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For the Saint Bernard



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A MUCH-OVERLOOKED AREA OF TRAINING

--Sue Cox

Have you spent the time and put much effort into training your dog to line up for the next exercise? How about to enter the ring, walk to the designated place to start and have an attentive dog.....not one which is sniffing the ground, looking around, and not ready to compete? This is seen all too often in the Rally ring, but much too frequently in the Obedience ring, too. The team is being judged from the moment they step into the ring until they pass the gate on their way out.

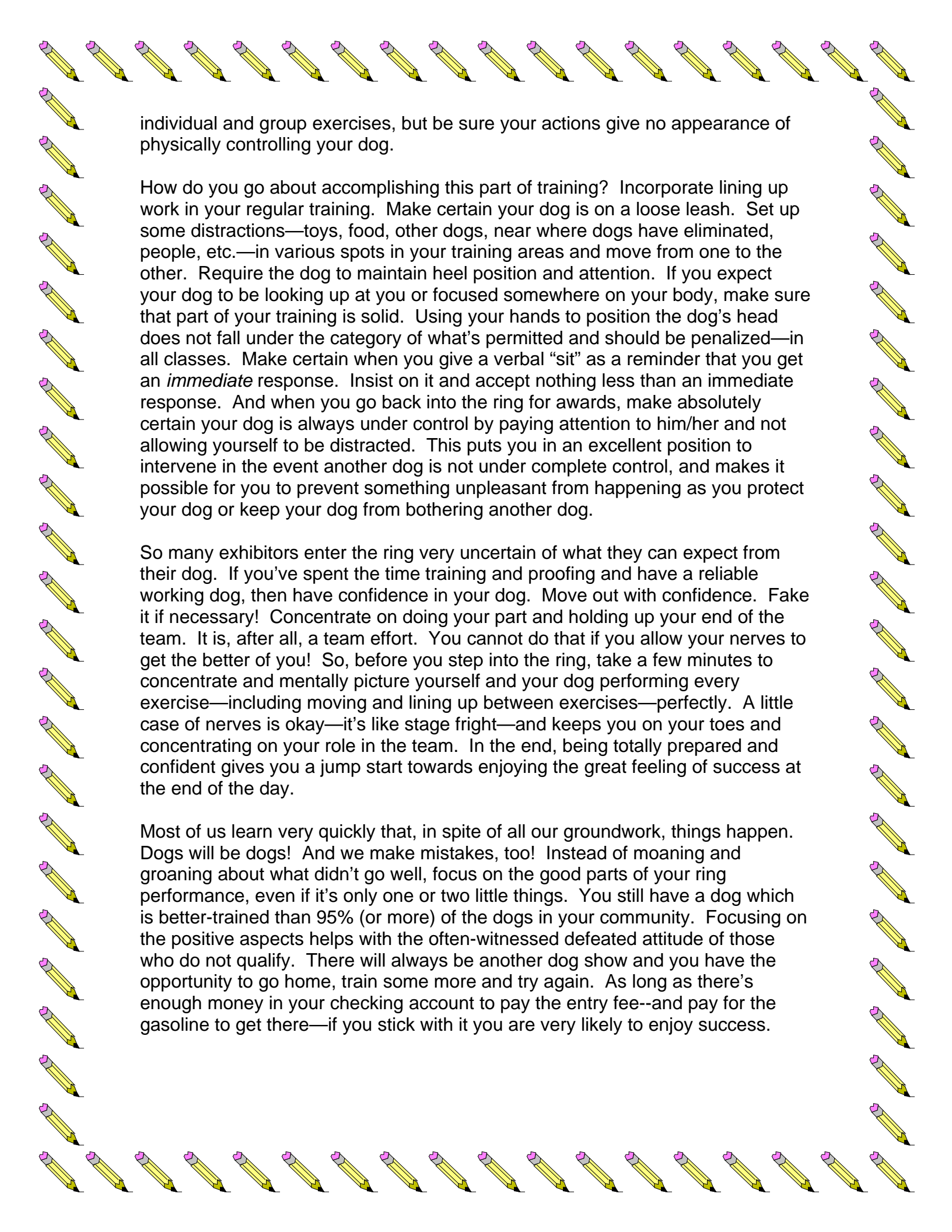
Why is it an important area to address in your training? For starters, it gets a handler in a twitter when their dog is clearly not under control at the very start or when they line up for the next exercise. That doesn't bode well for a good start to any performance! How you handle it may well lead to deductions from your score.....before you even get started.

