the items in a specified order. This is an activity filled with fun, a little strategy and lots of aerobic benefit.

The H.A.W & L Checkup: This activity for self-assessment evolves from the acronym the veterinarians use for checking the dogs at each checkpoint.

For the vets the "H" stands for heart and hydration; "A" for attitude and appetite; "W" for weight and "L" for legs and lungs. The athletes on my golf team use this acronym to assess their performance on a weekly basis. For us, "H" stands for heart, hydration and happiness - is your heart in golf, are you hydrating properly and are you happy? "A" stands for attitude and appetite - is your attitude toward the game, teammates, competitors and coaches positive and are you hungry to improve your skills and knowledge? "W" stands for wisdom or wise choices - are you making good course management decisions? "L" stands for legal, learning and lucky - do you know the rules and use them to your advantage, what have you learned not only from your coaches but from playing and are you managing your game to create luck? The athletes rank themselves (1 - 5) in each area every Friday at practice. Given their results, each golfer chooses a category and creates a strategy for improvement during the next week. This little checkup isn't very time consuming but reaps great benefits.

Eight Traits of Iditarod: Use IDITAROD as an acronym for positive characteristics of successful students, athletes, etc. Small groups of students list positive traits beginning with the letter "I", "D", etc. Once the small groups have completed their work, all the traits for each letter are listed. The students then vote on which trait will represent each letter of IDITAROD. Musher's serve as excellent examples of positive traits that students and athletes can relate to. My posting each month will have a trait following the IDITAROD acronym and a brief story of a musher or mushers that exemplify that trait.

"I" stands for INNOVATION - In the book Iditarod Classics, Lew Freedman shares stories about Libby Riddles and Martin Buser that demonstrate innovation as they faced fierce weather conditions during Iditarod. In 1985, Libby Riddles was in Shaktoolik in the midst of a raging ground blizzard. She was in first place and wanted to stay there so she left Shaktoolik heading to Koyuk. In her words, Libby describes the conditions as grim. Unable to see from one trail marker to the next, she let her dogs go just so far so that she could barely see the trail marker behind her. She then set the snow hook and walked ahead of the dogs until she could see the next marker then walked back to the dogs and repeated the process. She went 15 miles in three hours but never lost the trail. In 1991 Martin Buser found himself in a similar situation between White Mountain and Safety.

Other mushers who had left White Mountain were turning around because of the storm. Visibility was just the length of the dog team, 50 or 60 feet and it was impossible to see the trail. Martin figured that he would never let himself go a hundred yards without being sure he was on the trail. In fierce wind, the dogs want to go with the wind rather than follow the trail so it became clear to Martin that he needed to lead. He went to the front of the team and put Eleanor in single lead and Martin took the other tug line. Next to Eleanor, Martin pulled on the tug line and together they found and followed the trail. It was slow progress - perhaps just 3 or 4 miles an hour. In these examples, Libby and Martin always knew they were on the trail heading in the right direction because of innovation. Freedman's book, Iditarod Classics published by Epicenter Press, contains many great stories as told by the mushers. I hope you can find a copy to share with your students.

Finally, a quilt project, which began at the summer conference, is going into motion this week. Participants created quilt squares, which have been assembled into the Trail Quilt. The Trail Quilt will travel from school to school for the participant's students to use as a teaching tool. Students can write about it, journal, make up a story about what happens to the quilt on its journey, talk about the messages on the Quilt or use a map to track the Trail Quilt. Students will become a part of the Trail Quilt as they sign it and send it on. The Quilt will arrive in Anchorage to be displayed at the Winter Conference for the start of the 2006 Iditarod. The Quilt left Eau Claire and headed East Troy, Wisconsin on September 1st.



Happy Trails to All,
Terrie