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Dogs and Companion/Performance Sport: Unique Social Worlds, Serious Leisure Enthusiasts, and Solid Human–Canine Partnerships

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Introduction

As with many sports enjoyed by humans, canine sports have evolved from activities often serving utilitarian purposes. For centuries hunters have taken along dogs for their natural ability to flush out game. Dogs have swum with families on vacations, often diving off docks. Shepherds have used dogs to move sheep and other livestock. Farmers have used dogs to flush out vermin and other critters that harm their crops. Those living in the northern climates have used dogs to pull sleds for transportation and supply delivery.

The skills the dogs needed to perform their given tasks were learned naturally, often by a younger dog working alongside a seasoned older one. This was ‘on-the-job-training’. There were no training classes, seminars, videos, or competitions. And while not all dogs had ‘jobs’, many of the dogs in developed countries were also considered part of the family. Ellson (2008: 565) describes dog ownership as ‘physical, biological, imaginary and human, making this purchase different than others we may make, as the purchase of a dog truly becomes an entwined component in our lives’.

Dog ownership is not a simple relationship. Adult dogs do not leave the house to become independent as a grown child would. Since they remain with us for their entire lives we often need to set boundaries, indicating what property is ours and what is theirs, as well as what behaviours are acceptable and what are not, realizing that our standards will change as the dog ages. We also seek activities both to keep them out of trouble and engaged!

Perhaps it was the human desire for novelty, or challenge, that produced an interest in more formalized activities that involved both humans and canines. Over the past 25–30 years developed countries worldwide have seen an explosion in what has become known as performance or companion dog sport, where the focus is on training dogs to perform specific skills that can be used in competitions where they are judged on factors such as accuracy, speed, and technique. As this movement has evolved so have a plethora of organizations that now ‘sanction’ a wide variety of dog sports worldwide. Emerging alongside the development of dog sport organizations is a multi-billion dollar industry that caters to the needs of the canine dog enthusiast through such items as training devices, apparel, transportation options, crating needs, as well as specialized food and treats. Additionally, veterinary medicine has developed specializations in canine rehabilitation and therapy, as well as a vast array of vitamins and supplements. The travel industry offers information on pet-friendly lodging and vacation destinations, as well as products to make travelling with pets both comfortable and safe (e.g. specialized crates for air travel and seat belts for vehicles). And the entertainment industry has television channels that focus on animal-related topics as well as coverage of national and international events.

This chapter focuses on three distinct areas that capture the dimensions of dog sports worldwide. First, an overview is provided of many different dog sport opportunities. Second, discussion focuses on life with a performance sport dog. And third, the concept of social worlds and *communitas* is explored.

The growth of canine sports continues to climb at a phenomenal rate, often fuelled by exposure to a worldwide audience through social and broadcast media. For those who have watched the human/canine connection when training resulting in exciting performances, it is easy to see why so many people from so many different walks of life have got the bug and want to try a sport with their canine companion. ‘Except for a few participants who manage to turn dogs into “real world” careers, these activities are part-time, expensive and passionate hobbies. They are committed undertakings that are not necessarily understood, much less appreciated, by non-participants’ (Gillespie et al., 2002: 287).

Options abound!

There is a huge diversity in the activities available for humans to train their dogs in what has been termed ‘dog sports’. Below is a list

with a short description of several of the most popular dog sports, along with information about the organizations that sanction (develop rules and standards for performance) competitions. In addition to the individual sanctioning organizations, the Federation Cynologique International is the International umbrella organization for all things dog-related.

Agility

Dog agility has seen perhaps the most explosive growth of all dog sports since it was first introduced at the Crufts Dog Show in the UK in the



Figure 3.1 Phlash looking for the next challenge as he exits a tunnel on an agility course

Source: Ron Boe Photography.

late 1970s. Initially dogs were led around a course that was similar to what would be seen in horse jumping. The demonstrations, staged originally as ‘entertainment’, have spread worldwide and are sanctioned by many organizations. Today, dog agility is best described as a sport where handlers direct their dogs around an ‘obstacle’ course using cues given verbally, through hand signals, and/or body movement. Dogs are judged on speed and accuracy. The sport can be performed indoors (on matting, carpet, or turf) or outdoors (on natural grass, synthetic grass, or dirt).

Sanctioning organizations for agility are similar in that none of them allow any contact between the handler and dog, each has at least one or more style of courses that are numbered, and the obstacles are usually performed in sequence. The dog’s jump height is based on a standard that corresponds to the dog’s height at its withers. The handlers are allowed to walk the course for a short period of time (usually 5–8 minutes) without their dogs before the competition begins. Each trial presents different courses and different challenges brought on by the judge(s). In almost every organization dogs of any breed or heritage are allowed to compete.

Annually many of these organizations hold a championship event hosting head to head competitions that culminate in recognizing the top dogs.

