

1976 winner barred from 1982 race for dog complaints

By Paul Jenkins
The Associated Press

Veteran musher Jerry Riley says he will fight the Iditarod Trail Committee's decision banning him from this year's running of the marathon sled dog race from Anchorage to Nome.

Marc Grober, Riley's attorney, said during a news conference last week that the action was "unprecedented. We are not going to accept the . . . decision as it stands. We are terribly dissatisfied."

Riley, who has a reputation as an outspoken, hard-driving race competitor, stood silently as Grober spoke.

The committee barred the 1976 Iditarod champion from this year's race and placed him on probation for the next two years.

It said that during Riley's probation the "death of any dogs in his team during the race will be cause for immediate disqualification."

While Grober stopped short of threatening court action to get Riley back in this year's race, he said he believed there were three options: address the committee; organize a mushers' strike; or a lawsuit.

He said he would hesitate to ask for strike, and probably would not seek an injunction delaying the race, but he did

not rule that out.

The committee met behind closed doors Jan. 18 to hear Riley's appeal of an earlier decision barring him from the race for three years.

Riley was told he was being barred from the race because of "continued complaints about your treatment of dogs and other actions not in keeping with the image or the rules of the Iditarod Trail Race."

Committee Executive Director Jack Frost said five dogs died as a result of last year's race from Anchorage to Nome, three of them Riley's.

Grober said Riley had asked the committee for specific complaints, but received only

minutes of committee meetings and two letters, one chiding Riley for pulling his dogs across the Nome finish line in the 1979 race.

The letter concerning the 1979 incident was the "only real allegation," Grober said. Witnesses said as Riley's dogs approached the finish line they "spooked" because of the size of the crowd, but they were in good physical condition, he said.

While three of Riley's dogs died during last year's race, Grober said necropsies on the two dogs which died on the trail between Nikolai and McGrath showed one died of parvovirus, the other of un-

known causes.

The dogs died shortly after 25 hours of rest and being checked by a veterinarian who gave them a clean bill of health, Grober said.

The third dog died near the beginning of the race of a ruptured liver, but Riley said he did not injure the dog. Grober said the dog could have been injured on a treacherous part of the trail near Susitna Station.

"We believe Jerry is being singled out," Grober said. "Jerry has been very outspoken about the drugging of dogs . . . and a leading proponent of dog care."