



## ASK THE PRO

### walking baseball

By Tera Lancz.ak

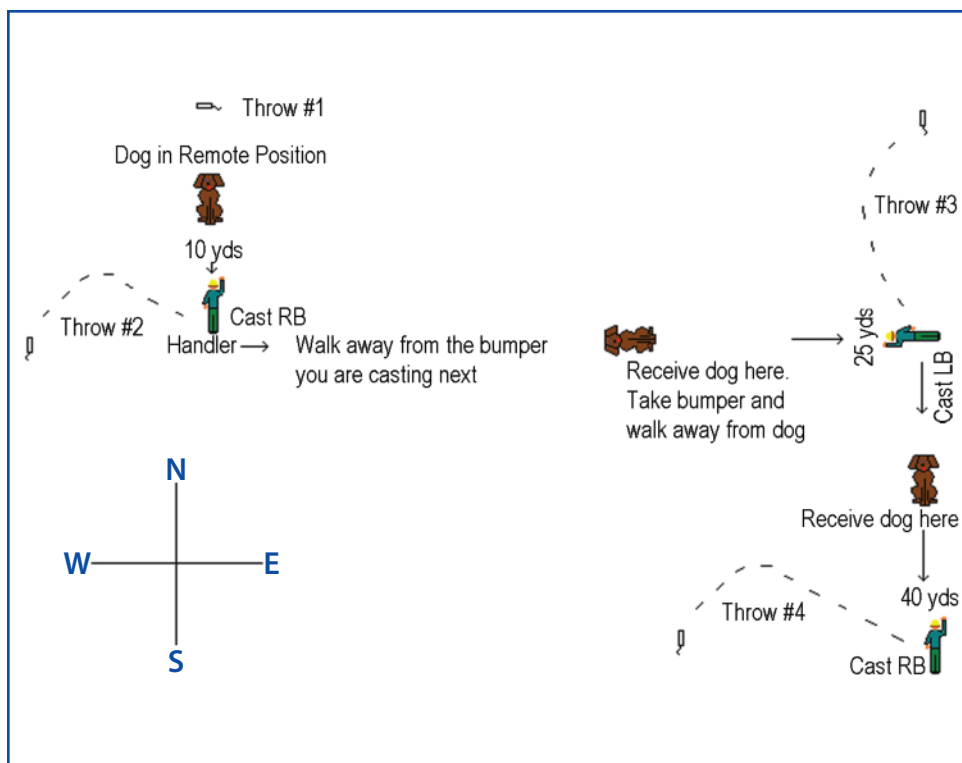
#### Casting and Lining Made Easy

WALKING BASEBALL was designed by D.L. Walters in the 1970's. His goal with the drill was to isolate a dog's weaknesses on casting and carrying a cast. But as one performs the drill it is apparent the drill does so much more. D.L. was very innovative and an excellent communicator with the dogs. However, the walking baseball drill (as diagramed in his widely helpful book, "Training Retrievers to Handle") is extremely complex. I learned about this drill and saw its value while apprenticing at Blackwater Retrievers, in Centerview, MO. I worked a variety of dogs at various stages of training during my apprenticeship, ultimately reaching my goal to develop young retrievers through basics into transition. There, I saw the endless benefits of walking baseball that were not mentioned in Walters' book. It is clear these attributes were just as beneficial for the dog and handler as the casting itself. Through this realization, I discovered the drill was a positive and productive way to trouble-shoot and isolate problems; such as flaring, spinning, no-goes, popping, bugging, lacking momentum and freezing on casts. As I witnessed the dog's trials and tribulations, I developed new strategies and enhancements using the concepts of walking baseball to alleviate many of these common problems.