Sanctioning organizations

United Kingdom

- British Agility Association
- East Midlands Dog Agility Club
- United Kingdom Agility

Canada

- Agility Association of Canada
- North American Dog Agility Council
- Canadian Kennel Club

United States

- North American Dog Agility Council
- United States Dog Agility Association
- American Kennel Club
- United Kennel Club
- Dogs on Course in North America

Oceania

- Agility Dog Association of Australia
- Australian National Kennel Council
- North American Dog Agility Council
- International Agility Link
- National Agility Link Association
- New Zealand Kennel Club

Asia

- Penang Dog Agility Association
- Philippine Dog Athletics Association

Canine freestyle

This sport involves a routine choreographed to music and performed by both the dog and handler. It requires creativity, discipline, teamwork, synchronization, and obedience. Intricate moves are used to show the dog's athleticism, style, and obedience skills. The results should be visually appealing and represent the bond that humans and canines can have in a creative environment. In short, it is dancing with your dog to music!

Several of the performances of canine freestyle performed at Crufts have gone viral over the Internet. Two of the most popular are Mary Ray and Richard Curtis performing with Levi and Carolyn Scott performing with Rookie.

Sanctioning organizations

- World Canine Freestyle Federation
- Musical Dog Sport Association
- World Canine Freestyle Organization (Australia, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, South Africa)

Disc Dogs/Frisbee Dogs

Most of the action in Disc Dogs happens in the air. Dogs catch a flying disc thrown by the handler. There are a variety of formats, including distance work, freestyle catching, which is choreographed to music, and toss and fetch. Disc throwing became popular amongst humans in the early 1970s. However, there was a specific moment when disc catching as a dog sport came on the scene. On 5 August 1975, college student Alex Stein jumped the fence at the Cincinnati Reds versus LA Dodgers (USA)



Figure 3.2 Booster catching big air and his Frisbee
Source: Barb Del'Ve Photography.

baseball game in Ohio and amazed the crowd with his dog's (Ashley Whippet) skills at disc catching on the ground and in the air. Although he was arrested after eight minutes, he later worked toward the creation of the Frisbee Dog World Championships (Anon, 2014).

In competition, divisions are based on the skill and expertise of the handler. Toss and Fetch involves a 60-second time period where a dog catches discs at varying distances, being awarded higher points for longer distances and mid-air catches. Freestyle, which involves a choreographed 1.5–2 minute routine, is subjectively judged. And long distance is judged relative to the distance that a dog can run out and catch a disc.

Three of the largest competitions are:

- Canine Frisbee Disc World Championships (Ashley Whippet Invitational)

- Skyhoundz – offers titling opportunities as part of its competition series (worldwide)
- Quadruped – the oldest and most popular long distance competition (worldwide)

Sanctioning organizations

- United Frisbee Organization – runs a world cup series using a points system that culminates in a World Cup Final
- Disc Dog Nationals – in the USA, Japan, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Canada, and Australia

Dock diving/dock jumping

For dogs that love jumping into the water, dock diving is the sport for them! First appearing at the Purina Incredible Dog Challenge (USA) in 1997, a number of organizations have since joined the ranks of offering competitions, primarily in the USA, UK, and Australia.

Dogs launch from a dock that is between 11 and 12 metres long, 2.4 metres wide, and 0.6 metres above the water. The pool is at least 1.2 metres deep. Artificial turf, carpeting, or rubber matting is used for the surface of the dock.

There are two primary skills tested, distance and vertical jump. Distance is judged from the end of the dock to where the base of the dog's tail hits the water. Handlers, using any portion of the dock, toss a toy into the water to give the dog direction and motivation to jump long.

Sanctioning organizations

United States and Canada

- Dock Dogs, LLC
- Splash Dogs
- United Kennel Club partnering with Ultimate Air Dogs (worldwide)

United Kingdom

- Dash n Splash
- Jetty Dogs

Canada

- Canadian Kennel Club



Figure 3.3 Emma exhibiting her retrieving skills after she locates a duck on a hunt test

Source: Chris Butler Photography.

United States

- American Kennel Club
- American Working Terrier Association

Australia

- Australian National Kennel Council

Europe (participation, but not considered a sport)

- Federation Cynologique International (Germany, Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, Spain, France, all Scandinavian countries, and Russia)

Field trials and hunt tests

Hunting dogs compete against each other in both field trials and hunt tests. Field trials are considered more competitive as a higher skill level is required. Generally, these trials attract retrievers, pointer dogs, and flushing dogs. In field trials, which primarily benefit dog breeders, the dog must have competed first in conformation and earned a Championship title. The dogs are required to retrieve an object over a long distance, receiving commands from a handler who is not allowed to move from the starting area.

Hunt tests are for gun dogs whose natural ability and training are tested against a set of standards. Any dog meeting the standards can qualify. There are various divisions based on the skill level of the dog, and, at times, the organization (breed club) offering the trial. Retrieves occur on land and in water.

