

## **Dog Talk Articles**

# **AKC Obedience Thoughts & Ideas**

by John Cox

**STARTING ON JULY 1, 2008, THE AKC OBEDIENCE REGIONALS ARE OFF AND RUNNING—BUT LOOK WHO WAS LEFT OUT!**

**WHO IS LOOKING OUT FOR THE SPORT OF OBEDIENCE? Part I & II**

**A RUSH TO JUDGEMENT!**

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# Starting on July 1, 2008, The AKC Obedience Regionals are off and running—but look who was left out!©

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Great news! The Regional competitions are back! This time around they are brought to us by the American Kennel Club (AKC). Below is the new section to be included in the new AKC Obedience Regulations.

**“Chapter 12, Section 2. AKC Regional Competitions.** The American Kennel Club will identify yearly the events/shows to be regional qualifying events for the next year. Events will be selected based on criteria established by the American Kennel Club Companion Events Department. Regions will be based on divisions currently established for Conformation by the American Kennel Club. The only exception will be the division containing Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, which will be combined as one Division, with separate qualification criteria to be set. For all Divisions, the top four dogs based on the qualification criteria as established by the Companion Events Department will be invited to attend the American Kennel Club National Obedience Event.

“The qualification time period for regional competitors will be from July 1 to June 30 for qualification to attend the National Obedience Invitational following the June 30 cut off date.

“For events to be identified as AKC Regional Obedience competitions:

- \*1. The Selected Division event(s) must have Obedience Trials over three consecutive days. Only three consecutive Obedience Trials will be recognized as the Regional Trial. (Each Division will only have one Regional competition per year.)
- \*2. Previous shows for trials at the events must have a minimum of 80-plus entries (this may vary by region).
- \*3. If there are no events that meet the given requirements in a region, the Events Selection Committee can select a smaller show or allow another region to have two events.
- \* Criteria for Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico may vary.

“To qualify dogs must:

- Have a UD title.
- Compete in both Open B and Utility B in all three of the shows identified as an AKC Regional Competition.
- Have a cumulative score obtained from the dog’s participation in Open and Utility at the Regional Competition.
- Be ranked from highest to lowest based on their cumulative score with 1,200 points being a perfect score.
- Qualify by cumulative score as one of the top four at one Regional Competition for an invitation to the National Obedience Invitational.

“Once a dog qualifies for the National Obedience Invitational at a regional event, any placement received at subsequent regional competitions by the same dog will not be considered for additional invitations. Invitations will be awarded to the next highest scoring dog in competition until all 4 of the region placements are awarded.

“Effective July 1, 2008”

While this is good news and a good start, the new Regionals will *only apply* to the dogs with a **Utility title**. Left out of this great opportunity to promote obedience entries are the **Novice and Open dogs, plus the Utility** competitors who may never make it to the NOI due to lack of OTCH points or placing with *combined scores* at a NOI Regional; therefore, having little incentive to enter a Regional! I am of the opinion we need to have national events for all levels of competition and not just Regionals aimed for a *few* National Obedience Invitational (NOI) possible invitees. This criterion alone *is too limited* and the chance to really promote obedience is lost.

We need to look into having an additional type of event for the AKC Business Plan to promote obedience. For example, host NOI Regionals, **plus** invent a new **Divisional competition** which *will include* the Novice, Open & Utility competitors. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel, but instead set-up Divisionals the same as the new AKC NOI Regionals. By doing this, the two events could run concurrently at the same shows! Running the two events may be accomplished the same way we now do combined breed specialties.

## AKC Obedience Showcase Divisionals for Novice, Open & Utility

If we agree Obedience is in need of a boost at the Novice, Open and Utility levels, we must then do more to promote obedience at a national level and a level which will include the Novice, Open and Utility competitors. An Obedience Showcase Divisional event would *create and maintain interest in our sport* to the general public as well as the **majority** of exhibitors now showing. As we all know, the future of our sport lies with new novice obedience handlers *and* holding onto the ones we now have in the sport!

