

Obedience Is...Knowing All The Rules and Regulations



by
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It never ceases to amaze me how many people enter into the sport of obedience without knowing the rules. They are provided free by the American Kennel Club if one takes the initiative to write for them and can also be picked up free of charge at any AKC licensed show.

Can you imagine a baseball player hitting a home run, but running to third because he did not know the rules and requirements of the game? He might be a dynamite player, but his ignorance could lose the game. Yet how many times have you heard competitors at dog shows complaining that they were disqualified for double commands or docked heavily for coaxing their dogs or adjusting their pace to the dog's pace? Having and **READING** a copy of the rules would eliminate these problems.

Over the past few years I have been fortunate enough to attend two seminars entitled, "A Day with the AKC," that confirmed that this problem is nationwide. Both seminars featured Mr. James Dearing, AKC obedience Director, as one of the lecturers. "Read the rules," he told those in attendance (including a number of AKC judges), "It's there in black and white." Many exhibitors do not realize that when they sign the entry form, they acknowledge familiarity with the AKC rules.

The rules were clarified and interpreted for those in attendance and recommendations given for consideration by exhibitors and judges in the interest of the sport of obedience. The rules were designed to give the judge flexibility with the individual interpretation; however, judges must use discretion and judgement in any situation. It was recommended that exhibitors be aware of their rights and knowledgeable of their

obligations. Specific suggestions for exhibitors are as follows:

- Watch the judging pattern. It helps an exhibitor's performance and makes the judge's job easier. The only person justified in asking the judge about the heeling pattern is the first person in the class.
- No training on the grounds. "Warm ups" are encouraged, but no training.
- No training in the ring. Dogs should be trained beforehand. If the dog fails an exercise, the handler should not attempt to correct the dog, nor verbally rebuff it.
- If an exhibitor performs the individual exercises, he **MUST** participate in the group exercises. It is required by the regulation. Being absent without an excuse will usually trigger a letter from the AKC to the exhibitor.
- An exhibitor is in a better position to question a judge if his attitude is kept positive. The exhibitor's fee is paying for that judge's opinion, interpretation of regulations, and standard of perfection...the exhibitor is never forced to enter under a specific judge. If the exhibitor feels that it was a bad choice to enter under a particular judge, it is his prerogative not to enter in the future. Showing poor sportsmanship is always considered poor taste.
- Check in at ringside at the scheduled **STARTING** time as there may be absent exhibitors. This seems to be a problem at many dog shows. Chapter 2, Section 15 of the AKC Obedience Regulations state, "Dogs should be judged in catalog order to the extent that is practical to do so without holding up the judging in any ring. Judges are not required to wait for dogs for either the individual exercises or the group exercises. It is the responsibility of each handler to be ready with his dog at ringside when required, without being called. The judge's first consideration should be the convenience of those exhibitors who are at ringside with their dogs when scheduled starting time of the class, to judge a dog earlier or later than the time scheduled by catalog order. However, a judge should not hesitate to mark absent and to refuse to judge any dog and handler that are not at ringside ready to be judged in catalog order if no arrangement has been made in advance." It is not the steward's responsibility to track down the exhibitor so in the interest of protection your entry fee and

as a courtesy to the judge (a great way to start!), be ready and waiting.

Some suggestions for judges were:

- Arrive at the ring thirty minutes early to set up and check equipment. Walk the ring for irregularities. Determine the sun's position in relation to the group exercises (the judge does have the option to change the pattern to a mirror image because of the sun if a dog fouls the ring).
- Inform the stewards of their duties and what is expected of them.
- Control the ring to keep things running smoothly and not to keep the exhibitors waiting.
- Take off points for every error in a dog or handler's performance.
- Have a standard of perfection in mind. Be consistent throughout judging.
- Judge inconspicuously without being noticed or hindering a handler's performance.
- Position oneself consistently throughout judging, giving the exhibitor and dog room to perform, yet still in a position to see everything and score appropriately.
- Give the benefit of the doubt to the handler and dog: i.e., do not judge the handler's motives, but his actions.

These are but a few of the suggestions given at seminars which would improve the quality of the show situation and allow you to concentrate on giving a good performance. Knowing the rules really sets you free.

So break the habit—obtain and **READ** the rules. You will be amazed at how much you can learn. The next time you drive to a dog show with a friend, read and discuss them on the way. By making yourself more aware of the rules, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain in your performance in the ring.

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