

Obedience

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My dogs have been retired from obedience competition for several years now for a variety of reasons. Nikki was retired due to age and health and Tucker secondary to a concern over jumping him in the more advanced classes as he has occasionally come up with minor back problems over the years. I just did not want to take a chance with him and his health, so the decision was made to retire him from everything but an occasional Veterans Class or Team Competition. Although my dogs don't seem to mind the forced retirement, I am finding that I miss the weekly training classes, my obedience friends, and generally being able to keep up with the latest obedience happenings.

I spent some time checking out the AKC web page recently just to see what was new in the world of Obedience, and found a wealth of information to share with everyone.

In April of this year the AKC Board of Directors met and approved a number of proposed amendments to the Obedience Regulations and the Guidelines for Judges. These amendments were submitted by a special Obedience Advisory Committee. Some of the amendments are:

AKC is now permitting dogs with long ear feathering or beards to have the hair controlled by the use of rubber bands while performing specific exercises. (I remember seeing how difficult it was for an Afghan Hound to pick up a dumbbell on the retrieving exercises without also getting his ear in his mouth, so this rule change will make a lot of those folks very happy.)

- Lets afternoon class judging immediately follow one another with just the afternoon start time being listed in the judges program.
- Establishes a UDX Class when entries are limited in the Open B and/or Utility B Classes.
- Allows for non-regular classes to be included even if entries are limited in regular classes.
- Allows for each section of a split class to be considered a separate class for award purposes with no run-offs being necessary between split classes to determine awards.
- Provides for continuing education for judges and more ring experience for judging applicants.
- Assures the same opportunity for all exhibitors to know the heeling pattern before entering the ring.

- Permits judges, at their discretion, to show and discuss individual score sheets with an exhibitor after prizes have been awarded in each class.
- Lets Novice B dogs continue to compete in this class after they have won the title CD until qualifying in an Open Class or receiving one High in Trial Award, which is in addition to any obtained before or during the 60 day period after receiving the CD title.
- Limits the number of dogs judged at one time in the group exercises based on the size of the ring and allowing approximately 4 feet per dog; where there are more dogs than proper room, calls for the dogs to be judged in groups.
- Permits judges to show in the Open A Class and Utility A Class. Up until this change, all AKC Obedience Judges had to compete in Open B and Utility B with their young inexperienced dogs when they wanted to put a title on their dogs. This is an excellent change that will benefit both the dogs and handlers.
- Establishes a procedure whereby a judge makes a decision on what order of exercises shall be performed for a class with the order not to be disclosed to exhibitors prior to posting (approximately 45 minutes before the start of the class). In future assignments, judges will be required to alternate the six orders of exercises so that the orders will be used approximately the same number of times.
- Allows for a variety of order for Open B exercises, but keeps Open A the same; allows for variety of order for Utility B, but keeps Utility A the same.
- Any color dumbbell will be allowed.
- Lets a judge determine minor to substantial point deduction for dropping the dumbbell; also for picking up the wrong article.
- Enables a handler to use a different method when sending his/her dog to retrieve an article.
- Permits one first place win at a Specialty Show to be counted towards the requirements for an OTCH.
- Allows for obedience championship points to be awarded for 1st through 4th place dogs in Open B and Utility B classes. Prior to this change, only the 1st and 2nd place dogs in those classes were able to earn points toward the OTCH.
- Allows dogs to enter Veterans class as an additional class.
- Redesigns the Judge's Book.

Another rule change that was recently approved was that the required jumping height was changed for Dachshunds, Clumber Spaniels, and Skye Terriers to three-quarters height at the dog's withers.

All changes will help keep interest in the sport of Obedience. The changes are wonderful not only for the handlers but for the dogs, too. I am looking forward to seeing these changes in upcoming competitions.

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When I started out in obedience quite a number of years ago, I was fortunate to find a local dog training school whose instructor and owner was very active in showing in obedience at AKC dog shows throughout the Northwest.