In Rally, if you end up tugging or pulling up on the leash or using your hands to position the dog, you will be penalized. Using the leash and collar (or your hands) to make corrections will likely lead to your being excused. That's a quick waste of about \$25!

In the Obedience ring, Novice exhibitors may "gently guide the dog by the collar." That generally means there is no real pressure put on the dog's neck, i.e. no action which resembles a correction or that can be seen as not gentle (and that will be in the eyes of the judge). Using your hands to position the dog will lead to a minor to substantial penalty under "Miscellaneous Penalties." This covers the action of physically bringing and/or holding the dog's head up to focus on the handler. A dog which is clearly not under control will be excused. And that also applies to the times you are between exercises in Novice.

Open and Utility exhibitors are expected to present a dog which is under control at all times. A substantial penalty (3 or more points) is to be applied if they use their hands or the collar to control or position their dog. Also subject to being penalized is lack of prompt response to the handler's commands or signals before, between and after exercises. This applies after the last exercise, too! Watch that you are not grabbing your dog by the collar (as in controlling it) as you begin to exit the ring or move to get your leash. Obviously, you may take hold of the collar in order to reattach the leash. A good idea is to have the dog sit and then attach the leash. That eliminates any doubt that you're holding back or controlling the dog with the collar.

Not to be overlooked is control when filing into the ring for the group exercises. Again, Novice dogs may be gently guided by the collar; for the dogs in Open, it's a hands-off process of lining up and getting into place or position, which applies to the time between groups, too. You may certainly pet and praise between



individual and group exercises, but be sure your actions give no appearance of physically controlling your dog.

How do you go about accomplishing this part of training? Incorporate lining up work in your regular training. Make certain your dog is on a loose leash. Set up some distractions—toys, food, other dogs, near where dogs have eliminated, people, etc.—in various spots in your training areas and move from one to the other. Require the dog to maintain heel position and attention. If you expect your dog to be looking up at you or focused somewhere on your body, make sure that part of your training is solid. Using your hands to position the dog's head does not fall under the category of what's permitted and should be penalized—in all classes. Make certain when you give a verbal "sit" as a reminder that you get an *immediate* response. Insist on it and accept nothing less than an immediate response. And when you go back into the ring for awards, make absolutely certain your dog is always under control by paying attention to him/her and not allowing yourself to be distracted. This puts you in an excellent position to intervene in the event another dog is not under complete control, and makes it possible for you to prevent something unpleasant from happening as you protect your dog or keep your dog from bothering another dog.

So many exhibitors enter the ring very uncertain of what they can expect from their dog. If you've spent the time training and proofing and have a reliable working dog, then have confidence in your dog. Move out with confidence. Fake it if necessary! Concentrate on doing your part and holding up your end of the team. It is, after all, a team effort. You cannot do that if you allow your nerves to get the better of you! So, before you step into the ring, take a few minutes to concentrate and mentally picture yourself and your dog performing every exercise—including moving and lining up between exercises—perfectly. A little case of nerves is okay—it's like stage fright—and keeps you on your toes and concentrating on your role in the team. In the end, being totally prepared and confident gives you a jump start towards enjoying the great feeling of success at the end of the day.

