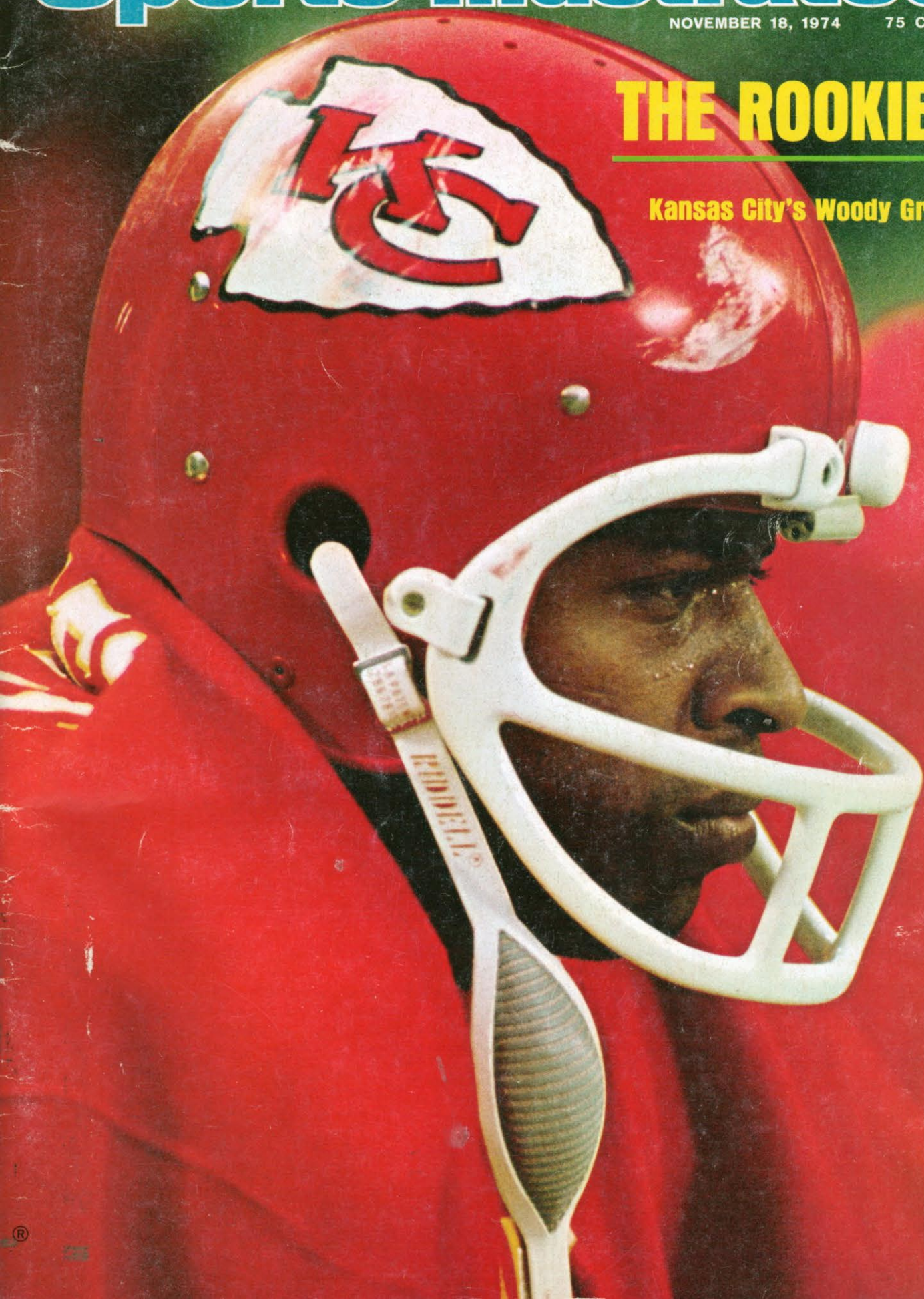


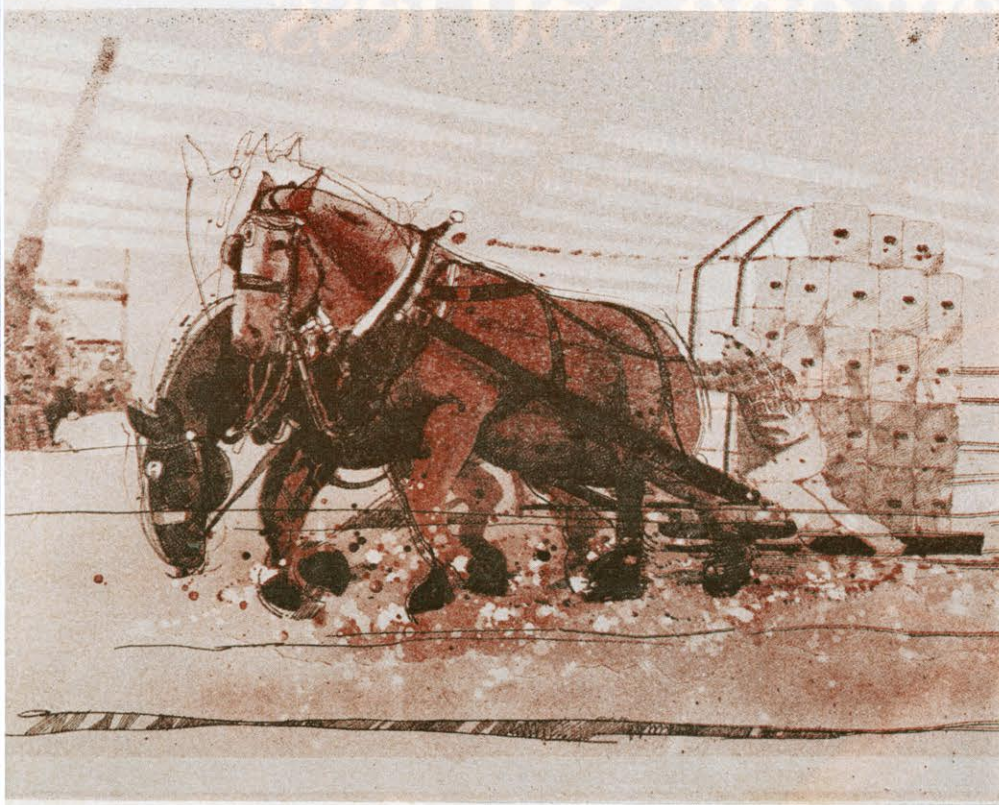
Sports Illustrated

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THE ROOKIES

Kansas City's Woody Green





The h in hp stands for horse. And this contest reveals the power

Ten tons and then some

It was the coldest October roundup anyone could remember. The temperature hovered between zero and 10 above on Friday and Saturday nights at the 16th annual Eastern Draft Horse-pulling showdown, and by Sunday afternoon even the hardest teamsters were frozen. They had traveled to North Swanzey, N.H. from as far away as Michigan and Kentucky, and now between events they huddled over coffee-pots in their campers or around the heated pails of water used to prevent the horses from being chilled. But neither Danny Reed, a blond, 34-year-old black-

smith from Raynham, Mass., nor Dick Wallingford, who runs a logging business in West Forks, Maine, paid the weather any mind. Sunday night their teams of draft horses would be pulling in the heavyweight, free-for-all division to settle a rivalry that had simmered through a season of county fairs and 4-H exhibitions from Maine to Ohio.

"All last year Dick beat me and I had to be content with second," said Reed, thumbs hooked under the straps of his Big Smith overalls. "Then he went out West and bought a new horse that didn't pull as well with his Rock, and I started beating him. We've both been waiting for the roundup for quite a while."

Wallingford, limping noticeably from a snowmobile accident last winter and showing the strain of having hauled his team of horses 25,000 miles since May, agreed, with traditional New England understatement. "It'd be very nice to win," he said. Sunday was his 30th wedding anniversary.

Like the people who perpetuate it, the sport of horse pulling, or horse drawing, in New England is uncluttered, stylized

and immutable, an agrarian drama conferring ritualistic status upon the beast that once provided men and women with their livelihood. Even the wealthier owners who hire teamsters to drive for them spring from the same roots as men like Danny Reed, and in the arena it is impossible to distinguish the rich from the poor. The rules of the sport are simple enough: a team of two powerful draft horses, either Belgians or Percherons, hitched side by side, pulls a wooden sled (also called a boat) piled high with oblong concrete blocks a distance of six feet. Each team has five minutes to make three attempts at a given weight. When all teams competing finish a round, more weight is added to the sled. The pair of horses pulling the greatest weight wins, but a teamster's style, or the desire of the team, is as important to devotees as a victory.

