



## WGSDPA **TRAINING** HELPER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

**Mission Statement:** The WGSDPA believes that dissemination of widely accepted **basic** Phase C **training** techniques might promote further growth and appreciation of IGP in the United States.

New enthusiasts who drop out (stop pursuing IGP) due to the disappointment of not being able to even attempt an IGP 1 or failing miserably when doing so are lamentable situations that can be obviated.

This Program focuses on basic and fundamental concepts to help newcomers understand what can lead to success and seasoned competitors / training directors to hopefully enhance their own scores or be able to better coach those who seek their help due to the identification and discussion of the issues addressed herein.

This WGSDPA **Training Helper** Educational Program is distinct from the AWDF IGP Trial Helper Program.

**Prefatory Comments:** Sport Dog Training is not only complex, but there is **no standard** step-by-step documented process to effectuate it, like for example, standard ISO (International Organization for Standardization) principles utilized by manufacturing facilities, worldwide.

Each successful trainer who has shown the ability to succeed at the highest levels of competition **with dogs actually trained by him or her**, has very personal methods to create the finished

product. You can bet when that successful trainer, seeks to repeat his or her success with the next dog, the training methods will vary, depending on the temperament and abilities of that next dog. The point here, is that the beginning IGP enthusiast should do his or her best to acquire fundamental knowledge and a broad understanding of concepts to determine what is best for the individual situation. Surely, in the beginning, reliance on a proven successful trainer is paramount because for the first couple of years, unless you have had experience in another dog sport and even if you do have such experience in another dog sport practice, it will be very difficult (for the beginner) to truly decipher what does and does not work. Give yourself two to three years, at the least and rely on the expertise of a proven trainer until you reach a certain level. Certainly, the handler who has never titled a dog or worked a trial in protection needs a lot of guidance.

*You Can't Lead To Where You Have Not Been*

*Words From Arguably One of The Top IGP Competitors in United States History*

*You Cannot Develop Your Own Successful Style Until You Have Attained A Complete Understanding of The Style of (At Least) One Person Who Has **Already** Succeeded*

**Observation:** Even the most successful of Trial Helpers who also engage in working dogs at their club or with individuals who seek their assistance, will readily admit that **the majority of their “helper time” is spent as a Training Helper** rather than as a Trial Helper.

### **Definition of Training Helper**

A Trial Helper is one who assists the Protection Judge in a Phase C competition by donning a sleeve, helper jacket, scratch pants, and athletic footwear, to “work” dogs, hopefully in roughly the exact same way, in accordance to the IGP 1, 2 or 3 trial routine rules.

As a result of this impartial and standard activity by the Trial Helper, the judge is able to assess a Phase C score between 0 and

100 to assess the temperament and trainability of the dog and the handling and training skills of the handler within the context of the Trial (“the competition”).

Arguably, Phase C is “most important” because the trial’s winner, if the total score is tied, will be determined by the higher protection score. If the protection score is the same, then the higher obedience score. If that too is the same then the winner is the younger dog. If the dogs with the same score are littermates, I presume you have co-champions.

**A Training Helper, on the other hand, is NOT constricted by formal boundaries of IGP routine rules, and thus, uses his or her experience and skills and various tools to promote the dog’s progression towards IGP titles.** The training helper also uses equipment that the trial helper cannot utilize during trials:







Most Ignorant Statement of The Year Candidate: My puppy is 3.5 months old and CRUSHES THE REGULATION TRIAL SLEEVE!!!!

**FURTHER DELINEATION (AKA “MORE DETAIL”) THE TWO BASIC KINDS OF TRAINING HELPER (THESE CATEGORIES ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE)**

“SKILL RELIANCE” – The Skill – Reliance Training Helper **assists and instructs** the novice or developing handler with protection development. Because the Skill-Reliance Training Helper has assisted numerous other individuals to attain the IGP 3 in the past, he or she is the “leader” in this paradigm, and is responsible for the daily “work” and progression of the K9-handler team. The “Skill – Reliance” Helper calls the shots and the Handler willingly follows the lead of the Skill Reliance Helper. Of course, the Handler relays opinions and asks

questions but because the Handler has limited experience (e.g. – never titled a dog to IGP 1; attained an IGP 3 but never scored higher than 85 points in C), the Handler follows the lead of the Skill Reliance Helper).

“HANDLER-DIRECTED” – In some cases, a skilled, experienced (and hopefully successful) handler will require the help of a Training Helper but it is the Handler who “leads” /”directs” in this instance and the Training Helper follows the direction of the Handler. THERE IS NO SHAME IN THIS AND ANY “TRAINING HELPER” who takes offense or whose ego cannot accept this, should recuse him or herself. Similarly, the most prudent of Successful Handlers solicit (ask) the opinion of the Training Helper to see if (s) has missed something. Sometimes, however, the Handler has a specific goal in mind and just needs to concentrate on that specific goal. Again, this is where the Training Helper worth his or her weight in gold, subordinates any and all for the moment (perhaps, suggest things later), so that the Handler achieves the “goal of the moment.” The dog and score, after all, will be owned by the Handler.