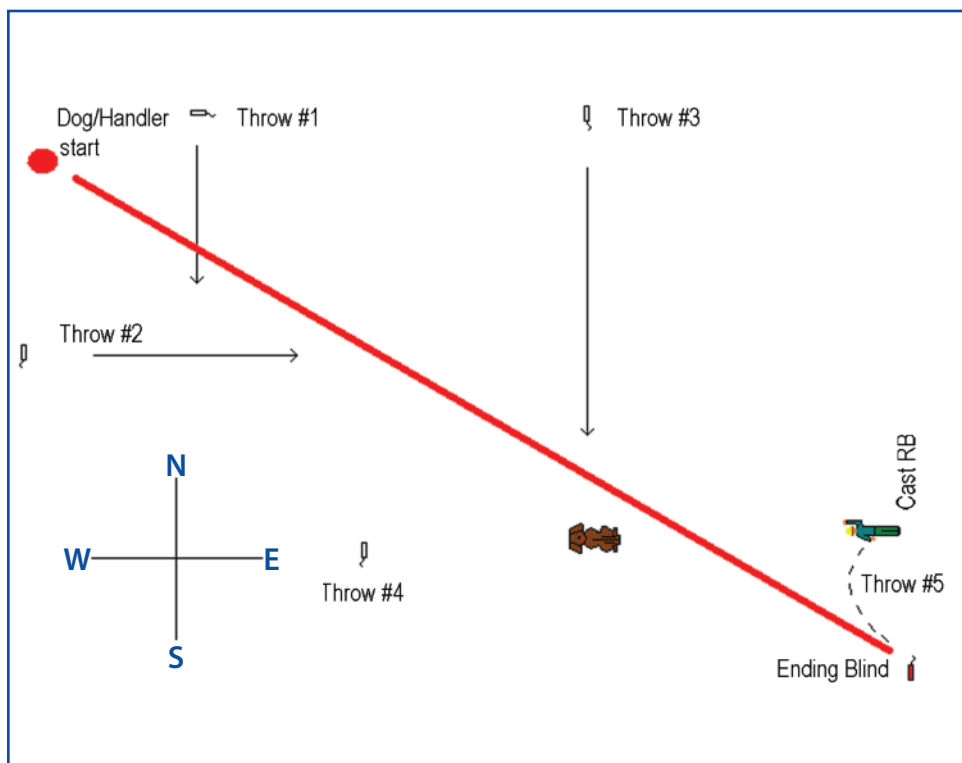
The philosophy behind walking baseball is to practice going and stopping, while increasing the accuracy of casting and distance in casts through successful repetition. Walking baseball also promotes teamwork, confidence, improves focus while building trust, momentum and memory through the success of retrieving. As the handler works walking baseball, the dog's attitude will soar.

So what is walking baseball? Imagine a baseball diamond where the dog is sitting on the pitcher's mound facing home plate and the handler stands a few feet away from the dog facing the outfield. This position is known as the "remote position." Now picture a single bumper placed at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd base. The handler will cast the dog with a right or left over to retrieve bumpers at 1st and 3rd base. Then, the handler will cast right or left back to 2nd base completing the drill known as simple baseball. Walking baseball is an extended version of simple baseball. Rather than performing the casts with the dog and handler stationary as illustrated in simple baseball, walking baseball adds degrees of difficulty by requiring the dog to perform the same over and back casts with added distance and forever changing terrain due to the handler and dog walking to different areas in the field.

Walking baseball is best utilized with dogs just coming out of reinforcement (force) training. Depending on the training program you are following, walking baseball can be taught after the advanced 3-leg pattern or Double T. Walking baseball is an interim step in teaching a dog cold blinds. During reinforcement work the dog can become very overwhelmed. The dog is experiencing physical and mental stressors, failures and successes, going, stopping, and coming to the handler all at the same time. Walking baseball was created to be a fun, non-stressful, and highly successful drill for the dog.



### Walking Baseball "Backs"



Now we are ready to begin walking baseball. We start with bumpers in hand and your dog in the remote position. Throw your first bumper directly behind the dog over the shoulder on the side you are going to cast (Throw #1 to the North). If the dog turns its head to see the bumper that is fine, however, you want to

discourage any movement of the dog's rear. Make sure your dog remains steady and then turn directly away from your dog walking 10 or so yards. Next face your dog and make sure handler, dog and bumper are aligned. So when the RB cast is given it is an accurate RB cast, NOT a right-hand angle back cast. Once you

#### To begin "walking baseball" you will need:

1. An open field with short cover (soccer fields, cut hay fields or parks)  
*Advanced Dogs: any open space will suffice*
2. Two, 3-inch white bumpers with throw ropes  
*Advanced Dogs: two, 2-inch orange bumpers*
3. White or bright orange surveyors tape
4. Handler in white jacket
5. E-collar or Short Leash (one the dog can run with)
6. Whistle

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are facing your dog, throw your second bumper 90 degrees to your left (West). This throw is labeled Throw #2 on the diagram. After you Throw #2, regain your dog's focus by giving a whistle blast. Once the dog is focused give the right-hand back (RB) cast to the bumper labeled Throw #1.

As the dog picks up Throw #1, the handler should begin walking directly away from Throw #2 (handler travels to the East on diagram). Receive the dog in the remote position with Throw #2 directly behind the dog. Leave the dog and walk to the East again, stop to face your dog and throw the bumper 90 degrees to your right (to the North) this throw is labeled Throw #3 on diagram. Regain dog's focus and give a left-hand back cast (LB) to Throw #2. Once the dog picks up Throw #2 the handler should begin walking away from Throw #3 traveling south as pictured on the diagram. Again, receive the dog in the remote position, leave the dog seated walking further south, turn and face the dog, throw the bumper to your left (the West) to Throw #4, regain focus and cast RB. Repeat this sequence 10 to 12 times depending on the success of casts, energy level and size of the field.