If we don’t do something soon to raise the interest back to basic obedience, plus promoting new competitors to go beyond Rally and Novice obedience, we will see a continuing drop in future NOI (and obedience) entries as there will be fewer and fewer Open and Utility-titled dogs. That will parlay into fewer UDXs, OTCHs, OMs & OGM titles in the future--not to mention the AKC and local clubs losing more entry dollars.

While the NOI and its new Regionals are an excellent start to showcase obedience, we need to have an additional national event to showcase the **Novice, Open and Utility teams** from around the country.

I submit the following proposal to showcase the Top Novice, Open and Utility dogs:

For the sake of a new term, let's call the new event **Obedience Showcase Divisionals (OSD)**.

To keep things simple and workable, the new Obedience Showcase Divisionals should be set up in the same format as the AKC NOI Regionals. For example:

**AKC Obedience Showcase Competitions.** The American Kennel Club will identify yearly the events/shows to be divisional qualifying events for the next year. Events will be selected based on criteria established by the American Kennel Club Companion Events Department. Regions will be based on divisions currently established for Conformation by the American Kennel Club. The only exception will be the division containing Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, which will be combined as one Division, with separate qualification criteria to be set. For all Divisions, the top four dogs based on the qualification criteria as established by the Companion Events Department will be invited to attend the American Kennel Club's National Obedience Showcase Competition.

The qualification time period for divisional competitors will be from July 1 to June 30 for qualification to attend the National Obedience Showcase Competition following the June 30 cut off date.

Events to be identified as AKC Obedience Showcase Divisional Competitions:

- \*1. The Selected Divisional event(s) must have Obedience Trials over three consecutive days. Only three consecutive Obedience Trials will be recognized as the Obedience Showcase Divisional Trial. (Each Obedience Showcase Division will only have one Divisional competition per year.)
- \*2. Previous shows for trials at the events must have a minimum of 80-plus entries (this may vary by region).
- \*3. If there are no events that meet the given requirements in a region, the Events Selection Committee can select a smaller show or allow another region to have two events.
- \* Criteria for Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico may vary.

To qualify dogs must:

- \*Be eligible to enter the appropriate Novice, Open or Utility class.
- \*Compete in all three of the shows identified as an AKC Obedience Showcase Divisional Competition.
- \*Have a cumulative score obtained from the dog's participation in Divisional Competition.
- \*Be ranked from highest to lowest based on their cumulative score with 600 points being a perfect score (Novice, Open, Utility) and 1,200 points being a perfect score for the dog competing in the Open and Utility classes all three days.
- \*Qualify by cumulative score as one of the top four at one Divisional Competition for an invitation to the National Obedience Showcase Competition.
- \*To qualify to enter an Obedience Showcase Divisional, a team would have to earn three (3) scores of 193 or better in their respective Novice, Open or Utility class.

Once a dog qualifies for the National Obedience Showcase competition at a divisional event, any placement received at subsequent divisional competitions by the same dog will not be considered for additional invitations. Invitations will be awarded to the next highest scoring dog in competition until all 4 of the divisional placements in Novice, Open and Utility are awarded.

By formatting the two events the same, the NOI Regionals and the OSDs could be held at the same event/trials. Now you have the makings for a "Super Bowl" 3-day weekend for obedience with everyone having their set of different goals to achieve! Consider the events as "exhibitor's shows" and create a friendly, congenial atmosphere during the three days of competition. The events can promote educated dog ownership, plus considerable media publicity which will attract large numbers of spectators to learn more about dog care, the benefits of an obedience trained dog, and responsible ownership.

**All levels of Obedience would be showcased at the Divisionals and local interest would be inspired for the majority of competitors.** Large numbers of obedience teams would now have a reachable goal to enter a Divisional and compete at their level. This type of event **is needed now** to promote obedience--an aspect now missing.

The top winners (how many to be determined) of the different Divisionals would then qualify to be invited to the **National Obedience Showcase (NOS)** competition. The NOS should be designed as a separate event competition that could be held a day prior to the NOI. Now that would be the ultimate national exposure, award and goal for the upcoming and continuing obedience competitors! Awards and suffix titles could be awarded by The American Kennel Club to the yearly top four dogs. For example the suffix titles could be, Obedience Showcase Novice (OSN), Obedience Showcase Open (OSO), Obedience Showcase Utility (OSU) and the Top National Obedience Showcase (TNOS) dog that competes in Open and Utility. The new suffix titles would follow the last obedience title in a dog's name. Keep in mind, only four titles a year would be awarded.