Field trial organizations

United Kingdom and Ireland – under Kennel clubs (live, unhandled game are used)

United States

- American Kennel Club – known as Retriever Trials consisting of ‘stakes’ that have separate competitions. The stakes are Retrievers and Water Spaniels, Sporting Spaniels, Pointers and Setters, and Breeds that hunt, point, and retrieve.
- Amateur Field Trial Clubs of America
- North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association
- Bird Dog Foundation

Hunt test organizations

- American Kennel Club
- North American Hunting Retrieving Association
- United Kennel Club (Hunting Retrieving Club)



Figure 3.4 Detail demonstrating the turn once a ball is retrieved from the box
Source: Dylan Seymour Photography, reused under a CC BY 4.0 licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Figure 3.5 Detail and Action make a close pass at the start line
Source: Dylan Seymour Photography, reused under a CC BY 4.0 licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Flyball

In Flyball, which had its beginnings in the late 1960s, two teams of four dogs race against each other from a start line, over a series of hurdles (jumps), to a spring-loaded box where they retrieve a ball, and then run back over the hurdles to the finish line. It is a relay race in that only one dog per team is on the course at a time, and when that dog comes across a line on the return trip with a ball in its mouth the next dog begins its turn. This is one of the noisiest of the dog sports by far, as the dogs' adrenaline is pumping hard as they wait to be released across the start line for their turn.

Each team is required to honestly estimate their own speed and teams are seeded against teams of similar speed. Because dogs passing each other in close proximity in the 'exchange area' is such an important aspect of the sport some competitions will use video cameras to document the pass, thus compensating for the limits of human perception to accurately determine distance between dogs. The first team to complete all four runs with the least faults wins that round. The European Championships and the CanAm Classic are the largest International Flyball championships.

Sanctioning organizations

United States and Canada

- North American Flyball Association
- United Flyball League International

Europe

- British Flyball Association (throughout Europe)
- Flyball Fever Federation
- Belgische Flyball Belge (Belgium)

Australia

- Australian Flyball Association

Africa

- South Africa Flyball Dog Association
- Kennel Union of Southern Africa

Asia

- Japan Flyball Promotion Society

French ring sport

The sport, which began in France, started as a way to test stock dogs for their working ability. The tests cover many areas, including obedience work, jumping over various heights and lengths, retrieving, bite work with a decoy, and guard work. The order of exercises is random and the dog competes in an entire series of exercises in one turn.

Sanctioning organizations

- Societe Centrale Canine (France)
- North American Ring Sport Association (USA and Canada)
- Canadian Ring Sport Association

Herding event/Sheepdog trials/Stock dog trials

First introduced in Bala, North Wales in 1873 (Jones, 1892), this sport places the dog in a position to work with other animals (sheep, goats, ducks, cattle) to move them as a group to various places while maintaining the integrity of the group throughout.



Figure 3.6 Annie driving sheep in a herding trial
Source: Lynne Kollar Photography.

While many canine performance sports lend themselves to dogs with lots of energy to burn, herding events require a dog to work calmly with a great deal of self-control. This requires stamina, as even a short break in focus might allow stock to break from the pack. The handler uses a variety of signals, usually verbal commands although sometimes whistles, to let the dog know what task they are to perform. For many 'herding breeds' instinct plays a large part in their ability to work with stock. The animals (often sheep) are moved around a field through fences and gates and into/out of an enclosure.

Events vary in different parts of the world; however, all are judged on time and obedience skills (the connection between the dogs and the handler's commands). There are several levels of competition, each mirroring skills that dogs would use if moving stock on open ground. The levels increase in difficulty and time allowed to complete the series of tasks.

Sanctioning organizations

Great Britain

- International Sheepdog Society

United States

- USA Border Collie Handlers Association
- Australian Shepherd Club of America
- American Kennel Club
- American Herding Breed Association

Australia

- Western Australian Working Sheepdog Association

Europe – trials held by breed/kennel clubs

- Commission d'Utilisation Nationale Chiens de Troupeaux (France)
- Federation Cynologique International

Scent detection

There are several sports that require a dog to use its strongest ability, its sense of smell. Three of these sports are described below. Each focuses on completely different environments in which the dog is required to seek out an object purely through its scent.

Earthdog/go to ground

Earthdog tests small dogs' (usually terriers and dachshunds) natural abilities and instincts to hunt vermin. An artificial 'quarry' is set up (usually) underground; depending on the skill level being tested, it can contain false dens and tunnels. The dog begins by finding the entry to the quarry and then, following a pre-laid scent trail, must work to reach the vermin (rats or mice) that are safely behind a wooden or metal enclosure. The dogs demonstrate their skills by digging, barking, scratching, or clawing for a designated period of time at the enclosure. No rats/mice are hurt in the competitions. At the advanced level two dogs, working in pairs, compete to see which dog finds the (hidden) entrance to the quarry first. After the entrance is located by one of the dogs the second dog must 'honour' the dog finding the quarry by remaining outside and allowing the other dog to work the rat/mouse.

