

# Agility Games

By Christy Gammage, Practice Makes Pawfect

There are multiple unique national agility organizations. Each has their own 'flavor' of agility. One might emphasize speed, another may reward consistency or distance handling. The classes offered during each organization's trials also varies. All organizations have some form of a Jumpers course where jumps and handling the dog's path are the main focus. All organizations also have a 'Standard' or 'Regular' class that is a numbered course over jumps, tunnels, weaves, and contact equipment such as A-Frame, Dog Walk and Teeter. There are other classes where the types of obstacles may be more limited (like an all tunnels course or minimal contacts) but are still a numbered course where all the dogs run the same course and faults (knocked bars, missed contact zones) and time determine success and placement. Beyond the 'normal' follow-the-numbers courses, most agility organizations also offer games or strategy classes.

One common style of games class is a point accumulation game with a distance send challenge. Depending on the organization, this class may be called Gamblers, FAST, Jackpot or Chances. Each obstacle is assigned a point value, e.g. jumps are 1 point, tunnels are 3 pts, etc. The handler creates their own course to maximize the number of points within the time limit. During their run, they also must send the dog to perform a series of obstacles while they stay behind a line on the ground 5-20 feet away. Depending on the class rules, this distance handling challenge may be after a buzzer or could be anytime during their run. A "Qualifying" run means you successfully completed the distance challenge and earned more than a pre-defined number of points. The class winner obviously has the most points (using time as a tie-breaker).

Another common game, called "Snooker" in many of the organizations, is similar to the billiards game with red balls



and numbered balls. The dog must take a 'red' marked jump before earning the right to take a non-red obstacle for points. After a series (usually 3 or 4) of red/non-red combinations, the dog then completes a short course numbered 2 through 7. Red jumps are worth 1 point and the other obstacles are worth their numbered value. The goal is to maximize the number of points earned, so trying to take that #7 obstacle after a red jump is the way to a high score. The best score (when limited to 3 reds) would be 1-7-1-7-1-7-2-3-4-5-6-7 = 51 points.

Beyond those two most common games, some organizations can get very creative with strategy classes. CPE (Canine Performance Events) has games called Colors, Wildcard and Full House.

Colors consists of 2 intertwined courses. One course may be marked with yellow numbers and the other course with blue (hence the name). The handler's strategy is to pick the course they feel their dog will succeed at and have the fastest time. Wildcard is also a numbered course, but 3 places on the course the handler has the option of taking an easier obstacle or a harder obstacle. Depending on the competitor's level, they are required to take 2 easy's and 1

hard or, at the higher level, 2 hard's and 1 easy. Full House is like Jackpot where the obstacles have point values and handler (or dog) makes up their own course, however, there is no distance challenge. The handler must design a course that will include 3 jumps, 2 tunnels or panel jumps, and 1 'Joker' (a 5 point obstacle). The Jokers are usually a contact obstacle, weaves or a combo of jumps. CPE also has a "Non-Traditional" Jackpot class where the judge makes up their own rules which they explain before the class starts. Some of these can be very creative.

Probably the most 'game-crazy' organization is TDAA (Teacup Dog Agility Association). Trials can include classes from a book of around 150 games written by Bud and Marsha Houston. You don't have to know the rules for all the different games. Prior to the class the judge will go over the rules during the class briefing. Then you get to walk your course and plan your strategy.

Most people learn agility and start trialing with the follow-the-numbers courses. But it can be great fun to figure out what would be the best course for you and your dog in a games class. With a great strategy and flawless execution, you could be a big winner. Better Practice!

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