Most of us learn very quickly that, in spite of all our groundwork, things happen. Dogs will be dogs! And we make mistakes, too! Instead of moaning and groaning about what didn't go well, focus on the good parts of your ring performance, even if it's only one or two little things. You still have a dog which is better-trained than 95% (or more) of the dogs in your community. Focusing on the positive aspects helps with the often-witnessed defeated attitude of those who do not qualify. There will always be another dog show and you have the opportunity to go home, train some more and try again. As long as there's enough money in your checking account to pay the entry fee--and pay for the gasoline to get there—if you stick with it you are very likely to enjoy success.

COSTLY HANDLER ERRORS IN THE OBEDIENCE RINGS

By Sue Cox

We all make handler errors from time to time. Judges are expected to penalize us for those errors—something none of us are happy about at the time and most of the time we're unaware of our action(s) which led to the penalty. Most handler errors are not conscious actions, but a judge is not to differentiate between conscious and unconscious movements or actions. A handler who makes no errors in their performance should have a better score than the same performance by another team which included errors on the part of the handler.

The judge is expected to carry a mental picture of the theoretically perfect performance in each exercise and score each dog and handler against this visualized standard which shall combine the utmost in willingness, enjoyment and precision on the part of the dog, and naturalness, gentleness and smoothness in handling. Don't overlook that word utmost—of or to the greatest or highest degree; the most or the greatest that is possible, extreme limit or degree.

So, just where are handler errors being made? Let's start with Ch. 2, Sec. 20 of the Obedience Regulations—Commands and Signals. "Delay in following a judge's order to give a command or signal must be penalized, unless the judge directs the delay." "Any unusual noise or motion may be considered to be a signal. Position of the arms and hands and movements of the head and/or body that aid the dog will be considered additional signals." Delay in following the judge's order is often seen during the heeling exercises with turns and halts, on exercises where the dog is sent away or called to the handler, and in the Group Exercises. We're not talking about the normal time it takes to respond to an order and then to react, nor are exhibitors expected to react the exact moment the words come out of the judge's mouth.

Hand position, described in Ch. 2, Sec. 19 of the Regulations, seems to cause some confusion for exhibitors. It's very clearly defined, but variations on what is permitted are frequently observed. Some handlers use "modified" versions of the hand/arm positions allowed while heeling and on exercises where the dog returns to sit in front of the handler. Clearly, there are other handlers who don't know what's required or are totally confused. If you don't know, get a copy of the Regulations (also available online from the AKC web site) and review that section. The judge isn't to overlook errors because you are ignorant of what is required.

Many exhibitors overlook Ch. 2, Sec. 23, Handling between Exercises. In Novice, you may gently guide the dog by the collar—and any part of the collar is okay. Open and Utility exhibitors will receive a substantial penalty (3 or more points) for guiding the dog by the collar or physically, or if the dog is not readily controllable. This applies to the Group Exercises, too, which comes as a surprise to many exhibitors.

The list of handler errors on heeling exercises is rather lengthy! In addition to the errors mentioned above, you'll find handlers not walking briskly, failing to noticeably accelerate speed forward (run) on the fast or decelerate speed forward on the slow, hesitating on turns, making wide turns, anticipating turns and other orders from a judge, drifting to ring barriers, moving into or away from the dog, adapting to the dog's speed, the handler's pace/speed is not consistent throughout the Figure Eight, and making wide circles around the Figure Eight posts.

On the Stand for Examination, handlers lose points for having their hand(s) on the dog and/or collar when giving the "stay" command, not being in heel position when giving the "stay," not going "about 6 feet" in front of the dog, backing away from the dog, and not returning to heel position. Any rough treatment in making the dog stand is also subject to penalty.

Errors on the Recall and Finish occur not only in Novice, but in Open and Utility. Loud commands, delay between the dog's name and command, delay in following the judge's order, body motions with commands or signals, holding signals, lengthy or exaggerated signals, signals not given in a single motion, handlers shifting position, and incorrect arm/hand positions are some of the handler errors observed.