I was fortunate to take classes from a quite competitive and active obedience trainer—I received an excellent start not only in training my dogs, but more importantly I received excellent instruction in “handling” my dogs in the obedience ring. From the time I started taking the advanced novice classes, Jane Smith, the owner of Columbia Dog Training School, told all her students to read and re-read the AKC Obedience Rules and Regulations. This free booklet proved to be the best training tip Jane ever gave me.

When I first began showing in obedience, I made sure I knew the regulations. I read and re-read the booklet many times. I also found it very helpful to review the regulations the night before a show. If I was showing in Novice, I reviewed the Novice regulations; if I was showing in Open, I concentrated on the Open regulations. I have seen so many Novice A and Open A handlers enter the ring without the slightest idea of what they were or were not allowed to do. I am appalled at some of the things I have seen Novice A handlers do in the ring. Many are not aware that they can't position their dogs with their hands, make obvious collar corrections, or adapt to the pace of their dogs. They certainly do not seem to be aware of their hand and body positions in the various exercises. These infractions not only lose the handler valuable points, but may cost the handler a qualifying score.

The best book I can recommend for anyone thinking about showing their dog in obedience is *Successful Obedience Handling – the New Best Foot Forward* by Barbara Handler. Barbara Handler is a noted obedience judge and exhibitor and a stickler for correct handling. I was lucky enough to steward for Barbara a number of years ago when she was judging the obedience classes at the January shows in Portland. It was quite an

education for me, as Barbara was quite strict in watching for correct hand and body position—taking points off numerous times for any infractions.

Barbara's book is not a training manual, but rather "serves as an aid to the person who is already familiar with the basic requirement for the obedience exercises". The book talks about appropriate dress for the obedience ring, determining if your dog is actually ready to show, attending training matches, how to proof train each of the exercises, what is required to enter a licensed obedience trial including how to fill out an entry form, the difference between the "A" and "B" classes, and numerous things that are extremely helpful in preparing to show your dog. Barbara then takes the reader through all the various exercises in each of the Novice, Open, and Utility classes. She talks about handling errors, what to expect from the judge, what you can and can't do in each exercise, and what is required to pass each exercise.

Although this book was published in 1991, it is still in print. I know that it is available to order on Amazon.com. I generally see the book in the vendor area at the larger dog shows in the Northwest. Just look for vendors selling books—it should be in the training section. Barbara also has a video companion to her book that is equally helpful.

My advice to anyone wanting to show in obedience is to read the regulations, read Barbara's book or watch her video, attend as many matches as possible and try to watch the top handlers show their dogs.

The AKC Obedience Regulations can be obtained by writing to the AKC at 5580 Centerview Drive, Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27606-3390. The first copy is free, but they will charge a small fee for additional copies. For those of you who have access to the Internet, it can be downloaded from the AKC Web Page: go to www.akc.org and key 'Obedience Regulations' in the search area.

Having trained and shown my corgis in obedience for the past 12 years, I have seen a lot of wonderful trainers and dogs in the sport. Today I still enjoy watching not only the best dogs work, but also the great trainers whose expert handling make their performance look smooth and effortless.

My advice when showing in obedience is to do your best—you can't always control what your dog is going to do, but you can control how you handle yourself in the ring. Remember, good handling is equally as important as good training. Do your best, but also have fun!

Ring Stewarding In Obedience, Part I

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There are many aspects of obedience that I enjoy, and one of the activities that I do occasionally is to ring steward for obedience. I usually ring steward at about a half dozen shows during the year. Now that I am not currently training or showing a dog, stewarding does keep me active in this sport.

When I first was asked to ring steward more than ten years ago, I felt very uncomfortable since I was so new to obedience and actually had not even shown yet. If I agreed to steward, I usually asked that I be put with another more experienced steward, particularly if I was going to work in the Open or Utility rings. At that time I would have loved to have available some sort of helpful guidelines for obedience stewards. Having nothing available motivated me to write my original article. Since that time, AKC published a booklet in 1993 called *The Steward In Obedience*, which was updated in 1998. The guidelines are available from AKC and are on the AKC web page and can easily be printed for quick reference.