Would it not be nice to envision a bonus to this type of event, that being larger numbers of quality obedience classes would spring up again to meet the demand? The class goals will be to aim towards the local AKC Divisional. New people will be welcomed into the sport, having been exposed to the local Divisionals and observing the obtainable goals for the beginners. There is nothing like a reachable goal to inspire and promote a sport to the newcomers!

Entries at the local AKC Obedience Trials would escalate in **all classes** as teams worked towards their AKC Obedience Showcase Divisional three qualifying scores.

If you, too, are in favor of such an event that includes the Novice, Open and Utility levels at future **AKC Obedience Showcase Divisionals**, let Mr. Curt Curtis (AKC Director of Companion Dog Events) know how you feel. Now is the time to start the movement so roll up YOUR sleeves and get to work! We are the masses at this point in time and it is up to US to secure OUR sport's future. You may contact Mr. Curtis at [cac@akc.org](mailto:cac@akc.org).

# Who is looking Out for The Sport of Obedience?

## Part I

By John Cox

This is *not* a whining article but a call to arms for **more** support and for the promotion of the Sport of Obedience. **We need to better promote our sport and bring it into the bright spotlight for the general public to view.** We are NQ-ing in this field. You all know the value of the well-trained dog as a companion to man and the positive reflection it has on our sport. Does the public know this? Do they have a chance to see this? The numbers are very small!

The public is well aware of the Westminster KC conformation show that is televised on the USA network and Agility trials televised on the Animal Planet channel. Where does the public go to watch obedience? Do they even know there is such a sport? We did have a weak start of the promotion of the AKC Invitational on a vague cable sports channel. It was a start and that is good! We need to further improve this start and rise to higher goals. We just can't sit back and use the excuse that obedience does not have the \$ behind it. We need to build more interest in our sport and the \$ will come and generate more \$ for future promotions.

Congratulations to the conformation and agility sides of our Sport of Dogs for being on the ball and introducing the public to the world of dogs and **some** of the things dogs can do besides sitting in the back yard. This was very evident at the Rose City Classic in Portland, Oregon. This circuit is a HUGE four-day dog show weekend with Agility, Conformation and Obedience events. Eukanuba Dog Food was there with signs all over the conformation and agility rings promoting their product. Strange thing, there were no signs by the obedience rings. *If fact, it was hard to tell this was an AKC event and not a dog food event!* Yes, companies now help underwrite many shows and I have no problem with this at all. We are lucky such companies will spend the dollars to find a new customer base for their product and thus all of us show-goers benefit. Let's face the bottom line dog shows are expensive and to host a quality dog show sponsors are *needed* in today's market place.

Conformation was promoted very well with a televised event for the Animal Planet channel featuring the Groups and Best In Show. This is great! Agility was promoted and all the four-day results (with photos!) were up on the AKC web page Tuesday (the day after the show). This is great too! Where were the Obedience trials featured? We had the National Obedience Champion for 2001 at the show and this lovely team went High in Trial and High Combined all FOUR days! Unbelievable! When it came time to present the obedience awards during the televised groups, the cameras were *shut OFF!* What a lost opportunity to show to the world a brief shot of a National AKC Obedience Champion going through a few paces.

I just point out the above as *one* example of our sport NOT being promoted. We need a national publicity person, or team, to build more public interest and to insure obedience is covered and promoted better. Let's not whine about the conformation and agility folks. *Lets learn from them!* They are doing their job and quite well I might add.

Let's learn how the others do it and work toward a better promotion of our sport before it is too late. It is past time to get out of the box and start to **THINK BIG!** We have a fantastic sport rich in history, plus one the public loves to watch, and understands, so let's go to work and promote it!

# Who is looking Out for The Sport of Obedience?

## Part II

By John Cox

Obedience has hit a pothole—an “attitude” pothole. Some even think we are in a ditch waiting for a tow truck that is not coming. It is time we roll up our sleeves and come to the rescue of our chosen sport and hobby. We are all in the **sport of dogs** but one part of the sport (obedience) is being polarized and is becoming known as a group of whiners. From all reports, we’re viewed in this less-than-flattering manner across the country. This article is a wake up call and a call to arms for an improvement in attitude towards obedience. If you *really do care, please* read on.

