



## **2024 Iditarod Race In the Books, Thanks to Massive Volunteer Force**

*The Wired Word for the Week of March 17, 2024*

### **In the News**

Dallas Seavey crossed the finish line in Nome, Alaska, with 10 dogs in harness in the 2024 [Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race](#) on Tuesday, becoming the first musher to win "The Last Great Race" six times. Seavey covered the course of approximately 1,000 miles from south-central Alaska to the northwest coast of the state in 9 days 2 hours 16 minutes and 8 seconds.

While the leading mushers and their star canine athletes understandably receive the most attention, some media coverage highlights the importance of the many people who work behind the scenes to make the event possible. The most successful mushers stress how much they rely on their support teams to achieve their goals.

In what is Alaska's largest volunteer effort, a large number and diversity of teams are needed to pull off a competition of this magnitude. Each team and each team member has a particular role and responsibility: logistics, route planning and marking, communications, ordering and delivering supplies, organizing and managing checkpoints, manufacturing and maintaining equipment (snow machines, drones and planes for monitoring the race, breaking trail, and aiding in safety, search and rescue operations that might be required), cleanup crews, fundraisers, cooks and more.

Just recruiting staff, volunteers, veterinarians, medical personnel, race judges and sponsors, checkers, pilots, financial supporters of individual mushers and dogs, trail breakers and others, is an effort of breathtaking proportions.

Along the course, veterinarians perform over 10,000 checks on the canine athletes. At checkpoints, volunteers designate specific locations for each team to park, and set up water stations and bales of straw the mushers use to bed down the dogs.

Sled dogs do not all have the same responsibilities on a dog team. Lead dogs steer the team and set the pace. They must be brave, intuitive and able to listen to the musher. The other dogs on the team must trust, respect and be willing to follow the lead dog. When lead dogs run as a pair, they must be in sync with each other as well as with the musher.

Swing dogs are placed right behind the lead dogs to support them and encourage the other dogs on the team to follow their lead. Next come the team dogs who power the team forward. Finally, the wheel dogs race right in front of the sled. They must have a calm, even temperament and be able to operate without needing to be in the spotlight so often shone on the leaders. Each dog has its own role, but together they pull together toward their destination.

Musher [Bruce Lee](#) wrote, "In a dog team ... They all must work together to have a successful race. It is, after all, called a 'dog team.'"

"Just as each dog plays a part in an Iditarod team, each of these components does its part to get the teams down the trail as well. All contribute with their own special skill-set to make the race happen," Lee added. "From the checker standing out in the cold at 3 a.m. to check in a

team arriving at a remote checkpoint, to the sponsor writing a check to buy fuel for the volunteer air force, they, like the dogs in a team, each contribute to the overall effort. Without them there would be no race."

While there are many benefits to belonging to a team, membership in such a focused group doesn't eliminate every possible danger or challenge. Less than 24 hours into this year's contest, Seavey's team became entangled with an aggressive moose, which the musher was forced to shoot in self-defense. The animal fell on the sled, injuring Seavey's dog Faloo, who had to be airlifted to Anchorage for surgery. The incident occurred last Monday, which happened to be Seavey's 37th birthday.

Iditarod Rule 34 states that if a musher kills an edible big game animal in defense of life and property, the racer must gut the animal before proceeding. Seavey said he did the best he could with the task, but race officials still gave him a two-hour penalty for not gutting the moose sufficiently.

Other competitors have encountered moose on the Iditarod trail, in previous years as well as in the current iteration of the race. Third-place finisher Jessie Holmes told *Alaska Public Media* he met the same moose Seavey encountered later. "I had to punch a moose in the nose out there," Holmes said. "I didn't like want to punch the moose in the nose, it was just a last ditch effort to not get stomped or to have any dogs get stomped," Holmes added. "Dallas said, 'I wished you had punched it harder.'"

Seavey's kennel suffered a different kind of tragedy last November, when a snowmachine ran into one of his three teams who were on a training run on Denali Highway. Two of his sled dogs were killed and seven others injured, three severely. His fellow musher, who was driving the sled dog team that was hit, was thrown off the sled in the accident, but was not seriously hurt.

Alaska State Troopers said that the operator of the snowmachine was cited for negligent driving.

"There's not much that bothers me more than seeing a dog in pain like that," Seavey said at the time.

