

Wait and watch. . .

One of Alaska's most popular spring sports begins at midnight Wednesday — waiting and watching for the ice to break up on the Tanana and other Alaska rivers.

Once that happens, hundreds of persons across Alaska can begin putting their boats in water and begin their enjoyment of the series of races that are the prime focus of summer sports activities.

In the meantime, thousands in Alaska and the Yukon, whether boatmen, sportsmen, or whatever, focus their attention on the small river town of Nenana, hoping against hope that this year will be the year they win the pot in the Nenana Ice Classic.

It's a leisure sport, requiring almost no physical activity at all. All one had to exert was enough energy to get down to the nearest tavern or store where the \$2 tickets were sold.

This is not to say the sport isn't exhausting. The mental effort that goes into picking the correct day, hour, and minute that the ice will go out can be as strenuous as any game's strategy, whether it be football or chess.

The earliest the ice has moved was April 20 at 3:27 p.m. in 1940. The latest was in 1964 when it didn't go out until 11:41 a.m. on May 20. Just using that time frame, there are 43,200 possible moments to choose.

Latest reports this year are



TRIPOD GOES UP — A wire attached to the tripod on the Tanana River ice near Nenana runs to a clock on shore. When the ice breaks and the tripod moves and the clock stops, signalling the official beginning of spring and the lucky winner of a pot worth thousands of dollars.

that the ice is much thicker than usual, some 54 inches. Average is 42 inches. Some say this means the ice will go out early; others say it means it will go out late.

Who knows? Lie back and watch and wait.