

Incredible Mohawk Champs: Unbeaten By Man Or Machine

BY MATT VAN WAGNER
What weighs one ton, can drag a seven-ton firetruck with its emergency brake still on, and has never been beaten in a tug-of-war contest?

The answer, of course, is the Mohawk Champs, a hefty crew of Mohawk Indians who enjoy spending their weekends taking on all comers at tug-of-war. In the past, "all comers" has included a team of ponies and a seven-ton fire pumper, as well as teams from

towns all over the North Country and Canada. The challenges usually take place during winter festivals and firemen's festivals, where the biggest, bulkiest men in town are pitted against the Mohawks in an atmosphere of healthy competition and whole-hearted fun. The result, without exception, has always been the same. The Mohawk Champs treat all challengers to a free ride across the center line.

Tug-of-war contests have been a source of fun and friendship for the Mohawks for years. It has become such a popular form of recreation at Akwesasne, the St. Regis reservation, that the Champs have both first and second string teams participating in the weekend competitions. Although they remain undefeated, Champs do not spend any time training specifically for the event. According to Rudi Hart, one of the newer members

of the second team, "It's just a fun way to pass the long winters. We all work during the week and this gives us something to look forward to on the weekends. Sure there are prizes. They usually give out trophies or cases of beer, or sometimes even a little money, but that's not the important thing. We come because we enjoy meeting people, making new friends and having a good time."

As if to prove total invincibility, the Champs have not only accepted challenges from men, but from machines as well. At a firemen's festival last summer, the ten best Mohawks, with Tiny at the anchor, strained and struggled against a seven-ton fire engine, emergency brake still engaged, and dragged it through a distance of 30 inches. No other team even attempted that feat.



THE CHAMPS, RELAXING—Taking a break between pulls at the Tri-Town Winter Carnival tug-of-war are members of the unbeaten Mohawk Champs. From left are coach Tony David, Leslie Thompson, and Warren "Tiny" Curleyhead. (Matt Van Wagner photo)

There are seven regulars on the first team all standing well over six feet tall and weighing on the average 280 pounds. By far the largest man on the squad is Warren "Tiny" Curleyhead. Tiny estimates his weight conservatively at "around 340 pounds."

In spite of their awesome physical appearance the Champs are an easy-going and friendly bunch of guys.

Their latest title defense came against the patrons of Carvel's Bar in North Lawrence during the Tri-town Winter Carnival, a week ago. A section of Route 11 was closed off just for the occasion.

How It's Done
Prior to the start of the tug-of-war, Mohawk coach, Tony David, positioned his men, alternating them on either side of the rope for stability. Coach David's strategy is to place the tallest men in the front and the heaviest towards the rear. Tiny, the heaviest on the team, is always the anchorman, the man at the end of the rope.

The Carvel's bar team, not quite as organized, lined up at the other end of the rope. Compared to the Champs, they looked like a team of Laurels going against the team of Hardys.

Once both teams were ready, the judge gave the signal to start the tugging. Immediately, Tiny arched, throwing all of his weight backwards. At the same time, the entire Mohawk team pulled in unison and took one step back. Making sure of his footing, Tiny again arched, putting his 340 pounds into the effort. This time the team was able to take two steps.



AND AT WORK—Displaying championship form on the tail end of the rope are Leslie Thompson and Tiny Curleyhead. (Matt Van Wagner photo)

The Water Was Cold, But Norwood Divers' Enthusiasm Did Not Cool

BY DAWN VICK
NORWOOD—The tragic drowning death of a young canoeist in the Raquette River last spring triggered a renewed interest in diving and rescue operations in the Norwood Fire Department.

At the time of the drowning, the only available units were the Aquaneers Diving Club out of Massena and divers on the police force in Gouverneur. They were assisted by local divers as well. There had once been a team of divers in the area, but ill health of some members and a lack of interest had disbanded the group.