To end walking baseball refer to Diagram #2. This diagram illustrates what the field looks like to a dog just worked on walking baseball. Notice where previous bumpers have been thrown and the paths of travel designated by the black arrows. However, the only bumpers on the ground will be Throws #4 and #5. So let's assume Throw #4 is your last cast you intend to give, instead of throwing to the North as previously done with Throw #3, the handler is now going to throw in the opposite direction, to the south. This throw is labeled Throw #5 on the diagram. Once again, regain the dog's attention and give the cast opposite of your last throw – this would be an RB cast. As the dog picks up Throw #4, the handler should begin walking back to the starting point of the drill. Make sure to position yourself and the dog so the line to the blind (Throw #5) is through the middle of the areas where previous bumpers were thrown, this line is designated in red on Diagram #2. Even though this is a "sight blind," the diversions (old falls) will create the opportunity to change the dog's direction and cast away from them. This is an excellent way to introduce the diversion concept in its simplest form on an unfamiliar field rather than a pattern field.

Walking lining is an enhancement to walking baseball; it was designed to aide in trouble-

shooting and to ease the anxieties of dogs that are uncomfortable working from the handler's side. The sequence of throws for walking lining are the same as those in walking baseball, the only difference is the handler sends the dog to the bumper from his/her side. The benefits to walking lining are: better initial lines, the dog pushes/pulls easier, the dog establishes focus quicker and most importantly the dog believes where the handler is pointing them. Walking lining produces a dog that runs harder, straighter, and for longer distances all while maintaining a positive attitude towards blinds.

Keep in mind this drill is designed to be a non-reinforcement (force) training session for the dogs. If something breaks down, such as a whistle sit or momentum, stop your course of action and address the problem. Be FLEXIBLE with the issue. Do not be quick to correct for some issues, such as momentum, they will build as the drill progresses. If the handler notices a pattern (behavior that occurs three or more times) the behavior must be addressed. For instance, if a dog is not sitting on the whistle DO NOT correct the issue in the field during the walking baseball drill. Stop the drill, take the dog to a different place and reinforce the whistle sit in a separate drill. Most of the time the reinforcement session will carry over to the next lesson of walking baseball. However, if your dog continues to not sit on the command, then the whistle must be reinforced in the field during your walking baseball lesson. As a precautionary measure, I would not use reinforcement as my first course of action on a dog new to the drill.

Another attribute to walking baseball is the improvement of a dog's memory. Walking baseball builds a dog's memory in a more controlled environment as a drill rather than in a marking scenario where the excitement levels can be distracting to your lesson. Walking baseball accomplishes this by the gradual increase in the delay and distance between casts. The improvement of memory will carry over to your dog's multiple marking abilities. The dog that practices walking baseball displays a better focus on their memory birds and an easier time in picking out longer gunners.

Not only does walking baseball develop the dog but the handler as well. The drill aides in the handler's abilities to pick out landmarks such as trees, change in color, ground cover, and backgrounds in reference to the position of the previous bumper thrown. This is where white surveyors tape tied in a two-foot streamer on the ropes of your bumpers comes in handy. The more accurate the handler on knowing exactly where the bumper is the sharper the dog will cast and carry that cast.

When working your dog it will be important to note factors like ditches, paths, hills, and wind direction, while paying special attention to the way your dog negotiates these factors. The dog's response to these factors will become critical information during hunting, training, and testing scenarios.

Simple baseball and walking baseball have been around for a long time. However, if the handler is patient, utilizes repetition in conjunction with successful retrieves there can be so much more to gain than just casting and carrying casts. Now the retriever team is well-prepared to go to the field and take their training to the next level. Have fun and enjoy growing and advancing with your dog. ■

## Bay Blue Kennels Tera Lanczak

Tera is the Owner/Trainer of Bay Blue Kennels, wintering in Giddings, TX and summering in Au Gres, MI. Bay Blue is a retriever kennel focused on developing young, competitive retrievers for hunt tests, field trials, and working gun dogs. Bay Blue's primary objective is to train train train!! Bay Blue Kennels trains only fourteen dogs at a time between the ages of 6 and 18 months, with one puppy in the early start program. Bay Blue concentrates on providing your retriever with the tools and knowledge to be a big dog. <http://www.baybluekennels.com>