The crowds, overflowing the bleachers on both sides of the dirt pit, share a lifestyle with the teamsters and handlers who compete. They are weather-beaten men in overalls and heavy boots with hands the color and texture of coarse-grade sandpaper, accompanied by sons who at nine and 10 already punctuate sentences with machine-gun bursts of saliva, dead-ly accurate to 15 feet, and wives who still cook heaping pots of beef stew for noon-time meals, far from the world of peach halves and cottage cheese. In hushed tones they talk knowledgeably of the massive horses who stand quietly in pairs at one end of the arena, decked out in ornamented harnesses and ponderous collars that distribute the impact of the weight. Grouped around the horses, the teamsters, helpers and assorted hangers-on eye each other's teams, spit tobacco juice in the dirt and wait for the competition to begin. Horse pulling is in their blood, as stock-car racing is in the blood of the rural South, and men like Danny Reed and Dick Wallingford are their Donnie Allisons and Richard Pettys.

In the old days they came out of the forests of northern Maine with their teams of horses, out of the heavily wooded mountains in Vermont and New Hampshire where, in the days before Ski-Doos and ski lodges, only the loggers went. They were frost-bitten, powerful men in heavy woolen Malone pants, plaid shirts and suspenders, with wads of chewing tobacco in their cheeks and limbs twisted from old logging accidents;

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hard-drinking gypsy loggers, French Canadian and Yankee farmers, brutal backwoods laborers and road builders, all of them horsemen in their own way. Not racehorse men or ropers or bareback men, but men who worked teams of 2,400-pound draft horses up and down the logging trails in 20°-below snow and knee-deep springtime mud, or back and forth across rock-infested fields, or through the stands of sugar maples, the horses pulling sleds loaded down with sap buckets. Several times a year they came to drink and fight and talk horses and trade horses and compete in the horse-drawing contests, their teams pulling extraordinary weights across dirt arenas at local fairs throughout New England. And then, as now, they loved those giant beasts who would pull their hearts out for men who knew how to handle them.

Frank Lambert, from Bethel, Vt., at 73 the oldest teamster at this roundup, remembers the way it used to be. "I been drawin' hosses for 53 years," he said, turning up the collar of his lumber jacket against the wind, "and of course it's changed some. There's more money boys in it now. Used to be we'd all get together with the hosses we used for loggin' 'n have us a hoss draw. The women'd make the ribbons 'n we'd bring along two, three gallons o' mountain dew. Had us a hell of a good time. So many folks started showin' up we began to charge admission and use the money for prizes. It was all a game, but now some of these fellas pay over \$10,000 for a hoss. They're out for blood. Over in New York State they threw two guys out of the association for druggin' their hosses." A few years back Lambert, on his death bed, asked his wife to buy a pair of draft horses so he could look out his bedroom window and see them standing in the pasture. He was so sick she bought them with the understanding that the seller would buy them back when Lambert died, but the sight of those horses inspired Lambert to recover and the following season he was back driving his team.

Other things have changed besides the cost of horses since the days when Frank Lambert started pulling. Friday night, for example, under a crescent moon on the dirt track outside the arena, the horses pulled in a dynamometer free-for-all event. The dynamometer, favored in Midwest horse pulling and called "the

machine," is a Rube Goldberg contraption of chains, hooks, weights and pulleys mounted on the back of a flatbed truck. When the horses pull on a hook below the rear bumper the weights in the truck bed rise on a steel shaft, allowing a hydraulic valve to open in the transfer case, in turn allowing the vehicle to roll. The horses have to pull the truck 27½ feet. In New England, horse pullers greet this pandering to the industrial revolution with about as much enthusiasm as they first showed toward the oil refinery Aristotle Onassis proposed for their coastline. But, as Percy Culver, president of the Eastern Draft Horse Association and organizer of this year's roundup, said, "We wanted the boys from out West to be happy, so we brought in the machine." Twenty teams pulled, with Danny Reed grabbing first place from the highly considered Stimer brothers of Jackson, Mich. Dick Wallingford, saving his team for Sunday's showdown, did not enter.