The European events offer a chance to test the terrier or Dachshund's courage in the face of an appropriately sized, dangerous quarry and measure his ability to respond to changing conditions underground. In contrast, the American events offer an opportunity to test for above ground search and manageability in the field, as well as some of the same below ground techniques, but American trials do not test courage.

(Frier-Murza, 2010: 45)

K9 Nosework

This new sport began as an offshoot of canine scent detection where dogs are used to locate drugs and criminals. In Nosework there are four environments: interiors, exteriors, containers, and vehicles where dogs search for one of three scents: oil of birch, or oil of anise or clove. Nosework is a viable option for older/senior dogs, as well as those who may be recovering from surgery or who may have hearing or sight loss. It also serves as an exciting retirement 'job' for dogs that previously competed in other dog sports.

Sanctioning organizations

- National Association of Canine Scent Work
- United Kennel Club

Tracking

The sport of tracking was developed to simulate scent detection in a variety of terrains. Many dogs that are trained in tracking also work in

search and rescue operations to locate lost people and animals. In competition, dogs must follow a scent trail in pursuit of a 'lost person'. Along the way they are required to find a number of lost articles laid along the path. Dogs are generally worked on a 10 metre lead in front of the handler, who may not offer any assistance in locating the hidden object. The dogs' efforts are timed, and the distance of their path to reach the object is evaluated as part of the scoring process.

Sanctioning organizations

Canada

- Canadian Kennel Club

United States

- American Kennel Club
- American Mixed Breed Obedience Registry
- Australian Shepherd Club of America
- United Schutzhund Clubs of America
- Deutscher Verband der Genrauchshundsportvereine America

Worldwide

- Federation Cynologique International

Lure coursing

Unlike some other dog sports where dogs interact with live animals, in lure coursing dogs chase an artificial lure (usually a fox tail or piece of cloth simulating a rabbit) controlled remotely across a field. The pattern is laid down to simulate an actual coursing. Courses are between 545 and 919 metres, although greater distances are often used in Europe. In some instances obstacles, usually jumps, are added to the course.

Courses involve turns and straightaways, and 'lure-wise' dogs are sometimes tempted to cheat by running to where they believe the lure will be next. Dogs run in groups and are generally scored on several criteria, including speed, endurance, agility, enthusiasm, follow (continued focus on the lure), and intelligence. Aggression toward other dogs while chasing the lure is not tolerated.

Sanctioning organizations

- American Sight Hound Field Association
- American Kennel Club
- Federation Cynologique International (Europe)
- United Kennel Club

Obedience

The ultimate goal of a dog trained in obedience is his/her ability to behave in a variety of settings, including at home, in public, and around other dogs. Dogs work alongside their handlers (or near them) on set tasks that are the same in all competitions and evaluated against a set of standards. At the beginning (novice) and intermediate (open) levels the tasks are repeated in basically the same order. At the advanced (utility) level the tasks may be evaluated in random order. Training involves a fair amount of mental and physical effort by the dog, and even if there is no intention to compete, obedience training usually results in a canine that understands how to 'behave' in many different situations. Many other dog sports require dogs to exhibit some of the elements found in basic obedience training.

Sanctioning organizations

United States

- American Kennel Club
- Australian Shepherd Club of America
- Mixed Breed Dog Club of America
- Service Dogs of America
- American Mixed Breed Organizational Registry

Canada

- Canadian Kennel Club

Oceania

- Australian National Kennel Council
- New Zealand Kennel Club

Worldwide

- Federation Cynologique International
- United Kennel Club

Rally Obedience/Rally-O

Rally was derived from formalized obedience. It differs from obedience in that handlers and their dog proceed around the course at their own pace, performing exercises that are described on signs with instructions. Handlers are allowed to talk to and encourage their dogs as they proceed



Figure 3.7 Renegade weaving through cones as part of a Rally Obedience exercise
Source: Traci Johnson Photography.

through 10–20 stations. Many people enjoy this form of obedience because of the randomness of the stations and the opportunity to connect verbally with the dog throughout the run.

Sanctioning organizations

United States

- American Kennel Club
- Canine Work and Games
- Canines and Human United

Canada

- Canadian Kennel Club
- Canadian Association of Rally Obedience

United Kingdom

- Talking Dogs Rally

Oceania

- New Zealand Kennel Club

Europe

- Swedish Working Dog Club
- CSEN Rally-Obedience (Italy)

Worldwide

- World Cynosport
- United Kennel Club

Pulling sports

There are several sports that can be grouped into the category of ‘pulling sports’ as they all involve dogs wearing a harness and pulling specified objects. Five such sports will be described in this section. In many cases the dry land sports are used as off-season training for sled dog racing in the winter.

Canicross

Think cross-country running then add a dog or two and you have canicross! Initially introduced in Europe, this team sport is quickly

spreading worldwide. Dogs wear a specially designed harness that attaches to the handler via a belt and a quick-release bungee-style tether called a skijor. It takes training to get the 'team' moving in a coordinated effort since an excited dog can easily throw a handler off balance. While handlers/runners enjoy the opportunity to have their stride increased by the dog that pulls them, dogs must learn how to follow a handler's basic directions or injury can result if the handler is pulled off balance. Runs/trials take place on trails. A well-trained dog will stay ahead of the handler, pulling steadily and avoiding distractions.