**This article is aimed at you!** I want you to Halt, Sit and take a moment to think about what are YOU doing for obedience. Can you take a long honest look at yourself and answer a few questions? Are *you* looking out for obedience? **Do you really care about this area of the sport?** Or, are you one of *those* just pointing a finger, complaining and doing nothing constructive? (We have all been guilty of this from time-to-time, myself included). When was the last time you gave *your time* to the sport without looking for something in return, be it monetary or praise? When was the last time you expressed your appreciation to an event chairman, ring steward, or that you wrote a positive letter to a club stating that you LIKED what they did for obedience? Or, did you take that energy and spend your time venting on all that was wrong, doing NOTHING to help fix the problem(s)? Did you try to help once by joining a club, and then threw in the slobber towel when your suggestions were not adopted? Or, have you always sat on the sidelines?

### Five areas that need attention:

1. Let’s start by looking at ourselves as dog lovers and not categorize ourselves (or let others) as “obedience people.” We are all in the Sport of Dogs. There are many of us who like all aspects and events in the sport and cross over on different occasions. Some do it all at the same show! If you are *not* one of these handlers, have you taken time at a show to go around and learn from the “other” rings and ask questions? When was the last time you sat at a conformation ring and looked at the dog’s structure, or temperament, and gave some thought as the role it plays in a good performance dog? This might be the BEST place to look for your next dog.

2. Don’t let your training (or lack of) become the root of a complaint. Too many times handlers start complaining because someone or something happened and caused a problem with the performance in the obedience ring. I sure did until I learned the meaning behind a banner (of just two words) in the building where I train. It reads “**OH WELL!**” We **must** learn and implement a positive attitude towards obedience as is done in other performance events such tracking and agility. Failure rates seem to run high in these two events, but the handlers tend to look at what went right and they are **happy with the results!** Why is obedience becoming known as a “group” dwelling on the negative when things do not go right? How do you react? What example do you set for others to observe? Are you being perceived as a whiner? Or, are you now a new role model?

3. If you feel a club is a little lax in providing a good venue for an obedience trial what do you do about it? Do you stop and think the club might need a new member (like YOU) who will help and give positive guidance and involvement? Have you joined a club and become involved? Have you stuck it out even if things did not go your way? Or, do you sit perfectly square bitching on all that is wrong and doing nothing towards improvement? Are you involved in a club and help host a trial ONCE a year for *others* to enjoy? Or, are you on the taking end *all or most* of the time?

4. If you are between dogs, training for the next level, taking a break etc., have you gotten in touch with a club (that you are NOT a member of) and offered to help set-up or takedown rings? Or, do you offer to steward for obedience and donate your time? Careful, this is starting to sound like work now. You will get nothing in return except good warm fuzzy feelings from assisting others instead of yourself. Are you sure you want to do this and HELP obedience like it has helped you?

5. Clubs and private trainers need to encourage their members and students to take a *more active role* and become involved with the process of running a trial. If we continue to lose trials, we lose one of the reasons we train our dogs. Surely, you can find the time to help out at ONE trial a year. When was the last time you donated your time or a few dollars back into the sport, and I don't mean entry dollars! It is time we give back to the sport that has given to us!

**How did you like your answers? Where did you place in your thoughts if the above questions were a test—1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, or did you NQ?**

**Our sport is in need of a front-end alignment from hitting a few potholes. Those potholes are best defined as apathy and negativity. The good news is we are NOT in a ditch (yet) waiting for a tow to the dump.**

I do believe we need to address problems in obedience and do it in a POSITIVE manner before we lose any more participants, detract new participants and lose any more trials. Yes, there have been clubs that have dropped obedience due to some of the answers to the questions posed above. Sad but true! Were you a part of it? Are you partly responsible? Careful where that finger is pointing!

