

Event Committee Responsibilities Regarding Rules, Safety and Injured Dogs

A Collaboration of Jerry Mann, AKC Field Director of Sporting Breeds and Retriever News

During the past few years many people have offered support for developing a national dialog regarding the Responsibilities of the Field Trial and Hunting Test Committees.

AS WE HAVE LISTENED to long time participants, it has become apparent that Event Committees are significantly less engaged today than they were in the past – judges are too often being left to fend for themselves, before and during events. As this has evolved, committees appear to be stepping back even further, leading to an environment of “the judges decide virtually everything” at events. Plainly stated this direction is wrong and the course needs to be corrected!

Judges and event committees were intended to be team members working closely together. This “withdrawal of committee involvement” is apparent at our National events as well. Our Nationals are historically said to have sought out the “most experienced committee members and the finest grounds thus helping to achieve displays of superior event operations!” Make no mistake about it; successful events are a direct reflection of the event committee’s concern and involvement before and during any event – in addition to the judges’ tests. Our finding is that the most engaged and experienced people among us believe that Event Committee members must get involved, too, as part of the successful event!

We have asked the American Kennel Club to provide interpretation of several questions that apply to all field events. Jerry Mann, AKC Field Director of Sporting Breeds, provided answers to the initial inquiries – questions that we felt needed to be asked, answered and shared from an educational perspective. Jerry references the two AKC booklets that apply. Of course, the Rulebook is primary – and of equal importance is the often-overlooked Dealing with Misconduct guide, which is provided to each club event secretary at each event.

During our study and discussions it became obvious we needed to point out the following about the Dealing with Misconduct guide – which should be read as part of the Rules prior to each judging assignment...

- 1) The Dealing with Misconduct guide is just as much a part of an event as are the Rules/Regulations handbooks for Field Trials and Hunting Tests.
- 2) During the running of an event, the Event Committee carries not only the responsibility but the “authority” of the AKC when dealing with issues of serious injury or misconduct.
- 3) Both the Event Committee and Event Secretary must be familiar with this publication and ready to apply its instructions when necessary at a club event as it does provide guidance for injured dog protocol at events.
- 4) The Dealing with Misconduct guide directives for the Event Committee apply to any and all serious injuries/deaths that occur in connection with the event.



EVENT COMMITTEES AND THE RULES

What is the responsibility of the Field Trial/Hunting Test Committee for assuring that rules are followed by judges?

Under Chapter 6, Section 3 of the Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedures for Retrievers it indicates, “*The Field Trial Committee and Field Trial Secretary shall (underlined for emphasis) be held responsible for compliance with all of the Field Trial Rules and Procedures – except those coming under the sole jurisdiction of the Judges, and must provide themselves with the latest edition of this book.*” (This same statement can be found in the Regulations and Guidelines for AKC Hunting Tests for Retrievers, Chapter 1, Section 14. (Note: Retriever Hunting Tests are run under “Regulations” rather than “Rules.”)

The Event Committee and Event Secretary (whether or not a member of the Committee) have *full* responsibility for assuring *all* Rules and Regulations of both Field Trials and Hunting Tests are appropriately applied in every phase of the event, i.e. club sponsoring/conducting the event, judges in the discharging of their duties and entrants in the running and treatment of their dogs.

The “sole jurisdiction” of the judges is the setting of tests and the evaluation of the dogs running those tests. In other words, the judges are the only persons with the power to set tests and evaluate dogs running those tests. That does not mean that the Event Committee cannot intervene when a test is contrary to the Rules and Regulations. When the judges set up a test contrary to the Rules and Regulations, the Event Committee has the power – and the obligation – to “step” in and advise the judges of the illegal conditions and require that the flaw be corrected. Examples might be, holding blinds set up in the field to mislead or trick dogs, dead birds not seen by the dogs placed on or near the line to a blind to distract the dog, scrapping a test after all eligible dogs have been run and resetting a substitute test, etc.

EVENT COMMITTEES AND SAFETY

When does the Field Trial/Hunting Test Committee have responsibility for assuring safety of dogs at a field trial?

At all times! The safety of both dogs and handlers should be at the forefront of everything from the very moment judges select a test site and began designing the test to be run. This is the reason either an Event Committee member or another club member should be present when tests are being designed and set up. Any observations creating concerns of safety should be immediately addressed and a decision made as to needed correction – even before a test dog is allowed to run. The AKC expects every Event Committee to be “safety conscious” for both individuals and dogs from the planning point to the completion of an event.

This authority should be properly exercised and every effort should be made to work with judges when they are designing their tests! However, if there is an obvious threat to dogs or handlers, the Event Committee, acting on behalf of the sponsoring club must make a final decision. This authority must in no way be misconstrued to mean that the Event Committee has to approve all tests designed by individuals invited to fulfill judging assignments. While some Committee members may feel that a test may be too difficult or just poorly designed, these are not considerations to be utilized to reject a test!