Sanctioning organizations

- European Canicross Federation (Europe)
- CaniX UK (United Kingdom)
- Mushing USA

Carting/dog driving

In carting, also known as drafting or dry land mushing, a dog, wearing a harness, pulls a cart filled with a variety of items. This sport is usually most attractive to larger breeds of dogs. The cart (three or four wheels) attaches to the dog in the same manner as if a sled was used. When dogs are used to cart humans a two-wheeled sulky is used. The benefits of participation include exercise and discipline, as this sport gives dogs the opportunity to be active as well as to 'have a job'. Dog carting is not a race, but instead competitions are held to test the handler's skills. In driving trials dogs' abilities are assessed based on their ability to follow the handler's commands and to work as a 'team', manoeuvring through obstacles and gates.

Sanctioning organization

- International Federation of Sled Dog Sports

Pulka racing

A very popular sport in Scandinavia, pulka racing has begun to spread to northern countries worldwide. Pulka racing involves a handler moving on cross-country skis and a dog (or dogs) pulling a 'pulk' or dog sled that resembles a toboggan on runners. The dog is attached to the handler via a harness and a skijor that hooks onto the handlers' belt. Pulka races are often part of Nordic combined events. The pulk weighs 7.5 kilograms

unladen. In competition, laden pulks for males average 20 kilograms and for females 15 kilograms.

Skijoring

Another off-shoot of sled dog racing is Skijoring. In North America, skijoring has become quite popular, especially in regions receiving lots of snow. Much like canicross, dogs wear a specially designed harness that attaches to the handler who is on cross-country skis.

Sled dog racing/dog sled racing

This winter sport is popular in the northern regions of European countries, Canada, Russia, and the USA. The musher (human), standing on a sled, guides a team of dogs over a marked course laid out on snow and/or ice. The teams are judged on the time it takes to cover the course. Races fall into three categories: sprint races (4–100 miles long), mid-distance races (100–300 miles), and long distance (300–1,000 miles). The Iditarod is the most famous long-distance race. It traverses mountains, frozen rivers, bleak tundra, and dense forests between Anchorage, Alaska (USA), and Nome, Alaska.

In addition to the distance, there is often a limit to the number of dogs allowed on a team. Sometimes the races are run in stages with different handler/dog teams completing different segments.

Sanctioning organizations

United States and Canada

- International Sled Dog Racing Association
- Mushing USA

Europe

- European Sled Dog Racing Association

International

- International Federation of Sleddog Sports (also for Skijoring)

Schutzhund

Originally developed to test dogs against the standards for a working German Shepherd dog, today Schutzhund is open to many other breeds. Schutzhund training is often associated with protection work. The well-trained Schutzhund dog will be capable of performing search and rescue

operations, odour detection, and police work. This is a very demanding sport that tests dogs on their courage, intelligence, perseverance, teamwork, and desire.

Sanctioning organizations

Germany

- German Shepherd Club of Germany

United States

- American Working Dog Federation
- United Schutzhund Clubs of America

Worldwide

- Federation Cynologique International
- Deutscher Verband der Gebrauchhundsportvereine – begun in 1903, this is the oldest and largest Schutzhund training organization in the world

Water work

There are two breeds that specifically compete in water work trials, Portuguese Water Dogs (PWD) and Newfoundlands. PWD trials are meant to showcase the working qualities of the dog, including teamwork between the dog and the owner, willingness and intelligence to adapt to changing conditions, and efficiency in completing a task. The handler either remains on shore or in a boat while directing the dog to perform a variety of skills.

The purpose of the Newfoundland tests is to assess the dog's ability to save a person's life. While the actual tests are not conducted specifically with drowning individuals, the series of skills performed all relate to the Newfoundland's natural abilities in this area.

Sanctioning organizations

- Portuguese Water Dog Club of America
- Newfoundland Club of America
- Associacao para a Protecao do Cao de Agua Portugues (worldwide)

Weigh pull/dog pulling

This sport is very much like tractor pulling. Essentially dogs are competing to see which one can pull the most weight for 4.6–5 metres. The



Figure 3.8 Pele moving swiftly through the water while pulling an obstacle to a target

Source: Judy Weinstein Photography.

safety of the dogs is extremely important and the international organization reports no competitive injuries. Dogs pull the weight either on a cart or a sled while wearing a special harness. Trials are organized by the dog's weight class.