Dallas Seavey told a journalist in a recent interview in Norway, "A sled dog is very much a pack animal. They rely on the security and the strength of a pack and they need to feel secure in that pack and they need to feel that if we're gonna run out into a blizzard or cross a big river, or through deep snow, they're never doing it alone. Even if they are the leader they know the rest of the team is right behind them and they're gonna help them through this."

When he was asked how he picks the right team of human dog handlers, Seavey replied, "Having a good team is really important. ... But what is also important, I think, is not to rely on those handlers too much in making decisions, because you as the musher need to be very in-tune with your dog team. You are part of that organism. I kind of feel like the dogs are my legs and the musher is the brain that are working together."

[Sanka W. Dog](#) (a blogger who writes using the persona of a female Alaskan husky) wrote that at her kennel, they have their own creed using the acronym, TEAM, which stands for "Together Everyone Achieves More."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Skwentna Checkpoint: Celebrate Your River Crew.](#) *Iditarod*

[What Sled Dogs Can Teach Us About Working in Teams.](#) *Giftedguru*

[Dallas Seavey: Building a Dog Team.](#) *Nonstopdogwear*

[4 Teamwork Lessons From the Iditarod.](#) *Michaelleestallard*

[5-time Iditarod Champion Dallas Seavey Mourning Loss of 2 Dogs.](#) *alaskasnewssource*

## **The Big Questions**

1. Are you or have you ever been on a team of some kind? What brought the team together? What was your role or position on the team? What made the team effective or ineffective?
  
2. What makes the difference between having individual athletes who have exceptional talent and a great team capable of winning a championship?
  
3. What would happen on a team if everyone was good at scoring but no one was good at defense (or vice versa)? What would happen if all the dogs on a sled dog team wanted to be the lead dog?
  
4. What are some of the roles people have in your congregation that further your ministry? Which of these roles are more prominent and noticeable, and which fly under the radar? Which would you notice most if the tasks done by particular people were left undone?
  
5. How can we be sure we are not merely spectators watching other people do their part on "God's team"? What do you need to do to become an active part of God's team?

## Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **1 Kings 19:9-10, 18**

*At that place [Elijah] came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ... [Then the LORD said to him,] "... Yet I will leave seven thousand [prophets] in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (For context, read [1 Kings 19:9-18](#).)*

After experiencing a spiritual high on Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah's nemesis, Queen Jezebel, vowed to kill him, and Elijah ran away in a panic ([1 Kings 18:20-46](#); [1 Kings 19:1-3](#).) Elijah was under the mistaken impression that he was the only person faithful to God left in Israel, and he thought he had to carry the weight of that role by himself. He knew it was too much for him to bear, and even asked God to take his life, to relieve him of his burden ([1 Kings 19:4](#)).

But God informed Elijah that he was not the only true follower of God. In fact, there were 7,000 other faithful people. Elijah was part of a team, the size of which he hadn't a clue.

**Questions:** What might lead people to forget that they are part of a team? When we feel alone in our spiritual journey, what can happen? What should we do about it?

## **2 Kings 6:14-17**

*So [the king of Aram] sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night and surrounded the city. When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (For context, read [2 Kings 6:8-17](#).)*

It appears that Elijah's successor, the prophet Elisha, may have learned from Elijah's mistake. In this incident, Elisha faced a formidable army, and his life was certainly threatened. But Elisha didn't panic. He realized that he had a hidden team of supporters surrounding him.

**Questions:** What kept Elisha grounded while his servant fretted? What should we do when we only see opponents and obstacles around us? What forces are "with us" even when we may not see them?

## **Mark 6:7, 12-13**

*[Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ... So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. (For context, read [Mark 6:7-13](#).)*

## **Luke 10:1**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of*

*him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. (For context, read [Luke 10:1-9, 17.](#))*

When Jesus sent people out in ministry, he sent them out in twos. He did not expect them to minister alone. In [Luke 8:1-3](#), we read that many women accompanied Jesus and his 12 disciples on his preaching tours. Some he had cured of evil spirits and diseases, and some were supporting him and his disciples financially.

Jesus knew all about team building! Look at how he called people, unlikely ones at that, to inspire and teach and train to carry forth the message that he knew he could not do in person.

**Questions:** What challenges might come from working on a mission or project alone? with others? What benefits might come from working alone? as part of a team?

