

The Blind Musher

Excerpts from Wikipedia, & 

Jeannette J. Lee, Associated Press, March 19, 2006, Anchorage Daily News



Rachael Scdoris, (born February 1, 1985 in Bend, Oregon) is an American dog musher who became the first legally blind person to compete in the 1,049 mile 'Iditarod Dog Sled Race' across Alaska.

"There are times when I'm out there and I think, 'Man I wish I could see what's going on around here,' "said Scdoris. "But, you know, I don't know anything different and this is what I have, so I'm going to use it."

Scdoris was born with congenital achromatopsia, an uncorrectable visual disorder. Her vision is 20/200, and she is color blind.

In 1997, Scdoris competed in her first dog sled race and placed 4th in the 'Frog Lake Race'. She later won several local short-distance races. In 2001, she competed in the 500 mile 'International Pedigree Stage Stop Sled Dog Race'. She became the first blind person and the youngest musher to complete an event of that distance. Rachael carried the Olympic Torch for the '2002 Winter Games'.

In 2003, the Iditarod Trail Committee approved her request under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 for special accommodations to compete in the much longer and more rigorous 'Iditarod'. Scdoris completed the qualifying races in 2004, placing 11th in the 350-mile 'Race to the Sky' in Montana and 6th in the 400-mile 'John Beargrease Mid-Distance Marathon' in Minnesota.

On March 5 she started the '2005 Iditarod' in Anchorage, Alaska with "visual interpreter" Paul Ellering, who warned her of trail conditions by radio, or shouting. The two-way radios broke several times during the race during crashes, which are relatively common especially among rookies. "I had a nice little encounter with a tree... the tree won". Rachael was not able to complete this race because of the condition of her dogs.

In the '2006 Iditarod', Rachael Scdoris fell asleep while mushing, as many mushers do, and became separated from Tim Osmar, her visual guide. She awoke in a place that had no tracks from other dog teams, which meant that her dogs had no scent to follow. As it turned out, Scdoris was close enough to Koyuk to make out the lights of the village. She guided her team over jumbled ice and open leads into the Koyuk checkpoint:

"It was so flat and so early in the morning, it was hard not to doze," Scdoris said. "I'm not really that brave. I'm actually kind of a chicken, but this is something that I've grown up doing."

Rachael finished the '2006 Iditarod'. She came in 57th out of 71 mushers. Rachael Scdoris is the first blind athlete to finish the 'Iditarod'.

Her determination to achieve her dream has created new hope and inspiration for all who hear her story. We look forward to following her future achievements.



Tim Osmar & Rachael Scdoris – Mar. 18, 2006

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