

SPORTS

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GAME OF THE WEEK

The West Sound 16s were 1-1 after its first week-end of play at the CABA World Series in Texas.

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Daugereau sets sights on Junior Iditarod

Local teen prepares herself and her 15 dogs for racing season.

By DIANE DUMELLE

Staff Writer

On Crash, on Remo, on Swinger and Skippy! On Jazz, on Bongo, on Chewbaka, on Buster!

Dashing through the hills behind her family's house in southern North Kitsap county is Laura Daugereau, a 16-year-old dog sled musher from Poulsbo. The teen is also an avid drummer, which is why she named her dogs after drums.

Laura is preparing her canines for her first Northwest Dog Sled Association races this winter as she prepares for the 2000 Junior Iditarod. Preparation of and care for the animals has become a way of life.

As one pulls in the long driveway of the old Poulsbo farmhouse off Viking Way and overlooking Liberty Bay, a humorous sign greets guests, "Old Dog, Young Dog, Several Stupid Dogs. Please Drive Slowly."

Back almost 100 yards from the historical house is an old chicken coop that was transformed into a dog kennel. Rusota Kennels, specifically, which was named for Rusty and Nakota, two of Laura's first sled dogs.

Next to the kennel is a large, fenced-off dog yard where 13 dogs wait anxiously on their teacups for breakfast, dinner, free time and training time.

Not every 16-year-old girl has that many dogs, but then again not every girl is like Laura. She's an intelligent, articulate teenager whose knowledge of dog sledding greatly exceeds that of any general dog lover.

This dog lover to the max didn't know she'd be raising and racing sled dogs until the idea sparked about six years ago.

When she was 10 years old and her family was living in Leaven-

worth, Wash., she discovered it was hard work getting a sled back up a hill after the exhilaration of sliding down it. She said it was easier to let the family pet Buster, a Labrador/Samoyed mix, do it.

It was downhill from there — no pun intended.

Last year, Laura helped a friend — and his 45 dogs — in Alaska prepare for the Yukon Quest. The quest is a 1,000-mile race on rough terrain along the Yukon River.

Upon Laura's return, she brought back four Alaskan Huskies, and because they — and the three dogs she already had — needed room to run, her five-member family moved from Silverdale to the 10-acre rental property in Poulsbo.

Laura said when her dogs arrived in Washington they were skeptical about grass, and they were hesitant to step on it because they had never been around it in the minus 60 degree weather at home in Alaska.

The dogs were bought between the ages of 2 and 4, which is still under a sled dog's prime for racing. Laura also bred dogs while in Alaska, which generated eight more puppies for a team.

"I'm not into breeding," Laura said. "So, I'll stick at (15) for now. I'm not knowledgeable enough to breed."

Java, one of the eight puppies, was injured after being hit by a car two weeks ago. The dog, which would make a perfect leader for a dog team, found a gap in the dog yard fence and went for a run.

"In Alaska it's really cool, it's like going to a baseball game," she said. "(Sledging) is like any other sport, it's a more common sport."

Unfortunately, the unsupervised run resulted in a \$1,500 hip surgery that has a 50 percent chance of taking her out of the running as a leader.

"If not, she'll make a really good pet," Laura said. "You'll be my mascot," she told the somewhat sedated pup.

Leaders have the mental stress of a dog team, they don't necessarily pull. They have to listen to the commands given by the musher.

Although surgeries aren't expected, other costs in dog sledding are expected. Keeping 15 dogs is costly.

"Their metabolism is so high ...



David DickStaff Photo

Laura Daugereau plays around with Katy, a six-month-old sled dog. With feedings and free time for the

food is the biggest cost," Laura said. Cumulatively, at the minimum they eat about 300 pounds of dog food a month, which is about 20 pounds for each dog. The food Laura feeds them costs \$30 per 40 pounds.

"Every penny she earns goes to the dogs," said her mother, Carol Daugereau.

The family runs a home maintenance business, so whenever Laura needs money she works a few hours.

Being homeschooled helps the 10th grader make her schedule fit her lifestyle, and that of her dogs, too.

Equipment from harnesses, lines, snags, and keeping fences repaired and in check are just some of the costs that add up.

Time spent taking care of the animals also adds up.

"Your brain never stops," Laura said. "You get tired physically, it's hard work ... mentally is the hardest part."

She easily spends four hours a day feeding, brushing, watering, keeping cool, tying and untying and training the canines.

Laura uses a cart of a four-wheel-

er to train the dogs in practicing weight training and endurance. At the appropriate time of year, she takes the dogs to the Olympic mountains where there is snow to practice in the elements.

"It's just like any sport, taking her to and from practice," Carol said. "We're just as supportive, it's just a different kind of support."

Despite the difficulty of training snow dogs at an elevation with little of frozen precipitation, Laura said she likes the challenge of sledging here.

However, in Alaska, "no one would think you're weird," she said. "And it would be a lot easier."

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Around here, Laura has gotten mixed reactions to her hobby. Some people who don't understand sledging and accuse mushers of committing animal abuse aren't aware that mushers aren't forcing the dogs to work, Laura said.

"That's their purpose in life," she said. "They get unhappy when they can't run ... it's in their blood."

All this training led up to her first

year of racing. She'll start with her adult dogs this year and her puppies will complete the team by the Junior Iditarod in 2000.

The Junior Iditarod — for junior mushers ages 14-18 — starts in Anchorage on the original Iditarod trail, and extends a distance of 150 miles in two days. Seventy-five miles out, and 75 miles back in.

"Everything is the same (as the original Iditarod), except it's shorter miles," Laura said. There are nearly 20 competitors in the junior Iditarod, and about 50 in the regular races.

Cash prizes are often awarded to winners of the races, but in general, "you get no money out of dog sledging until you're with the pros," she said.

She said she'd like to win some races, but she's more into the sport to see what she and her dogs can do. Her goal is to one day participate in the Yukon Quest.

"I like the woods, I like doing things by myself, and I love dogs," Laura said. "In sledging, it all comes together."

"All the hard work and stuff, it's all worth it to get to see God's country by yourself."

Saturday is Habitat for Humanity race day in downtown Suquamish

The Hot Feet for Humanity fun run will attack Suquamish for the third year in a row this weekend.

The 10k and 5k runs, 5k walk and kid's dashes to benefit the North Kitsap Habitat for Humanity organization. Over \$2,000 was raised last year, which benefited the North Kitsap Habitat for Humanity building fund. The fun run is one of biggest

fundraisers of the year for the North Kitsap chapter, behind an auction held in October.

"We're hoping the race will grow by leaps and bounds," said Joy Lawrence, event organizer. "We're only in our third year."

Last summer's Hot Feet drew 124 walkers and runners, some from as far away as California and Maryland.

Registration was down a bit in 1997 from the prior year. Participation was expected to double or triple, but instead the event drew about 30 fewer runners and walkers than the first year.

Registration entry forms are available at a variety of North Kitsap locations, including The Sport Haus and Washington Mutual Bank in Poulsbo.

Fees are \$15 for adults and \$2 for kids the day of the race. Day-of registration begins at 7 a.m. Saturday, with races beginning between 9-9:30 a.m. and awards and prizes starting at 10:30 a.m.

At the conclusion of all races — and the kid's dashes — there will be a health fair available to all interested participants and spectators.

Pledges are optional, and they must be collected and returned to Habitat by Sept. 11. Anyone raising over \$100 receives a free t-shirt.

For more information, call the Hot Feet for Humanity hotline at 394-4484, or check the internet at www.silverlink.net/nkc-habitat; www.notherun.com/hotfeet; www.sportsetc.com/habitat.html