The solution is yours and yours alone. What are YOU going to do? Are you going to do anything or just sit and watch others? If you are going to do something, when will it be? This is not an AKC problem, IT IS OUR PROBLEM. I sincerely hope your actions will be **something** positive! Please save this article and read it again when you see something wrong or start to bitch, and then do nothing positive to fix what is wrong.

Obedience is in need of *your* talents and positive energy TODAY. Help pitch in and give it a front-end alignment *and* tune-up so the sport may run smooth again. Remember back to what attracted you into obedience, the fun you have had and the folks you have met. You have the power to now repeat what were the "good old days" in your mind. You can be a part of and make "new" good old days for the future participants to talk about.

The Long Sit exercise is now over, time to get back to the enjoyment of this sport and leave the negativity and apathy in the poop bag!

If you missed Part I, email for a copy at [dog-talk@comcast.net](mailto:dog-talk@comcast.net)

# A RUSH to Judgment

By John Cox

A couple years ago, The American Kennel Club (AKC) adopted a new program to help promote new obedience judges. The program is designed whereby one may apply for judging status to judge *just* the **non-regular** classes. The benefits of this program are well intended for the individual wanting to be a judge, plus it helps clubs in their options for judges and the sport in general. As it stands now, a person who has put a Utility Dog (UD) title on a dog contacts the AKC and asks for approval to judge non-regular classes only. After the requirement of the UD is likely verified, the AKC issues a judges number to the individual and they are then ready to judge **any or all** of the non-regular classes, i.e. Pre-Novice, Veterans, Graduate Novice, Brace, Team, Versatility, Rally, or any other non-regular class a club might have approved! Now let's just think about this for a moment; are they **really ready** and **prepared** to step into the ring to **judge** dogs and handlers with this minimum requirement?

Let us take a look at the approval requirements and approval process for an individual to be approved to judge the **regular class(es)**, as outlined on the AKC web page. Keep in mind, the non-regular classes have the *same* exercises as the regular classes, *plus* a few more!

## “SIX MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:

1. Owned, trained and handled a dog that has been awarded an AKC Utility Dog Obedience Title.
2. Have been active in the sport a minimum of **six** consecutive years.
3. Have acted as a steward in Novice at AKC member or licensed trials a minimum of ten (**10**) times.
4. Judged at AKC Sanctioned A or B Obedience Matches a minimum of five (**5**) times. (Each assignment to judge a non-regular class at an AKC trial with a minimum of ten (**10**) dogs competing, may substitute for a match requirement. Apprentice judging under two (**2**) judges with a minimum of ten (**10**) dogs in each class may, also, substitute for a match requirement).
5. Actively participated as assistant trainer or as a trainer in a dog-training club or similar organization.
6. Attended an AKC Obedience Seminar within the past three (**3**) years.

Check out the AKC web page for further details:

<http://www.akc.org/dic/events/obedience/judgingrequirements.cfm>

“All applicants are required to pass a written test consisting of **50** multiple-choice questions, followed by a personal interview with one of the Obedience Field Representatives. The Obedience Department will schedule a mutually convenient obedience trial where the test and interview may be held with the applicant and representative.

“Applications are reviewed at the first available monthly meeting of the staff and board committees and referred to the next monthly meeting of the Board of Directors for final determination. Following review, applicants will receive written notification of the Board's action. If approved, the applicant's name will be published on the Secretary's Page of the first available issue of the *Gazette* as a Provisional Obedience judge and the judge may then accept judging assignments for the class approved.

“As a Provisional judge, he or she must judge a minimum of five (**5**) classes with at least ten (**10**) dogs competing in each class. In addition, an Obedience Field Representative must complete a satisfactory observation judging the approved class. (It is helpful for the Provisional judge to inform the Obedience Department when judging assignments are accepted, for ease in scheduling the observation.)”

Now compare the above criteria to that of the applicant for only non-regular judging status. All they do is mail in proof of a UD, the title is verified, and they are issued a non-regular judges number! Do you think the qualifications are there for most individuals to run an obedience ring and judge dogs in one or more of the non-regular classes listed above? It may be for some, but this program is for all that apply and met the only requirement--a UD title.