### **1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11**

*Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (For context, read [1 Corinthians 12:4-11.](#))*

Paul teaches that the church is made up of diverse people, just as a human body has different limbs, organs and systems that work together to function the way a body is supposed to function. An ear cannot do what an eye does, a heart can't do what a lung does, and feet can't do what hands do.



It's the same way in the church. One person may be a gifted administrator, while another is a good counselor. One preaches well, another relates well to children. Bodies (and churches) work best when the members help one another.

**Questions:** Why does the Holy Spirit distribute gifts to many different people rather than concentrate those gifts in the hands of only one or a few people? What could possibly go wrong if the Holy Spirit gave you every gift and withheld them from everyone else?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. How might each of the following function as a team, and how would you define their common purpose?

- Parents, educators, school administrators, church members and leaders
- Members of a sports team
- Architects, carpenters, masons, electricians, plumbers, landscapers, interior designers, city planners
- Members of an orchestra
- Researchers, philanthropists, fund-raisers, nonprofit agencies, public health officials, insurance companies, sick people
- Company employees, management, legal department, sales force, stockholders

2. TWW team member Joanna Loucky-Ramsey recalls a shy member of a church she served as minister of music and youth. "Rushel was not a singer, but he loved to hang around the choir, and to help me with every little task I gave him, because he wanted to make my job easier," Loucky-Ramsey

wrote.

"Whether it was organizing anthems, putting folders away in the correct spot, managing the audio-visual booth, or placing a glass of water on the podium before a rehearsal or service for me, he was meticulous about performing each task so I could leave countless jobs in his hands and trust they would be done. I never had to think about them, until one Sunday he had to be away, and I was reminded just how much of a burden Rushel had been carrying without complaint, just for the joy of serving his Lord, me, the church musicians and congregation at large. I made a mental note to express my appreciation more often to this quiet, humble worker, without whom my job would have been harder and less satisfying."

Who are the people on your spiritual support team who serve without requiring public recognition? What are you doing to let them know how valuable they are to you and the ministry of the church?

3. [Hidden Figures](#) is a 2016 American biographical drama movie loosely based on the nonfiction book of the same name by Margot Lee Shetterly about three female African-American mathematicians who worked at NASA during the Space Race. If you are familiar with the film, talk about the meaning of the title.

4. Choose one or more of these quotations to discuss:

- I don't believe in the [auteur](#) thing. Nobody makes anything on their own. It takes hundreds of people to ... make a feature film and I'm appreciative of every one of them. -- Cord Jefferson in his acceptance speech last week when he won the 2024 Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar for *American Fiction*
- Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success. -- Automaker Henry Ford

- Individual commitment to a group effort -- that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work. -- Vince Lombardi, coach of the Green Bay Packers, who guided his team to become one of the most successful teams in NFL history
- Teamwork is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results. -- Andrew Carnegie, steel magnate
- None of us is as smart as all of us. -- Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager*
- The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. -- Baseball slugger, Babe Ruth
- Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. -- Helen Keller, activist for people with disabilities
- No matter how brilliant your mind or strategy, if you're playing a solo game, you'll always lose out to a team. -- Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn
- If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. -- African Proverb
- Teamwork at DF Dent and Company, as on the trail, is the blending of individual strengths to achieve a common goal. – Martin Buser, four-time Iditarod Champion.

5. Talk about this: Dallas Seavey has learned over the years how important it is to pay attention to what the dogs are telling him about what they need. He prioritizes their welfare over getting another trophy. Sometimes that means going against the urging of his own dog handlers who want him to "go for it," when he knows his dogs need more rest. In one interview, he told a journalist that sometimes coming in fourth place is success, because that placement is in the best interest of his team. He's said that coming in first might be good for human egos, but the cost of getting there might be

breaking the spirit of the dogs. And in his opinion, winning isn't worth paying that price.

### **Responding to the News**

1. You may wish to share this video, [Object Lesson - The Importance of Teamwork \(Video 8:16\)](#), with children in your family or church.
2. What might a team cheer for your church sound like? Ask different groups in your church to create one, share the cheers at a future activity, and choose a cheer you might want to use to build your sense of team identity.

### **Prayer**

O God, thank you that you did not call us to follow Jesus by ourselves, but invited us to join your family, whose members are designed to work together as a team. Knit our hearts and minds together in love, and teach us to value each member, whatever their abilities and roles may be. Remind us that we can accomplish much more together by the power of your Spirit than we could ever achieve alone. And may all we do be for your honor and glory. Amen.

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