The following guidelines should be helpful to those of you who might be asked to steward at a match or licensed show.

AKC has defined the stewards role in obedience in these categories: Gate Steward - responsibility is to ensure that the next dog to be judged is ready and waiting at ring side. Table Steward - responsibility of this steward is to “run” the table for the judge, checking in dogs/exhibitors and helping with the bookwork for the judge. Ring Stewards - two are required to do the actual ring work, which consists of acting as the posts for the figure eight in the Novice and Open Classes, setting up the jumps in the correct height for each dog, placing out the articles and gloves in the Utility Class, and making sure that the leash is handed back to the exhibitor at the end of the individual exercises.

Up until recently most AKC shows only assigned two stewards to each ring. Although two stewards can effectively perform all the duties required, I do find it helpful and more efficient to work with three stewards.

Be Early - In general, whether stewarding at a match or licensed show, you should plan to be at your designated ring at least 20 to 30 minutes before the scheduled start of the first class. You will meet your judge and fellow ring stewards. At that time the judge will give you special instructions as to what he wants you to do. Much of this depends on what obedience classes the judge has for that day. Important to note is that the judge is in sole charge of his ring until his assignment is complete. The stewards are provided to assist him, but they may act only on the judge’s instructions. Stewards shall not give instructions to owners and handlers except as specifically instructed by the judge.

The above often comes into play as the exhibitors check in and receive their arm bands. Some may tell you that they have a conflict and would like to be judged out of order. If the judge has not given you instructions regarding this you must tell the exhibitor that they need to check with the judge. Most judges will instruct the stewards to place any conflicts at the end of the judging order. Be sure to mark the catalog. At licensed shows there will be one or more catalogs at the judge’s table. The judge is not allowed to look at

the catalogs which are provided for the stewards use only. There will also be a supply of correctly numbered arm bands and ribbons for each class judged in the ring. As a steward it may be your job to pick up these supplies from the Superintendent's table or they may be at the judge's table ready for use.

First things first - As a steward the first thing you usually do is check in the exhibitors and give out the arm bands. Ideally most exhibitors will check in before the class starts, but they are not always so prompt and you might be checking them in during the class also. I usually place a check mark by the exhibitors' numbers in the catalog as they pick up their arm bands. In the Open and Utility classes you must also ask for the dog's jump height which should be marked in the margin of the catalog beside the exhibitor's number. Normally dogs should be judged in catalog order. The judge may agree, on request in advance of the scheduled starting time of the class, to judge a dog earlier or later than the time scheduled by catalog order.

In general as a ring steward you will probably be responsible for bringing each exhibitor/dog in the ring in the correct position to begin the heeling pattern. In the Novice and Open classes you need to be prepared to be the posts for the figure eight which is at the end of the heeling pattern. The judge will have shown you where to stand prior to the beginning of the class. At indoor shows some judges may even mark the floor with tape or chalk. Do not wait for the judge to call you for the figure eight. Be prepared to go into position for this exercise as soon as the judge says "exercise finished" at the end of the heeling exercise. The judge might also ask one of the stewards to check his addition on the individual score sheets for each dog. I normally volunteer to do this. I also prepare a score sheet for each exhibitor if required and hand it to the judge as needed. Most judges will instruct you as to what they want on the sheets.

Helpful - I have put together an obedience steward's box I take to the ring with me that contains equipment helpful to me as a steward. As of now my box contains the following:

- Small solar calculator
- Small carpenter's tape measure
- Scratch pad
- Extra pencils (with erasers) and pens
- Several 3 x 5 cards on which I've written the order of the individual exercises in Novice, Open, and Utility classes
- 3 x 5 card with the measurements for the broad jump (how many boards to use for specific measurements)
- Several slip noose leashes which I put in my pocket to help with the stays in both the Novice and Open classes

- I will probably add equipment to my box as needed.

