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Watching weiner dogs race is big in the United States. (Submitted photo)

It's the biggest sport you never heard of: dogumentary filmmaker

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The Daily News

It's called launching the dog; throwing your wiener dog out of the starting gate at the beginning of a race to improve the animal's chance of winning.

"It can work and it can also go against you" said filmmaker Shane MacDougall. "You will see some times where they throw the dog and it lands face first in the dirt."

It's just one of the interesting facts the Prince Edward Island native - and former Haligonian - includes in his dachshund-racing documentary, *Wiener Takes All: A Dogumentary*. It screens today at the Atlantic Film Festival.

"They are hysterical. It is so cute, you can't get a more TV friendly event than this," he said. "It is the biggest sport you never heard of."

MacDougall first found out about the races while he was watching TV and a news report about the Wiener Nationals was playing. Racing these small animals is big in the United States, with race tracks packed with people - as many as 13,000 in some places.

"It was like, 'No way. There is no way this is a real thing.' But I started digging and sure enough there was this quasi-national championship and people from across the country would race their wiener dogs."

He sat on the idea for two years, even though his wife kept hounding him to start working on the project. It was only after his was turned down for a job on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno that he decided to work on the documentary.

MacDougall started digging into the story and found out there was more to the story than racing. He thought there would be enough material for a short film, but it turned out there was enough for a feature length.

The documentary follows a handful of owners through a dog racing season, looks at the Shaq-Kobe rivalry between two high-spirited dogs, examines controversies about dog doping, and researches the history of the breed.

During the First World War, these German dachshunds were even renamed Liberty Dogs.

He also looks at the owners, some of whom are quite eccentric and passionate. The owners of the dog Baby Luv live for their pup.

"They have been hounding me the last couple of days, they are really excited for the American premiere of the film," MacDougall said. "They are hyper, hyper excited, which means five calls a day."