Men in the Norwood Fire Department decided to do something about it. A recent study by Michigan Sea Grant had found that people in a cold water drowning (under 70 degrees) had been revived without permanent brain

damage anywhere from four to 38 minutes after their immersion and apparent drowning. With a team in the local area, perhaps future tragedies could be averted, it was thought.

Tim Donahue investigated the possibilities for training and found that Dave Jackman, owner of the St. Lawrence Diving Shop in Massena, had been running scuba diving courses at SUNY Potsdam for several years. Jackman is also president of the Aquaneers, the St. Lawrence County Diving group, as well as president of the New York State Divers' Association. He has taught divers from the area including members of the Colton, Hannawa Falls, Hogansburg and Malone Fire Departments.



Four Norwood Firemen and two from Hannawa Falls, as well as six individuals, completed the accelerated summer diving course. They started out with snorkels and went on to scuba tanks and three open water dives after the instruction in the pool. Bob Harper, Tim Staie, Don Hoyt and Ron Clark of the Norwood Fire Department and the others spent six to eight hours in intensive sessions until the 40 hours of training and three dives had been completed. They also joined the Aquaneers to keep in practice.

About a week ago, the four made an ice dive of approximately 55 feet, lasting about one half hour in duration in Teycon's Quarry in Norfolk. The practice was designed to enhance their diving skills.

The ice was 18 inches thick, and the temperature was zero degrees when the dive was made. A hole three by four feet had been cut in the ice to allow them to dive.

The divers' initial reaction to the water, which had just been skimmed off ice, was "Wow! It's cold!" until their wet suits, which allow water to seep in, and warmed up to body temperature. That took about three to five minutes. They were also equipped with heavy gloves as well as the rest of the necessary equipment for a dive.

During the warm-up period, as they floated and bobbed around the hole in the ice, they checked out their gear and secured lines around their left wrists

and forearms to insure their ability to get back to the access hole. The divers dove in teams of two, buddy system, and each dive lasted about 25 to 30 minutes. Attendants on the ice held the lines and watched the time because air is used much faster in cold water dives.

Euphoria
All of the divers were almost euphoric upon surfacing. Comments flew back and forth. "Did you see the feet of the hibernating frog? I could see the feet of the people watching. I actually walked upside down on the ice. No, we didn't need the underwater lights until we hit the bottom and stirred up the silt. It was beautiful. No, we didn't spot the snowshovel you dropped down the hole, sorry. I'd like to go down again!"

Jackman, as leader of the dive had wisely determined that one dive was

enough, and they could do more dives at another time.

Local Involvement
The ability to make winter dives would not have been possible without the help of local merchants, the North Country CB Clubs Association, four bands who donated their services, and Dave Moore of WYBC who played disco music between bands at a recent dinner-dance held to raise funds for the wet suits and underwater lights which will enable the Norwood Divers to make winter as well as summer rescue dives. The initial grant came from the Norwood Fire Department, and enabled the men to qualify for summer or arm water dives. A 14 foot rowboat, motor and oars, have also been activated again.

Two more Norwood Firemen are now taking the diving course, and with Bill

Grady and Tim Clark on the team, Norwood will have six divers that are certified and will be on call virtually 24 hours a day. All of them are now talking about taking the advanced diving course. This covers underwater compass reading, refined search patterns, dives of over 100 feet in depth, improved techniques in fast current search, night dives, and a blind dive with a tank. This course will also be taught by Jackman if there is enough interest.

The team expects to routinely cover the Potsdam to Raymondville area, but are also available throughout all of St. Lawrence County if the need arises for certified divers. They practice a lot, but hope that we all will use the precautions necessary to make sure that their services are not required.



IN THE QUARRY—An underwater picture, taken by Jackman's crew last summer on a dive in the quarry, shows a diver on the bottom.

Town Board Ponders Relief Route Questions

Should the Town of Potsdam pay for nine street lights that would illuminate the approach to the village from Canton?