In the Novice and Open classes the judge will also let you know when he wants to break for the group exercises. AKC regulations require that not less than 6 dogs or more than 12 dogs shall be judged together for the group exercise. For example, if the Novice A class had a total of 14 dogs entered and checked in, the judge may have you break for the group stays after the 7th dog. If you are the steward doing the paperwork, be sure to have the group score sheets marked with the exhibitor's number and breed of dog.

When the judge is ready to begin the group exercise, be sure the exhibitors are lined up in catalog order ready to be taken into the ring. In Novice, two stewards will need to stay in the ring. In Open, one steward will take the exhibitors out of sight and remain with them until called back in the ring. The second steward will stay in the ring with the judge. You may be asked to hold a dog that has broken the stay or has bothered another dog. This is where the slip noose leash comes in very handy! This may prove to be a little hairy if the dog is somewhat timid or aggressive.

At the end of the class the judge may ask you to verify the final scores and placements with him. This is where I find my calculator to be very handy. If there are ties in scores for the first four positions, there will be a run-off for placements. AKC regulations require that the run-off consists of the Novice Heel Free for all classes. You will have to call the exhibitors back in the ring individually for the run-offs.

After all the scores are recorded for the class by the judge in the official Judge's Book, the judge will call for all qualifying scores to be brought back in the ring. The stewards will stand by with ribbons and the trophies, if any, and hand these to the judge as he announces the scores of each prize winner. The judge will then also announce the scores of each dog that earned a qualifying score and hand out a green qualifying ribbon. At this point you may be done for the day or may have to get ready for the next class.

In the next newsletter issue, I will continue with a summary of the duties of the obedience ring steward in the Novice, Open, and Utility Classes.

I would like to thank my stewarding "mentor" Dan Butcher for teaching me everything I ever wanted to know about stewarding so many years ago. Dan is now a licensed AKC Obedience Judge and I am thrilled to be able to steward for him now.

Single copies of the AKC booklet, *The Steward In Obedience*, can be obtained free. Additional copies are \$1.00 per copy. Contact The American Kennel Club, 5580 Centerville Drive, Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27606-3390 or phone number (919) 233-9767.

Next time you are asked to steward, go ahead and say yes! You might just learn something and have a great time, too!

Ring Stewarding In Obedience, Part II

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I would like to summarize the duties of the ring steward in the Novice, Open, and Utility classes.

Novice:

Check in exhibitors and give out arm bands.

When the judge is ready, bring each exhibitor into the ring and line them up in the correct position to begin the Heel on Leash exercise.

Stewards should stay at the judge's table until needed for the Figure Eight exercise. At the end of the Heel on Leash, two stewards enter the ring and position themselves for this exercise. At the conclusion, one steward will take the leash from the exhibitor and one or both stewards will return to the judge's table.

The next exercise is the Stand for Exam. During this exercise, the judge may ask one steward to remain in the ring and hold his/her clipboard and pencil. The steward will make sure that he/she promptly moves to the area that the judge has instructed. At the end of this exercise, the steward will hand the clipboard and pencil back to the judge and return to the judge's table.

The next two exercises are Heel Free and Recall. At the end of the Recall, one steward will take the leash back to the exhibitor.

The designated "table" steward will normally (if requested by the judge) verify the addition on the judge's score sheet.

Bring the next exhibitor into the ring when the judge is ready.

When ready, prepare the group exercise sheets per instructions by the judge.

One steward will line up the exhibitors for the Group Exercises and bring them into the ring. Two stewards should position themselves in the ring per the judge's instructions. Normally one steward is positioned at the gate and the second steward is positioned in one corner of the ring opposite the judge. The stewards' attention should be divided between the dogs and the judge. Be alert to possible disturbances and be ready to follow the judge's instructions if needed.