Sanctioning organizations

- International Weight Pull Association
- American Dog Breeders Association
- United Kennel Club

Life with a performance dog

Once handlers and dogs become involved in any of the companion/performance sports, it is not long before handlers realize that there

is much more to it than simply training the dog in a class. Perhaps the area that is most surprising is the amount of time training actually takes. It is often more a matter of training the handler than the dog! 'Thus deliberate practice is key to developing an expertise . . . Working dogs are not born experts . . . they become experts by engaging in a long period of intense practice' (Helton, 2007b: 255). In a number of canine sports (agility, musical freestyle, herding, field tests, water retrieving, obedience, rally, Schutzhund, and all pull sports) 'dogs need to simultaneously control body movement and detect handler signals while they continue to move' (Helton, 2007a: 174). Responding to and giving movement cues in motion takes a great deal of coordination to ensure that the timing of the cue is received in sufficient time to change direction, yet not too early to cause the dog to take an incorrect route. These are learned skills for both the dog and the handler and must be practised regularly if one wishes to become proficient. Depending on the goals of the handler there are usually opportunities to take classes, attend seminars, and/or work with a personal trainer in private lessons for all of the canine performance sports.

A question often debated in literature (Greenwood & Parasuramen, 2003; Rossano, 2003; Helton, 2005; 2007a) is whether expertise is more a product of skill development or innate talent. Those interested in dog sports may seek out the activity that matches their achievement goals. For example, in events where one winner is crowned, ego orientation is usually much higher than task orientation (Reimer & Thomas, 2005). Task orientation involves the mastery of a sport. Ego orientation focuses on demonstrating your ability to defeat your competitors. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive. 'It is also possible that competitors who enter the sport with high ego orientation leave the sport quickly if they do not receive recognition quickly' (Duda, 1996; Reimer & Thomas, 2005: 273).

Skill development leading to expertise involves three stages (Fitts & Posner, 1967). Initially, the handler pays close attention to the cues given and the reactions from their dog. There is typically a lack of fluid motion as the handler and dog learn to work as a team through coordinated efforts instead of through separate skill performance. The second stage in skill development is noted by improved motor control and the ability to sequence individual skills. The handler/dog team becomes more fluid and speed subsequently increases. In the final stage independent skill performance increases; and coordination and the increased ability of the dog to interpret signals via a variety of methods is observable.

Because expertise acquisition has been primarily studied in humans who do not have anywhere near the range and diversity of body shapes as canines, the contribution of dog height must also be considered when examining skill development. In dog sports where running speed is crucial, there is a tendency to use taller, longer-legged dogs for their longer stride. However, practice and skill acquisition plays a significant role in speed (Helton, 2007a). There are some very fast papillons, corgis, and Shetland sheepdogs that record high speeds owing to their training and internal motivation.

Along with the time spent in training comes the desire to purchase a vast array of items. In 2010 the pet product industry reached \$81 billion in sales despite global recession. The USA and the UK lead the pet product and service industry in sales (Wolf, 2014). Those with performance dogs will consider purchasing equipment for home use (where applicable), items to be used while trialing (e.g. shade canopies, chairs, crates, ice chests), leashes and harnesses, toys for motivation, training treats, and recording devices (iPads, video cameras). Of course there are also non-essential purchases that often add not only to comfort but also to self-identity. These include specialized clothing and shoes, retro-fitted vehicles equipped to carry all your items, homes with more yard space, recreational vehicles so you can stay 'on site' at trials and travel comfortably with your canine partner, redecorated rooms in the house to display ribbons and trophies, and the growing quantity of pictures amassed from show photographers.

The role of personality in marketing pet and pet-related products is a vital facet for understanding pet and owner behavior... The relationship between dog and dog owner is an aspect of consumer behavior that explicates the need for businesses to match pet and pet-related products through values other than slogans and glossy programs.

(Ellson, 2008: 273)

In addition to purchases, many of those who remain active in their sport find themselves making life changes. Accumulated discretionary money, which may have gone towards a vacation before, now goes toward trial entries and items associated with the hobby. You may find yourself waking up earlier to get some training in before work or alternatively training in the evening or at weekends. Some have reported changing jobs to attain the flexibility to have weekends off in order to devote time to training (Hultsman, 2012). Speaking of jobs, for those who become

serious competitors they may experience a focus shift, where working becomes a means of supporting their hobby.

Then there is the issue of family. '[D]og sports indeed represent a culture of commitment. Sometimes it generates strong behavioral expectations for participants [and their partners] and expectations that clash with those of the real world...' (Gillespie et al., 2002: 285). For some, involvement in dog sports becomes a family activity, with several family members becoming involved with different aspects of the dog's life. For others, increased involvement in dog sports can mean less and less time spent with the family. At times this can become a point of contention, especially when non-involved spouses/partners do not understand the human/canine connection (Hultsman, 2012). Family relationships may also be tested when parents whose children are grown and have left home take the view that they spent their earlier life raising their children and forgoing their own interests, and now it is their time to pursue new hobbies. Thus, if their grown children (including their grandchildren) wish to see them, they can travel to the trial site (Hultsman, 2012).

In essence, your life can easily begin to revolve around your canine companion. Stebbins (1992: 3) described this intense involvement as serious leisure, a concept that involves

the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that... they launch themselves in a (leisure career) centered around acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.