How about paying for maintaining a section of sidewalk along that road? Those are two questions that the Potsdam Town Board is thinking over in the wake of their discussion with Department of Transportation (DOT) officials at the February town board meeting.

The two questions are related to road improvements that DOT will make to Route 11 when it constructs Phase II of the Potsdam Relief Route.

Phase II of the Relief Route will involve reconstruction of the highway from a point west of the railroad bridge to the present intersection of Pine and Maple Streets. The roadwork will tie in with Phase I of the Relief Route to the east and planned improvements for Route 11, the Canton Road, to the west.

Some 1,900 feet of the work on Phase II will be located in the Town of Potsdam, according to DOT Regional Director Charles Lyman, who explained the details to the town board. Also present was Ed Cornish, the DOT design supervisor for that section of road. Another 1,600 feet of Phase II is located in the village limits, it was ex-

plained. There will be lighting inside the village limits and there will also be a sidewalk, the two explained.

What they wanted to know was whether or not the town board wanted to continue the lighting and sidewalk out to the railroad bridge. Installation of both the lights and the sidewalk would be paid out of the project cost and would not be billed to the town, it was noted.

However, the town would thereafter have to pay the electricity bills for the lights and also pay maintenance for the lights and sidewalk. In view of that, the town board did not appear interested in undertaking the responsibility, although no formal decision was made.

Lyman did point out that, for safety's sake, there should be some transition from the fully-lighted section of the road to the dark section.

Detour For Bridge
One thing that was revealed was that there will be a detour around the railroad bridge during the time that the project is under construction.

While the bridge is being rebuilt, traffic will detour off the road near the John Murray property and will cross the railroad tracks at a grade crossing, then return to the highway near the Richard Sherman property. While the highway overpass, is being

rebuilt, engineers have also planned to change the approach slope to the bridge. That will require demolition of one house, a dwelling now occupied by Ralph Norman.

It could take more than one construction season to complete Phase II, Lyman said. Bids for the construction are expected to be sought by May of 1980.

In a related matter, Lyman told the board that the DOT is hoping to let bids for Phase I of the Relief Route, the section that will cross the Raquette River and require destruction of the Potsdam Depot, sometime this fall.

In other action, the town board approved Lance LaFontaine to supply cover material for the landfill site.

It learned that nearly all the fire departments that contract with the town have increased their insurance coverages in accordance with an agreement reached last month.

It decided to keep the present telephone system in the town office and not to purchase a new one.

It appointed Francis Cappello as town attorney.



JAMIE NEWELL RON LAPOINTE STEVE FALLON

Student Leaders Attend Confab

COLTON—Three students from Colton-Pierrepont Central School and their advisor recently attended the annual conference of the New York State Secondary School Student Organization held at SUNY Albany.

C-P student council president Jamie Newell, vice-president Ron LaPointe, treasurer Steve Fallon and advisor

Frank Sprow participated in workshops designed to improve the effectiveness of student government.

N.Y.S.S.S.O. is recognized by the State Education Department and seeks to inform and influence the Commissioner of Education and the Board of Regents on matters of interest to students.

Postal Authorities Notified Of Mail Box Fire

Federal postal authorities have been notified of the fire that occurred in the out-of-town mailbox in front of the Potsdam Post Office during the wee hours of Friday morning.

Postmaster David Lipka estimated that some 25 pieces of mail were totally destroyed in the fire and perhaps 125 pieces of mail were damaged.

The fire, which was reported to village police at about 12:30 a.m. Friday, is believed to have been deliberately set, according to Lipka. It is a federal offense, he added.

The fire would have affected anyone who put mail in the out-of-town box, located in front of the Post Office on Elm Street, after 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 22. That was the last time that the blue box was emptied, Lipka noted.

Any persons who may have had mail in the box are asked to contact the Potsdam Post Office for information, Lipka said.

He said that some mail that could still be mailed would be sent with an explanatory letter.