Some may argue that it is JUST a non-regular class and who cares? Tell that to the individuals who spend the money to enter (plus all the other expenses associated in showing dogs that day). Does this individual, who is judging in the ring, have any concept of running an efficient ring, having extensive knowledge of the Obedience Regulations (i.e. Chapter 1 & 2 or, does anyone know if they even read the Regulations?), plus knowing how to score a working team? Remember, their *only* minimum requirement was to put **one** UD on **one** dog!

I believe there should be more extensive requirements for the non-regular judges other than having earned a UD title *only*. The teams entering the ring to be judged deserve and demand that the individual who is judging should have at least gone through "some kind" of judge training preparation to *judge*. The non-regular class entrants should not be the training "guinea pigs"! They did not pay an entry fee for this "privilege." Keep in mind, these judges are judging at an AKC **trial**, not at an OA, OB or OC AKC sanctioned match.

The new non-regular judge's intentions may be the best, but what is their experience or knowledge in handling all matters that can, and will, arise? Who has tutored them to be aware of possible judging situations and how to react to them? It was not the AKC! Do they have any experience or knowledge in entering scores, excusals, conflicts etc. in the Judge's Book? Do they know the procedure for when a dog attacks (or attempts to attack) another dog? Do they know how to disqualify a dog for attempting to attack, or attacking, a person? Keep this in mind, if they do **not** have the knowledge to handle such situations, these dogs will be back in the ring and maybe next to you and your dog the next time around! Do they know how to set up a ring, develop a fair heeling pattern for all breeds, plus are they aware of good and bad judging positions for **all** exercises? How does merely titling a dog to a UD prepare a person to judge such matters? I think you know that answer. These issues need to be addressed, as there are major flaws in the approval program for new non-regular judges. The prospective new judge needs to be better prepared by having met a more detailed criterion **before** the non-regular number is issued. It is also not fair to the new judge to get in over their head and not realize the subtle, and not so subtle, nuances of judging until after they enter the ring to take on the job.

Consider the following criteria for non-regular applicants. (They are less than one-half the requirement of a **regular** class judge.)

**SIX MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Owned, trained and handled a dog that has been awarded an AKC Utility Dog Obedience Title.
2. Have been active in the sport a minimum of **three** consecutive years.
3. Have acted as a steward in Novice, Open or Utility classes at AKC member or licensed trials a minimum of five (**5**) times.
4. Judged at AKC Sanctioned A or B Obedience Matches a minimum of three (**3**) times. (Each assignment to judge a minimum of ten (**10**) dogs competing.)
5. Apprentice judging with no fewer than two (**2**) judges with a minimum of ten (**10**) dogs in each class may, substitute for one (**1**) match requirement.
6. Attended an AKC Obedience Seminar within the past three (**3**) years.

The above would better prepare the applicant for the capability of stepping into a ring at an AKC trial and doing a decent job the first time around. They should **not** be granted the privilege to judge at a **trial** (I am not talking matches) with their only requirement being one UD title. Also, the entrants in the non-regular classes at AKC *trials* are not being considered under the current requirements and, in fact, are overlooked! The sport deserves better. Let's not rush to judgment!

Also consider this possibility: IF there are new non-regular classes coming down the pipeline, which may be **titled classes**, do we not want experienced judges passing judgment for legs towards such titles? The **non-regular** judge program now in effect needs to be reviewed and updated.

Do not misunderstand the premise of this article. I very much like the program the AKC has enacted for bringing new judges into the sport and giving them the opportunity to start with judging the non-regular classes only, if that is what they have chosen. However, I strongly feel this program needs to be improved and enhanced. Let's not send a judge into the ring to judge whose only requirement, experience and knowledge is titling a dog. This is not enough! We should want, and insist, the new judges be better prepared to judge the dog and handler teams so their experience (judge and handler) will be a very positive and rewarding one. Here lies one of the best promotional spins for the sport, which in turn help keeps the entries up. The way the program now stands can lead future judges to fail (and possibly the entrant due to poor judging). It is not fair to them or the sport. It is also not a good reflection on the AKC and its approval process. This is not the way the AKC has done things in the past in their judge approval programs. Today's non-regular approval program will lead to a real public relations snafu in the future if nothing is done to fix it. The program needs to be repaired and repaired soon.