Many of the Top Handler Competitors are also Training Helpers and exchange helper work and work the dog exactly in accordance to the specifications and requests of the handler-trainer (E.G. National and World Competitors John Paul Soares and Bryan Hendricks often “trade” helper work. Mike Diehl and Sean O’Kane also exchange Helper Work and their successes, are many times coterminous, and show the benefit of sharing and cooperating from the heart even when the two are at the same time, vying for a limited number of coveted spots e.g. WUSV Team ).

Experienced trainer – handlers understand what is going on with their canine and the development of progress. There may be issues in other phases or even issues within Phase C that the particular handler wants to address in his or her own way. The excellent training helper can do exactly what the experienced trainer-handler wants and feel just as gratified by doing so.



## **Patience As A Virtue & “The Nightmare” Club Member:**

We have already alluded to “humility” as being the ability to make one’s ego subservient based on respect for the experienced handler’s wishes and judgment that the training has to be a certain way for the day. Until now, we have only focused on the Training Helper in a very limited set of circumstances.

Let’s flip the page and focus on the Beginner or Even Intermediate Handler, one who has yet to or just attained an IGP 1. From the Training Helper’s Perspective, the “Nightmare:

- Is in a Hurry and Always Wants To Jump To the Next Step
- Employs Methods Unknown to the Training Helper or Used By The Training Helper For Another Handler
- I was watching the XYZ Website and thought it was a great idea so had my Neighbor Put On The Sleeve To....
- -I saw what you did with Club Member A, So Had My Buddy Use a Wedge to Work On The .....
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- The self-appointed “Assistant” who has never even titled a dog, giving side-advice to “help” you, The Training Helper or TD (Training Director)

It is recommended that you set the ground which will make you most comfortable to be the Training Helper for the people in your group. The enthusiastic and impatient and exuberant handler may just not know any better. It’s hard to fathom and characterize what many beginners are thinking. Bridging the gap will inure to the mutual benefit of both the Training Helper and Handler.

## **The “Modern” Versus “Traditional” Approach**

At the risk of inciting controversy, there is a school of thought that believes IGP has changed from the original intent of being a breed suitability test for the German Shepherd Dog

(“Schutzhund”) to a dog sport (IGP) that focuses on testing trainability of **modified**, perhaps even unnatural or cosmetic, behaviors.

An examination of the evolution of the blind search, for example is often cited. Contrast the top competition dog of a mere decade ago who ran the blinds wide and barely glanced in any of the blinds and after running the 5<sup>th</sup> blind, focused singularly on the HOT BLIND almost oblivious to the handler, with the top competition dog of today who runs the blinds (“directed search”) very tight; looks in each blind “for the decoy” and demonstrably after blind 5, runs to the handler to THEN be directed to the “HOT BLIND.”

Further, those who support this school of thought cite the change of vernacular (e.g. Long Bite is now called Attack on the Dog Out of Motion ... Stick Hit is Now Padded Stick Contact) as incontrovertible proof that IGP is “not” schutzhund.

Be that as it may, the traditional school eschews (refutes) the use of any tools to teach protection other than a sleeve and derivations (e.g. Half Sleeve /Wedge). The traditionalist or purist may state “I don't want to own a dog that will be happy with a ball reward when a helper with a sleeve is on the field!”

The “Modernist” on the hand, in response to the preciseness now required to attain a V, utilizes tools that were once exclusively or at least, primarily, used for obedience, such as a ball with string, to teach the blinds, to teach looking into the blinds, and even the transport and escorts.

The Modernist may have devised such training methods out of necessity, say for example, since a helper is not available at all times, or because the nervous system of the top-level competition canine is intense, and thus, the ball, arguably, provides a level of stimuli that is more easily malleable than when the helper’s sleeve or wedge is the end reward.



We make no judgment between the two approaches as indeed, every individual must find peace and happiness with their training methods.

### **Food For Thought- THEORY & The Debate**

We would like all who attend Training Helper Seminars to discuss the appropriateness and timing of the following tools. Those who feel one or any are not necessary and who have attained an IGP 3 with a V score are asked to pose counter arguments (if any):

- When do you introduce informal protection training like rag work or a flirt pole?
- Do you only start protection work after a certain age or the attainment of a certain amount of obedience (like a BH)
- What tools do you utilize to promote the best performance? – Table? Wooden Platform Near Blind to Ensure Distance? Agility Tube Between you and the Dog To Encourage Jumping / Leaping on Frontal Bites?
- A very well-known and highly successful trainer emphasizes that IGP focuses on gripping and **not biting**. Certainly, listening to a judge's critique on protection, bolsters the argument (e.g. "the grip is full" "the grip slipped" ... the transition was "poor" "the transition was excellent"). Have your Training Helper articulate on the Grip vs. the "Bite."
- Transition-this is the vernacular used to focus on the grip to out on the sleeve. More than ever, the skilled-handler times the out to show true gripping behavior and the out via the transition. Ask your Training Helper how he or she builds this. Keep in mind that Training Helpers are not limited like Trial Helpers so their motion can vary, the number of grips or slips they employ can vary and the tools they use can also vary and be exhaustive (substantial).
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## **Food For Thought: Getting the Most Points**