In any of the performance sports described it would not be difficult to find participants worldwide who have become so involved in their chosen sport that they regularly exhibit the qualities that Stebbins (2002) indicated as distinguishing a serious leisure participant. These include perseverance even when difficulties arise, progressive development in skill level, concerted effort applied to the attainment of knowledge, training, and skills, actualization of personal self-development benefits, involvement in an active social world environment that impacts their beliefs, activities, and values, and strong identification with the chosen activity in personal descriptions of themselves. Brown (2007) and Heuser (2005) emphasized the rewards of friendships made through serious leisure involvement as motivating factors for maintaining long-term serious participation.

Hultsman (2012: 248) found that when couples involved in dog sports were questioned, they 'regularly brought up the time, financial decisions and sacrifices faced. Almost all agreed that the benefits received from spending time with their "dog(s)" (almost no one said "spouse") far outweighed the sacrifices.' In fact, seldom was remorse expressed about the time and money spent on serious leisure.

For many of the dog sports (excluding field trials and hunt tests), the majority of the competitors are females. In many societies the role of the female is synonymous with caretaker of the home (Gillespie et al., 2002). This makes it more difficult for women to justify to others how often their dog sport involvement takes them away from performing household duties. 'The demands of romantic relationships... domestic and paid labors, [are] packed around the demands of... serious leisure. Any demands that resist manipulation [are] avoided or ignored' (Raisborough, 2006: 250). This perspective can become an area of family contention when the house may no longer be as clean, meals together may be missed (because of class times and trials), vacations may involve the dog(s), the yard may look like a training facility, and the food cupboards may contain a vast array of vitamins, supplements, and treats, for both human and canine nutrition.

The problem is that women are expected to treat families as a culture of commitment, too. Families demand much effort and time. But so do passionate avocations. As hobby involvement increases, discretionary time may be shifted to the avocation with less attention paid to duties like housekeeping, personal grooming, supervising children, and placating significant others.

(Gillespie et al., 2002: 294)

There are personal shifts that may also take place. While the dogs may not care about appearance, titles earned, ribbons rewarded, or initials before or after their name, handlers who stay in the sport may find themselves developing a new self-identity. When asked about themselves they may include in their self-description phrases such as 'I compete in __', 'I'm into __', or 'I'm a __', where the blank space is substituted by a noun that depicts their perception of themselves as an accomplished participant in that sport or activity. People start to identify with their accomplishments and wear clothing that also sends the message.

While many individuals choose to compete in dog sports alone, it is not unusual to see spouses/partners joining competitors at trials.

Baldwin et al. (1999) indicated there are two roles that can positively relate to couple recreation: one, when both spouses share a strong commitment to an activity; the other when one spouse is highly committed to an activity and the other offers significant support. Support may be offered by two different means. First, there may be similar interest and commitment to activities that initiates collectively solving problems, sharing, and communicating. The second means of support occurs when there is expressed affirmation of the other's role by arranging schedules, engaging in conversations about one's spouse's performance, providing equipment related to the activity as gifts, and offering service by helping.

Hultsman (2012) found that support spouses fit into three non-mutually exclusive categories relative to participation in dog sports.

- 1) A few were holding a fair amount of resentment and came only to get to spend some time with their spouse ... who, in their eyes, spent far too much energy and time in dog sports;
- 2) A larger group had found a niche for themselves in helping to run the competitions/trials. Some became show chairs, and literally produced many shows. Others found ways to be involved by volunteering. Over time, these volunteer commitments tended to increase, not always to the liking of their competitor spouse, as they sometimes had little time to actually watch the competitions and offer support.
- 3) The majority looked at the weekend as time spent with 'their' dogs, and it just so happened that only one of them was actually competing.

In the end the responsibilities of a relationship, compounded with the interest in dog sports, as well as the desire for canine companionship, find individuals 'walking between [several] socially constructed worlds ... which sometimes conflict' (Gillespie et al., 2002: 300). Usually couples find a way to make it work, however, decisions almost always having the dog's best interest in mind.

Have we gone too far?

While the vast majority of information related to dog sports reflects fun with one's dog, it is important to realize that there are also consequences. Discussions centre around 'are we pushing dogs too far?' In some sports dogs are required to contort their bodies simply to

turn tighter, or they are being jumped higher, resulting in a greater impact upon landing. For those who compete week after week questions arise about the dog's ability to recover, both physically and mentally. Stressors can come into play too, such as 'time spent in a kennel traveling, presence of other dogs, the wait, . . . and the competition itself' (Pastore et al., 2011: 188). In addition, there are the potential stressors of 'social interaction, environmental factors, loud noises, exposure to novelties, and increased high expectations [of owners]' (Pastore et al., 2011: 192).

