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Tue, July 24 / 07
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Cool runnings - with dogs

Jamaican team training to tackle Yukon race

By JAMIE NGO, SUN MEDIA

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Ya mon!

The Jamaica Dogsled Team is bringing the heat to northern Canada as they prepare to run in the 1,600-km Yukon Quest race for the first time in 2009.

But first they must compete in and complete two semis -- a 320-km race in January and a 480-km run in February -- before qualifying for the big tournament.

"If you don't do those, you cannot enter the Quest," said Danny Melville, owner and founder of the Jamaica Dogsled Team. "That is our goal."

The Yukon Quest race begins in Whitehorse, Yukon, and ends in Fairbanks, Alaska -- running on frozen rivers, climbing four mountain ranges, and passing through isolated, northern villages.

Temperatures can hit -40C with 160-km/h winds, a big worry for Jamaican-native Melville and his team.

WILDERNESS TRAINING

"There's an incredible amount of wilderness training also involved because you cannot take somebody from Jamaica and have them frostbitten," Melville said yesterday.

Lead musher Devon Anderson will be training in Whitehorse with three-time Quest champ Hans Gatt from British Columbia.

Anderson will be racing with Gatt's team of huskies instead of their homebred dogs from Jamaica.

"Our dogs, I don't think, can stand the cold," Melville said. "It's the same way why you wouldn't want to bring down a Siberian husky to Jamaica."

Melville said his team's goal is not to win, but to be properly prepared and to complete the race.

"The biggest obstacle is training the dogs for that distance, because we have only been in short races of four or five miles (6-8 km)," he said.

"It's also not about winning, it's about competing and completing the race."

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