At the conclusion of the judging of the class, help the judge verify scores and placements.

Hand ribbons and other awards to the judge as he/she announces placements.

Open:

Check in exhibitors, ask for jump heights, and give out arm bands.

Before each exhibitor enters the ring, have the high jump and broad jump set to the correct height and width for the dog.

Bring the exhibitor into the ring in correct position for the Heel Free. Take the leash from the handler and make sure the dumbbell is on the judge's table. Judges are no longer required to measure each dog unless there is a question regarding jump height.

At the conclusion of the Heel Free exercise, two stewards need to be in position for the Figure Eight.

The judge will let the stewards know when he/she wishes to have the dumbbell brought into the ring.

The stewards should return to the judge's table for the Drop on Recall, Retrieve on Flat, and Retrieve Over High Jump exercises. At the conclusion of the Retrieve Over High Jump, one steward must take the dumbbell from the judge and place it back on the table.

At the conclusion of the last individual exercise, the Broad Jump, one steward should take the leash back to the exhibitor and make sure he/she picks up the dumbbell upon exiting the ring.

Verify addition on the judge's score sheet.

Bring the next exhibitor into the ring when the judge is ready.

When ready, prepare the group score sheets for the group exercise.

One steward will line up the dogs and handlers outside the ring for the Long Sit and Long Down group exercise and bring them into the ring.

One steward will lead the handlers out of the ring to a pre-designated site out of sight of the dogs and will remain with the handlers until the conclusion of the Long Sit. The same will be repeated for the Long Down.

At the conclusion of the judging of the Open class, help the judge verify scores and placements.

Hand ribbons and awards to the judge as he/she announces placements.

Utility:

Check in exhibitors, ask for jump heights, and give out arm bands.

Before each exhibitor enters the ring, have the high jump and bar jump set to the correct height for the dog.

Make sure each exhibitor has placed his/her scent articles and gloves on the judge's table before entering the ring.

When the judge is ready, bring exhibitor into the ring for the Signal Exercise. Take the leash from the exhibitor.

At the conclusion of the Signal Exercise, one steward should be ready for the Scent Discrimination Exercise. Bring the scent article case to the judge and exhibitor. The judge will tell the exhibitor what leather and metal article to remove from the case. The remaining articles are placed by the steward on the floor or ground at a designated spot at random about 4 to 6 inches apart. Each article needs to be touched by the steward as they are placed.

At the conclusion of this exercise the steward will retrieve the articles while a second steward gets ready to place the three gloves out for the Directed Retrieve Exercise.

The second steward should not place the gloves out until the exhibitor and dog are facing the opposite direction. The exhibitor must not see the steward placing the gloves in the correct locations.

At the end of Directed Retrieve, the steward will pick up the remaining two gloves.

The judge may ask the steward to hold his/her clipboard while he/she examines the dog on the Moving Stand and Examination Exercise. Return the clipboard to the judge at the conclusion of this exercise and return to the judge's table.

At the end of the Directed Jumping Exercise, hand the leash back to the exhibitor. Be sure that the exhibitor remembers to pick up his/her scent articles and gloves before leaving the ring.

There are no group exercises in Utility.

At the conclusion of judging of the Utility Class, help the judge verify scores and placements.

Hand ribbons and awards to the judge as he/she announces placements.

It gets easier.

The above may sound like Greek to you now, but the more you steward the easier it gets. If you think that you might be interested in stewarding, let your local breed or All Breed

Kennel Club know you are interested in doing this. Most clubs will be delighted to include you on their list of available stewards. Some clubs even pay a small fee to their stewards.

Again, as mentioned at the conclusion of Part I, the AKC Booklet, The Steward In Obedience, is available from the AKC. Single copies are free, additional copies are \$1.00 per copy. Contact the American Kennel Club, 5580 Centerville Drive, Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27606-3390 or phone number (919)233-9767. The booklet can also be found on the AKC web page at www.akc.org.

Happy stewarding!