After his victory in the machine pull, Danny Reed and his wife Vicki partied with some other horse pullers and then, despite the near-zero temperature, slept in the hay in the rear of Reed's wooden-sided horse trailer. In the morning neither Reed nor Colonel, his dark gray Belgian lead horse, was moving too well. Colonel, in fact, lay stretched out in his stall like a beached whale, now and then lifting his head to see who was around. "Colonel was crazy when I first got him," said Reed. "It took me two years to train him so he'd have confidence in me and want to pull. I worked him real slow, tell-



GAME LOSERS RICHARD AND HIS ROCK

ing him he was doing right even when he wasn't. Then one day he got me so mad I had to whip him with the reins. He's been fine ever since." Reed's other horse, Diamond, a 17-year-old Percheron, was considered over the hill, since prime pulling age for draft horses is between eight and 12, but Diamond has turned out to be the George Blanda of horse pulling, teaming up with Colonel for many clutch victories.

"A good team is 90% desire," said Reed, "and I worked both of mine real easy at home so they'd keep their heart. Colonel always wants to lead, and I had to be careful not to let Diamond lose his confidence. I'd shorten up on Colonel's bit and let Diamond get out in front just a hair. I've been resting them for three weeks before the roundup. They were gettin' tired from so much pullin'."

In a nearby barn Dick Wallingford was feeding Rock, his 12-year-old Belgian gelding that weighs 2,200 pounds and stands 19 hands high at the withers. Wallingford, 49, who has been drawing horses since 1942, considers Rock to be the strongest horse he has ever seen. During the roundup another horse puller offered \$15,000 for him, but Wallingford was not selling the prize horse he purchased from an Amish farmer in Illinois. Plenty of trading does go on at every horse pull, though, because one teamster is always convinced he can do better than another with the same horse. In a sense horse pulling shares certain characteristics of contemporary marital customs.

Neither Danny Reed nor Dick Wallingford entered Saturday's event, an arcane pull native to parts of Maine called "two pound of rock," in which horses pull double their own weight as far as they can in five minutes. "I hate distance pulling," said Danny Reed. "It wears a horse's heart out, and I don't care for that machine, either. Six foot on a sled's real horse pulling."

So all day Saturday and far into the night groups of men and women gathered to pass the bottle, families ate steaming chicken in the 4-H food barn and teen-agers necked wherever they could. Through all the cold and wind and mud of the Cheshire Fairgrounds people talked, lived and breathed horse pulling, speculating on the outcome of Sunday's pull.

First there would be the lightweight 3,000-pound class—total weight of a team not exceeding 3,000 pounds—with

continued

Nate Black, Arthur Durgin and his brother Ronnie, the Trundy Brothers and Novac Bergeron among those entered. And then the heavyweights, with Reed, Wallingford, Harold Brigham, Charlie Wimler and old Frank Lambert, all names that sparked the kind of controversy that John Newcombe vs. Jimmy Connors does among tennis fans.

Saturday night Danny Reed's luck suddenly turned sour. Colonel, after acting funny all day, developed large boils on his legs and neck, a reaction to paint from the walls of his stall at the fairgrounds. Heartbroken, the little blacksmith packed up and left the roundup, arriving home at 3 a.m. He treated Colonel himself until six and then took the horse to the vet, who told Danny he could pull with him. "At first I thought the hell with it," Reed said, "but the vet assured me Colonel would be O.K." Back into the horse truck went Danny and his wife, and at 2 p.m. Sunday they were again in North Swanzy.

In an age that equates excellence in

sports with six-figure incomes, private planes and fat endorsement checks, such dedication may seem anachronistic, if not downright ridiculous. Top money at the roundup, heavyweight division, was \$115, plus a trophy and two pounds of naturally aged Vermont cheddar cheese. On the other hand, Shorty Dyke will never have to sell his house in Anson, Maine and uproot his wife and kids after being traded to San Diego, and as yet no teamster has had to resort to transcendental meditation for inner peace. Give him a chaw of Beechnut, a nip of home brew and the company of his friends at a good horse draw and things will work out fine. Never mind if the cost of feeding two horses and driving 25,000 miles a season far outstrips anything he could earn, even with a first place team. Horse pullers, after all, do more than promote and cherish a sport. They fiercely protect and defend a way of life.