Editor: “*The Event Committee always has the power – and the obligation – to intervene when a test is potentially unsafe for dogs, contestants, or observers.*”

What you need to know about Event Committees

- 1) They are responsible for the rules being applied
- 2) They must be notified of unsafe conditions
- 3) They must investigate any serious injury
- 4) They must report injury investigations to the AKC
- 5) They represent the AKC during the event

What to do in case of a serious injury

- 1) Report at once to Event Committee
- 2) Insure your Event Committee investigates
- 3) Rectify unsafe situations
- 4) Report investigation to the AKC

How you can help!

- 1) Educate your Club’s Event Committees
- 2) Discuss your Committee duties with Judges
- 3) Work as a team



EVENT COMMITTEES AND INJURED DOGS

What is the responsibility of the Field Trial/Hunting Test Committee where a dog is seriously injured during a trial?

The Dealing with Misconduct guide applies, just as the Rulebook does to field events, as such it is considered part of the Rulebook!

In compliance with the Dealing with Misconduct guide, Section V, page 6, “When a dog is seriously injured or dies in connection with an event, the Event Committee must (underlined for emphasis) conduct a preliminary investigation to determine if negligence or the willful conduct of an individual caused the injury or death. -----.”

As part of the mandatory investigation required when a dog is seriously injured or dies while running a test, the Event Committee should immediately intervene to consider/determine the further possibility of injury/death to other animals. Only after a close inspection of the grounds begin utilized and by a collective decision of the Committee in consultation with the judges should a test be allowed to continue.

If injuries or death occur other than during the running of a test, the Event Committee is still responsible for conducting a preliminary investigation to determine if the injury/death was the result of an accident, negligence or the willful conduct of an individual. If necessary the Committee is still required to conduct a hearing to determine what, if any, disciplinary action needs to be taken.

What constitutes a seriously injured dog?

What requires a trip to the vet varies from owner to owner. We would think any injury that requires a visit to the veterinarian would be considered a “serious” injury. The death of a dog would be considered “serious” under all circumstances. We would recommend anytime a dog is injured at an event (other than a briar in the pad, a tumble or roll causing a little disorientation, etc.) be reported to the Event Committee just to assure those in charge are made aware of the situation.



Editor: *The definition of a serious injury, which must be reported to the AKC, is up to the Event Committee. For the purposes of applying a standard for all judges and marshals, it's clear that a dog that cannot continue a test, picks up or goes to a veterinarian during an event should be reported to the Event Committee.*

Should the FTC or HTC be immediately notified in the instance of a seriously injured dog during an event?

Absolutely. Not only during the running of a series but anytime a serious injury or death occurs on the grounds or in connection with the event!

Under what circumstances should the AKC post trial/test report note a dog seriously injured at a trial? (e.g. Misconduct or accidental or both?)

No matter the cause of the serious injury or death, a report must be made in accordance with the Dealing with Misconduct guide. As required by this publication, a written report of the Event Committee's findings must be made to the AKC (Attn: Executive Secretary) 260 Madison Ave., Fourth Floor, New York, NY 10016 within five (5) days of the investigation. A copy of this report should also be submitted via the Event Secretary's report to the Performance Events Department in Raleigh, NC.

Is there a reason the FTC/HTC procedure for injured dogs is not in the Rulebook, e.g. does it only apply in the instance of Misconduct?

The failure to indicate in the Retriever Field Trial Rules and Retriever Hunting Regulations handbooks the procedures to be followed in the Dealing with Misconduct guide regarding the serious injury or death of a dog has been an oversight! That situation is currently being rectified by referring the Event Committees and Event Secretaries of both to the Misconduct guide for the appropriate procedures to be followed in the event of serious injury or death of a dog. It should at least be cross-referenced in the Rulebook for emphasis.

Where the above protocols are not followed by a club, what is the process for a participant notifying the AKC?

The proper procedure would be to contact the Event Chairperson (or a Committee member) and the Event Secretary to ask if they are aware of the procedures to be followed in the event of serious injury or death of a dog. (Experience tells us that most are not due to their failure to even look at the Misconduct guide unless an issue of that nature arises.) If they are not, one might suggest that they take a look and initiate the necessary action. If they, one or both ignore the request we would strongly suggest contacting an AKC Field Representative for intervention. (Most of the time and especially on weekends, either Jerry Mann or Russ Reavis are available via cell phone. The call needs to be made immediately when no action is being taken.

AKC Rep Contact Phone #'s:

Jerry Mann 919-522-3991

Russ Reavis 303-550-2758

There are more than 2,500 stakes run each year in both retriever field trials and hunting tests and there are very few events that will have to deal with the serious injury issue. However, when tragedy strikes, proper response training or education is always important. With your support, our combined effort will be focused on proper education of the community.

As Retriever News endeavors to support this exposé of the Responsibility of Event Committees, we are eager to obtain your contributions, experience and opinion to assure the effort carries the proper message regarding application of the Rules and application of that ever-elusive element of common sense. We hope this effort results in an productive, supportive and educational outcome – which strengthens our event committees' efforts to improve events by becoming involved as was intended. ■

Originally Published February/March 2013