



Photo by Molly Schlachter



## ASK THE PRO

### characters of the game

By Mark Edwards

I enjoy reading the articles submitted by other pro trainers in "Ask the Pro." There are always things that can be learned or revisited that hopefully will make me a better trainer for the dogs and clients that I work with.

One of the questions that inevitably gets asked of a pro has nothing to do with training techniques. It is, "How did you get interested in training retrievers and decide to become a pro?" Hopefully this remark has rekindled some fond memories of your own mentors and defining moments that fueled the passion of doing what we do.

I would like to acknowledge some of the people that inspired, taught and believed in me. The first person I want to mention will hopefully bring back memories if you

had the privilege of ever meeting my first mentor, Rog.

We all have significant moments in our lives that are life changing. One such moment happened to me about 20 years ago when I walked out of the woods at dusk while deer hunting in Minnesota. I had a yellow lab in my truck that I let out to air. Only because I had her out, a little old man driving a beat up Toyota pick-up stopped and told me I had a good looking dog and that he messed with dogs also. He had 3 black labs with him, one being FC-AFC Ironwood Tarnation. Not knowing anything about field trials at the time, I did not realize that the man inviting me to his deer shack for a cup of coffee was Roger Reopelle, a well respected and beloved field trialer. If I had come

out of the woods five minutes earlier or later than I did, our paths would have never crossed.

Roger fascinated me from the moment I met him. Every day off I had from my job working in juvenile corrections, I would drive an hour to throw birds and hang out. He became my teacher and friend. Three years after we met, I quit my job of 16 years (my parents were not thrilled) and I helped Roger drive around the country chasing the dogs for a year. What an adventure!

I loved to listen to all of Rogers' stories. He told them over and over thinking it was for the first time and I listened like it was. The one story I enjoyed the most was when he talked about running a National in St. Louis where it was cold enough that ice was

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forming on the water. Dog after dog was refusing to get into the water on the blind. Roger put his dog Tar in his truck and cranked up the heat. When the panting Tar took his turn, he couldn't wait to get into the water, and he did the blind.

The last competitive dog that Roger was able to have success with before his body said no more, was a neat cheskie named Chase. I picked up many girlfriends at the airport for Chase. Roger would do breedings the day of a trial (off the grounds of course). Someone asked Roger if he was worried about "screwing" up his dog for the trial. My 80-year-old friend replied, "Hell, it never bothered me!" Roger Reopelle, member of the Retriever Hall of Fame, thank you for impacting my life and exposing me to this lifestyle.

I left Minnesota to spend some time in Colorado. It was there that I crossed paths with Kenny Trott. He had just gone out on his own as a pro. We became instant friends, and I learned by watching him what was involved in training other peoples dogs. Kenny ran my dog FC-AFC St. Croix Peli-Can MH, (Pelle, named after Reopelle) in the 1996 National and she became his first finalist. Kenny, congratulations to you and Marcy Wright on your recent marriage.

Danny Farmer hired me for my first job as a pro trainer. He gave me the opportunity to run his wonderful string of dogs. The first trial I got to run on my own only happened because Danny could not be there due to an illness in his family. He called me wondering who won the Open. I don't know if he was more shocked or proud when I told him I won with Abby, my first Open win as a pro. Wow!

One of the valuable training lessons Danny gave me was when I was running a land blind with a young dog. I was taking way too long trying to get the perfect line. When he couldn't stand it anymore, he just told me, "Kick the dog off and handle wherever he goes." Lesson learned, that I have passed on to others.

Danny once introduced me to another trainer at a trial and told him that I was one of them. I took that as the ultimate compliment of being accepted into the retriever world. Thank you Danny for giving me the opportunity to become a pro trainer.

Thank you to all the other "Characters of the Game" that have supported me, you know who you are. I want to especially thank my wife Becky and our daughters Shaelee and Wylie, who always have



A victorious Roger Reopelle

my back and remind me that it is ok to have a balance between having a great family and training the dogs.

Maybe there is someone reading this that is contemplating becoming a pro, as an assistant, or taking the big step of going out on your own; follow your dreams, remember your roots and always be willing to learn from those that have come before you. ■

## Edwards Retriever Training Mark Edwards

Mark, with his wife Becky, and their kids Shaelee (11) and Wylie (9) live in Bonham, TX. Summers are spent training and going to trials in Colorado. Mark works with retrievers and Becky trains stockdogs. [www.edwardstraining.net](http://www.edwardstraining.net)