Forelimb soreness and other foot and shoulder injuries are the most common injuries in dog performance sports (Helton, 2007b). When dogs are required to jump peak vertical force is 45 newtons/kg of body weight when landing over a jump compared to 25 newtons/kg while running. A newton equals the force required to accelerate 1 kilogram of body mass per metre (Pfau et al., 2011). When dogs are constantly landing on the same forelimb (as they do in several dog sports), there is the potential for chronic overload injuries on the dominant limb (Pfau, 2011). For example, when a dog is first learning about flyball it is often putting stress on the forelimbs from hitting the box straight on to get the tennis ball to release. Once dogs become more trained they will turn in the air as they grab the ball. However, they are always turning in the same direction, so the potential for carpal and tarsal injuries can exist. In addition, with continuous repetitive movements it is possible to experience ligament and tendon laxity from always turning in the same direction (Helton, 2007b).

The social worlds of performance dog sports

It is often said that if you are new to an area and want to meet people simply take your dog for a walk. Dogs have a way of breaking the ice for many, whether it is on a walk at home or at an event with others. The social networks that have developed from friendships made through dog sport involvement will often surpass those that were part of life 'BD' (Before Dogs!) (Hultsman, 2012). While individuals may not see members of their 'dog social network' except at trials, it has become very easy to keep in touch via Facebook, blog sites, and email. Thus, connecting with those one has met at events around one's country or the world is quite easy, not only for individuals, but also for clubs. Many championship events are hosted using live streaming, welcoming a worldwide viewing audience that learns results in real time. Likewise, individuals share their own accomplishments, breedings, event pictures, dog births,

and dog passings over the Internet. YouTube has also contributed a great deal to performance dog sport, as trainers around the world have posted videos to help others learn new skills. This is particularly helpful to those who must train alone, usually because of their remote locations. YouTube has also allowed so many to watch some phenomenal performances, such as the Canine Freestyle dances that have become a part of the Crufts Dog Show, and the photo finishes at the Purina Incredible Dog Challenge 60 weave pole challenge.

Turner (1974) shared that ‘the social world around an event, particularly in celebration is a construct of “out of time” experience... [known as a] liminal state of communitas’ (232). ‘During this liminal state an alternative moral order emerges in which the usual cultural values of competition are subordinated to values of cooperation, and the roles and statuses connected with a class and gender in the larger society are not operative’ (Kemp, 1999: 81).

‘Communitas is the shared interrelatedness that occurs outside the regular social structures of society’ (Turner, 1974: 231). It disregards demographic characteristics. All involved are equals. There is no separation by social order. People experience a shared symbolism through closeness and friendships. In essence all that was an outside means of social and self-identity is stripped away.

In sled dog racing equality of the competitor often occurs during the pre-event check, where dogs are examined by a vet and then marked as ready to race. Following this the musher (handler) is given a bib number and sometimes an item of clothing (from a sponsor) that must be worn at race time. Because of the heavy layers of clothing worn it is often the bib number that becomes the sole identifier of the competitor. Thus, any past social status that a competitor may have is no longer identifiable, nor does it matter (Kemp, 1999).

A similar thing can be said for handlers who make it into the finals of some agility events. All handlers are given identical clothing to wear, and thus become part of the ‘community’ rather than individuals. And while each team will still approach their time on course as a solo dog/handler team, being surrounded by fellow competitors who have all ‘earned’ their shirts definitely provides a liminal state whereby whatever happens during the remainder of the competition is far removed from the moral and cultural values of modern society.

In a sense, even those who are watching a ‘finals’ competition in any dog sport have their own sense of communitas. Interacting primarily with those with whom you came to the event is the dominant

interaction observed among spectators. This is known as social capital bonding (Putnam, 2000) and is the most frequently observed form of interaction of people at events. However, among fans watching an intense competition it is not unusual to see conversations occur among individuals who do not know each other (unconscious capital bridging) (Putnam, 2000). Since many of those watching 'finals' events are also usually competitors, the willingness to share excitement (through high-fives, comments, and shared cheering) with those around is more typical than atypical. Perhaps that is the true meaning of performance dog sports. There is clearly a great deal of joy, camaraderie, laughter, learning, and many other nouns that describe the wonderful partnership activities so many of us choose to share with our beloved canine companions.

Conclusion

While our dogs remain with us their whole life, it is truly never long enough. Likewise, it is also never too late to find an activity that you and your canine companion can experience together. In this chapter many different canine performance sport opportunities have been discussed. Involvement in any of these sports could provide a great many leisure benefits (personal, physical, and emotional) for both dogs and their human companions.

The Internet has brought training options to many living in areas where attending classes and seminars is not convenient or even available. As a result, the skill level of dogs and handlers in all of these sports has increased significantly each year; and so does the recognition that pets, and dogs in particular, can provide a meaningful role within the family.

According to the worldwide London-based market research firm Euromonitor International, the pet products and services industry has seen exponential growth in the last five years. Based on the global humanization of pet support indicators, we are likely to see the introduction/continued growth of performance sports (based on a strong purchasing market for products and services) in China, India, Russia, Japan, and Latin America.

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