

# On your bark, get set, go

## Peoria pooch competes in national race

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At first glance, Kahlua doesn't look like an elite racing dog. She is only a 9 pound Chihuahua after all.

But she can run like the wind. So fast, in fact, that the Peoria pooch will have the opportunity this weekend to win the title of nation's fastest Chihuahua.

Kahlua and her owners, Tiffany Di Giacinto and Scott Harris, have earned a trip to San Diego to compete in the fourth annual PetCo Unleashed National Chihuahua Races. The race will be Sunday at the San Diego Padres' PetCo Park after the first inning of a game between the Padres and the Colorado Rockies.

Kahlua's 14 challengers, including Maddy, the reigning titleholder from New York, have traveled from all across the country after winning regional races of their own.

The 3½-year-old Kahlua won her regional event at a PetCo in Phoenix April 19. She smoked 132 other Chihuahuas in three heats to earn a spot in the national competition, Di Giacinto said.

Not bad, considering Kahlua and Di Giacinto only had three weeks to train prior to the regional race after learning about it on a Web site for Chihuahua owners.

"I didn't have a lot of time. I got together with my mom and we went to the dog park and fastened a starting block with a cardboard box. We'd lift the flap and had her running to me," Di Giacinto said. "We didn't want her to be scared. We wanted her to have a feel for what she had to do."

Turns out Kahlua is a natural.

"It was really neat. It was the first time (we raced and) she did so well," Di Giacinto said.

A busy schedule and lack of training time in prep- ping for the national race isn't something Di Giacinto is worried about.

"(Kahlua's) a pleaser," Di Giacinto said. "She knows a variety of commands. A real quick learner."

As for strategy in the national race, Di Giacinto said she has a secret weapon.

"She loves food," she said. "I yelled 'are you hungry?' to get her across. And she's very attached to me. She always has to know where I am. She's my shadow. So we were kind of capitalizing on that attachment."

Di Giacinto said racing has opened up a new perspective on the world of Chihuahua ownership.

"It's just a lot of fun. You get to see a lot of people



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tiffany Di Giacinto of Peoria holds Kahlua, her 3½-year-old Chihuahua, which is competing in a national race Sunday in San Diego.

and their dogs and how they interact with them," she said. "It's a great bonding experience with your dog — an all-around fun experience. It's really cute."

And no matter how Kahlua fares next weekend in front of thousands of fans, Di Giacinto said she will be proud of her tiny dog.

"It's all going to come down to the excitement of race day and seeing how nervous she is about being in a new place," she said.

"We already call her our little champion. She's already a winner.

It's fabulous for us."

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