



Iditarod Trail Committee

2100 South Knik Goose Bay Road, Wasilla, Alaska 99654

907.376.5155 (voice) 907.373.6998 (facsimile)

www.iditarod.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 23, 2017

Below is a statement from the Iditarod Trail Committee sent to the Iditarod Official Finishers Club on Sunday, Oct. 22, regarding the statement from Musher X:

Recently certain false assertions have been made to the effect that the drug testing regimen used by the Iditarod Trail Committee (ITC) relating to canine testing is deeply flawed. There have also been false allegations made relating to commitments purportedly made by the ITC to the musher whose dogs tested positive in Nome after finishing the 2017 Race. ITC responds to both topics in this statement.

First, the ITC's drug testing regimen is incredibly robust. Using certain aspects of the tests as applied to the dogs in Musher X's team, the following outlines the procedures of ITC's dog drug testing pursuant to Rule 39.

- Prior to the 2017 Race, Musher X requested a delay in the collection of the urine samples by the ITC drug testing team after the finish of the Race, explaining that there were other tests that were already ordered by Musher X and that Musher X wanted to make sure the dogs were sufficiently rested for both the urine draw and the additional tests. Dr. Morrie Craig, the veterinary professor from Oregon State University who coordinates the ITC drug testing program, approved that request. Dr. Stu Nelson, the long-time Chief Veterinarian of the Race, informed representatives of Musher X in December-January time that the request had been approved.
- According to Dr. Craig, on March 15, approximately six hours after finishing the Race, a drug testing team comprised of three trained individuals took urine samples in bags from four dogs in Musher X's team.
- A separate individual, the recorder, broke the tamper proof seals on three cups, transferred the samples from the bags into individual cups, and placed new tamper proof seals and identifying bar codes on those cups. One cup contained two samples from two dogs, a common practice known as batching.
- An observer from Musher X's kennel was present and observed the collection of the urine as well as the transfer, sealing and bar coding of each cup. A very important part of the chain of custody process is identifying the dogs by bib number and dog tag letter on each sample submission card. In this case, the batched sample submission card

contained Musher X's bib number and the dog tag letters from two dogs on one common bar code on the batched sample. At that point, the musher's representative confirmed that the urine was collected, the samples were sealed, and the musher's representative signed each sample submission card as a witness.

- The next step in the chain of custody involved placing the barcoded cups in a locked box and moving them to a secured freezer in Nome pending overnight air transportation to the lab. The lab which ITC utilizes is qualified and accredited by the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA) to the ISO 17025 quality standard. That lab must participate in a proficiency program for quality assurance by the Association of the Official Racing Chemists. Samples are first screened by a LC/MS/MS (Liquid Chromatography Mass Spectrometry) system which allows detection of 375 different drugs. Any positives are then reconfirmed by a second LC/MS/MS analysis specific to the detected drug to obtain more robust data. The sample submission cards with the identity of the dogs and their bar code numbers remain secure with the Dr. Craig, so the lab does not even know the identity of the musher associated with each barcoded sample.
- In this case, the samples were shipped the afternoon of March 16.
- On the morning of March 17, the sealed samples were confirmed as delivered to the laboratory, with seals still secured and identified only by barcode. The frozen samples typically range in volume 30 to 50 milliliters (ml). The first five ml portion of the samples was analyzed on the same day.
- On March 20, a second analysis was performed on another five ml portion of the sample to confirm the presence of tramadol and its two metabolites.
- The same day, Dr. Craig received the report from the drug testing lab verifying Tramadol and two metabolites of Tramadol that were found to be present in all the homogeneous tested sample portions.
- According to the lab report, the parent drug, Tramadol, the instrument was noted to be "Saturated/Overloaded". What this means is that testing devices are typically set with upper and lower limits of detection. In this case, the levels recorded were at 254 ng/ml (nanograms per milliliter). That value exceeds the normal detection limits range which is set to approximate levels of the parent substance three or more days after therapeutic administration.
- The lab result data was transmitted to Musher X shortly after April 10, 2017.
- At no time did Musher X ever request that sufficient portions of the remaining samples be sent to another accredited laboratory for a third test.

In regards to allegations relating to statements and/or commitments purportedly made by ITC representatives to Musher X after the positive tests became known, ITC will address them in order. First, Mark Nordman, the Race Marshal, never told Musher X that the fact that the test instrument “was noted to be saturated/overloaded” meant the levels of the drug present indicated it was likely administered after the Race finish. It is possible that interpretation is a conflation by the musher of separate communications.

Second, and more importantly, ITC is aware of a written statement, as follows, which is being circulated:

Musher X was determined unlikely to have administered a drug to their own dogs. Musher X was led to believe that the Head Veterinarian and Race Marshall suspected either an accident or possibly foul play in the Nome dog lot or food bags. They assured Musher X the issue was over, no further action was necessary, and that measures were being taken to increase security of the food drops, checkpoints, and the Nome dog yard.

Both Dr. Nelson and Mr. Nordman unequivocally confirm that there is absolutely no truth to any of the assertions of fact in that paragraph. ITC never made a determination that it was unlikely Musher X administered the drug in question. ITC decided, as it stated in its press release dated October 9, 2017, that Rule 39 as previously written could have been interpreted to require the ITC to have proof of intent. The ITC decided that it was not internally satisfied that it could prove intent in this case and modified Rule 39 instead to adopt a strict liability standard. Based upon ITC’s research, that is virtually the universal standard in other animal sporting events.

ITC, Dr. Nelson and Mr. Nordman also categorically deny that “Musher X was led to believe [that they] suspected either an accident or possibly foul play in the Nome dog lot or food bags.” In fact, that was a hypothesis put forward by Musher X, It was rejected by ITC because it was not supported by identifiable facts but only by supposition and speculation. As we are learning, that type of entertaining “what ifs” can be destructive to individual mushers and the sport we all hold so dear. It should be noted that as the revised Rule 39 states that ITC will take any **facts** of that type of behavior very seriously and mete out firm and prompt sanctions.

Finally, neither ITC, Dr. Nelson nor Mr. Nordman ever told Musher X that the issue was finally resolved and that no further action was necessary. It is correct that ITC evaluated taking measures to increase the security of musher’s bags at food drops and surveillance at checkpoints, but at this point in time its budget does not permit what could be substantial cost increases for that type of 24/7 security. ITC believes that the mushers themselves can adopt practices which minimize any risks of tampering.

###

Media contact:

Chas St. George, Iditarod Trail Committee

Email: chas.stgeorge@iditarod.com

Phone: 907.352.2215