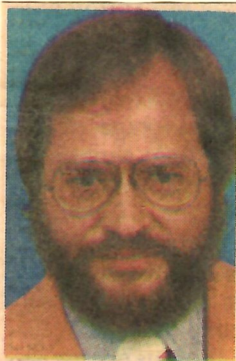




During the Fultonvale Fastball Club's Celebrity Dinner Saturday night, Emcee Don Percy of CFRN radio revealed Edmonton Oiler Kevin Lowe's ability to throw his voice. According to Percy, when the Oilers visited Muhammed Ali a while ago, it was Lowe, not Dave Semenko, who called Ali a nasty name — only the insult came out of Semenko's mouth. The audience got a good chuckle out of the joke and thoroughly enjoyed the rest the speakers, which included Everest climber Pat Morrow, curler Ray Kingsmith, boxer Willie Dewit, Eskimo receiver Waddell Smith and headliner Al Oliver of Montreal Expos.



National League batting champ Al Oliver said if there's ever a banquet that promises to be better than the one put on by the Fultonvale Fastball Club Saturday night, he wants to be there.



Ray Turchansky

No need for an encore after surviving Everest

For months now, he's talked about the deaths, desertions and depression, over and over.

But one question seemed to irritate Pat Morrow — the second Canadian to reach the summit of Mount Everest last fall — more than the rest.

He was asked if he had any desire to go back.

"Maybe not to the same mountain, but certainly the same range," he said, while in town to speak at the Fultonvale sports celebrity dinner last night.

"I don't know why people ask if you'd want to go back to a place where you came close to being squashed. That's like asking a guy who goes over Niagara Falls in a barrel if he'd like to do it again. It's a survival test; that's all it was, a survival test."

And, for the record, his biggest joy did not come in standing atop the world's highest mountain.

"There wasn't much difference from the other climbing I've done," said Morrow, who scaled four peaks of more than 20,000 feet in preparation for Everest. "There was the usual kind of subdued exultation."

"The neatest thing was getting down to Base Camp safely. And getting to Kathmandu safely — that's an intergalactic city if ever there is one; it was far more meaningful to me."

Morrow is a 30-year-old adventure photographer from Kimberley, B.C., who reached the summit two days after Laurie Skreslet did.

Thus, Morrow seems destined to the anonymity like that of Tenzing Norgay.

Norgay was never knighted and has never made credit card commercials. Because when he stood on Everest on May 29, 1953, he did so alongside Edmund Hillary, who had become the first conqueror of the 29,028-foot challenge.

"I really didn't mind that at all," said Morrow. "I just followed in his footsteps. He made the footsteps, and I was glad he had."

Morrow said that who would reach the top first hadn't been pre-planned.

"The mountain more or less dictated. Attrition was the factor. We knew the strongest climbers would have the first crack."

Morrow was one of the original members of the team when the idea was conceived in 1977. And yet, despite the eventual success, the achievement has received as much criticism as praise.

First came the deaths of three Sherpa guides and then TV cameraman Blair Griffiths — a man whom I spent an afternoon with in 1979, while driving to Victoria from B.C. Lions training camp in Courtenay.

"An ice flow gave way. There were people five feet away, who could have gone, too."

Then eight expedition members quit.

"We were not able to explain our side of the story," said Morrow. "After the disaster, two Sherpas left, and it was reported 20 Sherpas left."

And more criticism came when Skreslet planted not a Canadian flag at the top — claiming to have forgotten it — but rather an Air Canada symbol.

Indeed, to this day, the expedition looks sadly like an advertising gimmick for the major sponsor.

"It was the only way we could get there," he said of the sponsorship. "It's like a sugar daddy. When anyone gives you money, you feel obligated to them."

Regardless, as a result, some team members feel the achievement has been ignored.

"Climbing is a personal sport," differed Morrow. "We fulfilled our spiritual needs."

Yet, he said he's not a religious man "by Western standards."

"I went into the climb hoping that I would be a survivor, and came out if it with kind of an inflated feeling of confidence. But the mountain did strip me down."

Therein lies a common occurrence among climbers, namely, giving a mountain a personality.

"It's a living thing. You really did tap into its aura. But that's all part of the game. You're not just there flexing muscles. It's a real head trip."

And it can be lonely.

"Something of that magnitude lasts so long. You've got nothing but time. And you can develop a loathing for the mountain, and a loathing for yourself."

He's right. Who would want to go back to that?