Late Sunday morning the bitter north wind picked up, the sky turned heavily overcast and occasional flurries of snow

whistled across the fairgrounds. Percy Culver convened a meeting of the teamsters to decide whether to pull inside the arena or out. "Cold enough for ya, Percy?" one driver yelled. "Why, hell," Percy said, "ain't no colder'n it was wet last week." Nonetheless, inside won hands down.

At 8 p.m. Sunday 18 heavyweight teams and their handlers gathered at one end of the unheated arena, the crowd of about 2,000 blanketed and long-johned fans made final bets among themselves and the long-awaited free-for-all horse draw began. "O.K., boys," said Junior Edwards, the announcer, in a voice that could peel the bark off a tree, "the starting weight is 5,000 pounds. Team No. 1 is J. D. Durgin and sons from Antrim, N. H., Ronnie Durgin doin' the drivin'."

The teamster, reins in hand, a dead cigar in the corner of his mouth and a hunting hat on his head, flanked by two tobacco-chewing attendants called evenersmen, marched the length of the arena behind the great horses prancing with

high-held tossing heads. As they approached the weight-laden sled the men circled ceremoniously and slowly backed the wild-eyed beasts up to the hitch. An iron bar with an eye in it, called a whiffle tree, secured to the horses' traces by an eveners-bar, was placed over the hook of the sled by one of the evenersmen while the teamster cajoled, commanded and muscled the horses back and forth. This is a task on the order of threading a needle and stopping a runaway freight train at the same time and, with more than two tons of psyched-up horseflesh rearing and pawing the ground, disaster is always imminent. Later in the evening Ronnie Durgin's brother, who won the afternoon 3,000-pound pull, was flipped 30 feet across the dirt when an eveners-bar broke. Durgin flew one way, his plug of Redman flew another and his horse went right over him. Durgin was lucky to escape with only a shoulder separation.

They pulled for more than four hours, slowly eliminating one team and then another until, at 12:45 a.m. Monday, the

John Deere payloader placed two 750-pound blocks atop the stack already on the sled to bring the weight to 20,250 pounds. Four teams remained: Wallingford, Reed, Charlie Wimler from Durham, Conn. and Magill & Kimball from West Burke, Vt. The crowd, numbed by the cold, was silent and tense. Now the teamster's coordination and the horses' ability to pull simultaneously were crucial. At the instant of each hitch the teamster's command sent the horses surging forward against the weight with a noise like eight interior linemen butting heads. For four or five seconds they pulled, necks stretched parallel to the dirt, chests and shoulder muscles bulging, mouths agape, legs digging for a hold in the loosely packed earth, the teamster, down low between their hindquarters, calling to them, "Now, Rock, yeah, Rock. Pull Rock, Rock, Rock," then unhitching while another team approached. Both Wimler and Magill & Kimball failed in three tries to move the weight six feet.

On Magill & Kimball's best effort—

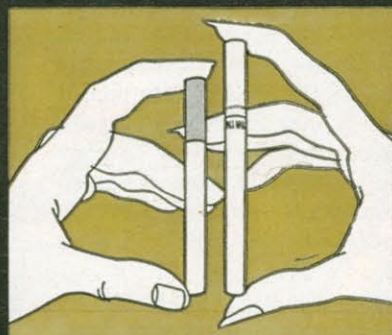
68 inches—the only noise in the arena was the groan of the horses. The weight was raised to 21,250 pounds for Reed and Wallingford. The payloader and six or seven hearty men adjusted the weight on the sled as the two teamsters circled each other in the arena, keeping their teams moving to avoid a chill. Then Danny Reed hitched Colonel and Diamond to the sled and pulled the distance on his first try. Dick Wallingford's team missed three times and the roundup was over.

"Ya did good, Danny," Dick Wallingford said, as Reed passed him en route to the trophy ceremony. Wallingford was disappointed but not disheartened. "I'll have to get a better horse this winter to pull with Rock," he reflected. Just then a wily old logger with no teeth and tobacco juice on his chin approached. "Wanna buy my horse, Richard?" he said. "Watcha take for him?" asked Wallingford. "Watcha gimme?" "I dunno," said Wallingford. "I ain't seen him yet." Preparations for next year's showdown were under way.

END

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