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# Football's Newest, Northern Fans

## An Alaskan High School Embraces Football After Fundraiser Brings Field to Frozen Town

Nov. 21, 2007



34 comments

Life is hard in Barrow, Alaska, deep inside the Arctic Circle where the permanently frozen ground means no trees or plants can grow and roads can't be paved.

It's one of the northernmost communities on the planet, and in this small town you're more likely to see a whale scratching its back along the shoreline than something as ordinary as a house fly. This time of year the sun never sets, and during winter there is no sunlight.

**Watch an updated report from Neal Karlinsky tonight on "World News with Charles Gibson" at 6:30 p.m. EDT.**

"The wind chill gets to 110 below zero. The buses get so cold the tires get square and we can't turn them," Barrow school superintendent Trent Blankenship told ABC's Neal Karlinsky. "We have an aide who stands at the door and makes sure the kids gets on and don't get blown away."

Football reaches the Arctic Circle as a philanthropist helps an underdog team.

Drug and alcohol abuse rates are off the charts. Most kids have only one parent and the high school dropout rate was a staggering 50 percent until the school began a strange new program last year -- football.

They have never had a football team in Barrow, and the population of mostly Eskimo kids was more familiar with how to spear a whale than how to catch a pigskin.

The Barrow Whalers learned to play with the help of their computer science teacher Mark Voss, who last coached a team 23 years ago in Arkansas.

He wasn't prepared for one of the challenges they would face.

"I was going out to our playing field last year," Voss said.

"Someone called just before we got on the bus and said, 'Hey there's a polar bear sighted out there.' We had to be a little more aware and have a plan if we had to evacuate and hop back on the bus."

### Finding a Field From a Warmer, Southern State

For their first season they played on gravel and used flour for the yard lines that birds would promptly eat.

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But the field wasn't their only problem. The nearest opponent was located at least 500 miles away and there are no roads in and out of town, so every game either home or away involved putting an entire team on an airplane.

Still, the new sport engaged the kids like never before, and attendance and grades shot up.

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