Both Training Helper and Handler must understand the point allocation and rules in order to position oneself for the most points and success. Here are some examples of what basic studying of the rules will reveal:

- Touching of the dog during the routine to assert control is a DQ
- Once you send the dog to the HOT BLIND, you must stop moving until the judge waves you in
- You must utter a command to release the dog upon the escape
- You should utter your out command to show “transition:
- If you don’t understand what transition (for the out) means, ask your Training Director or Training Helper
- The back transport requires a distance of 5 Paces Between Helper and Handler-K9. Being closer or further than that is considered handler help and the inability to fully demonstrate control
- During the back transport, the dog should not look like it is fussing, and instead totally concentrate on the helper (note that many a dog fusses at the corner)
- The canine cannot leave the helper during guards or in the HOT BLIND and the rule states
- The canine that refuses or does not enter the HOT BLIND is

## **The FUNDAMENTALS (SAFETY FOR ALL IS IMPORTANT)**

- 1. Be a Pole -The Training Helper uses the tie out since the handler may not be experienced enough to properly hold the leash in a way that empowers the dog and enables the helper to create the most intensity. The Training Helper has his or her hands full as (s)he needs to watch the dog, handler and ensure that the leash does not tangle up on a leg and cause an injury . The Training Helper can effectuate a “miss” from this position most**

- easily. Ask your Training Helper when and why (s)he employs a miss. Similarly, novice helpers may “help” the dog too much with their voice or the agitation whip or stick and make the dog too dependent on same for focus. Sometimes, a kick back and disappearance is ten times more effective than yelling “hey” or making a noise etc. Watching a skilled Training Helper work other dogs can only broaden your exposure and hopefully, your understanding.
2. Once the Training Helper is sure that the Handler has more of a feel and understanding of what is going on, the Handler-K9 Team “graduates” to a 6 to 10 foot line for protection work. For both 1 and 2, a harness or flat collar may be used. I have seen some very stubborn handlers insist that a prong or fur saver collar suffices yet they wonder why later, the barking is not intense or there are side issues.
  3. The Training Helper may use a rag, tug, jute roll or wedge, puppy sleeve, sleeve with plastic wrist and elbow cuff, etc. Trust your Training Helper. Don’t be obsessed with getting your dog on a trial sleeve. In the big picture, that means nothing at the stage your in and what you are trying to develop.
  4. The helper may use a leash or rope attached to the rag, jute roll or sleeve. This may provide psychological relief for the canine due to the distance. Certainly, the rope may be used to swing the sleeve or rag around to incite prey drive, but another arguable purpose is the psychological relief and distance for the developing dog upon engagement. There may be some trainers who scoff at this, stating they want a “real dog,” but even Mike Tyson learned boxing by shadow boxing, and hitting the speed bag, mitts and heavy bag. Not even Mike Tyson was thrown in with a seasoned pro boxer when he first began learning from Cus D’Amato.
  5. The Training Helper may direct you to “move” upon engagement of and release of the sleeve in a circular

- motion...then you may be directed to run your dog towards the training Helper so (s)he puts the sleeve back on or re-engages with the rag or tug... the skilled Training Helper knows exactly why he or she is doing this at that stage of development
6. The athletic Training Helper may use “blind run arounds” as part of teaching the blinds or increasing interest in and speed.... Talk to your Training Helper to better understand the theory
  7. Is the inexperienced Training Helper teaching the dog to stop barking in the blind? If your Training Helper is inexperienced and tenses up in the blind before giving a grip, he or she may be teaching the dog to actually stop barking. THINK DEEPLY ABOUT THIS. Ask a Training Helper to demonstrate how this might be unintentionally signaled and thus, taught.
  8. Eye Contact-at a recent national event, the protection judge asked the helpers to avoid eye contact with the dogs. I fathom the protection judge wanted to see the intensity of the dogs when there was no returning stimulus. Ask your training helper when he or she does and does not make eye contact. Sometimes, when a correction is administered, the helper looks away so the dog does not fully associate the correction with the helper. Thereafter the helper immediately gives a re-grip to give the dog another chance to perform the exercise correctly. It can take many instances with regrips to teach the dog the desired behavior.

## **THE FACULTY**

We have utilized different criteria to select our Invited Training Helper Faculty:

- Have documented success of having helped others attain an IGP 3 from scratch

- Have documented success of having helped others IMPROVE upon the performance level of an IGP titled dog Both of the above done by the same Training Helper for different individuals.

While the above elements constitute the main criteria, we believe that the Training Helper who **also competes** and has titled dogs him or herself (preferably to IGP 3) and who works actual trials frequently is in the best position to understand comprehensive training.