Who is Responsible?
THE JUDGES OR THE FIELD TRIAL COMMITTEE?

By John Stracka

Few subjects generate more chatter at field trials than the division of authority between Judges and the Field Trial Committee. It is hoped that after reading this article, competitors and Field Trial Committees will realize and accept that the Judges "and" the Field Trial Committee are equally responsible for event management and event rules. While we may roll our eyes at the decisions and choices some Judges make, or maybe even the Judges that are selected to judge, the Field Trial Committee is more responsible for the outcome of the weekend because they are the final word, the arbitrator! Not for who places and not for where the birds land, but most every other poor outcome can be tied to the Field Trial Committee not managing its trial.

Most of us understand that Judges determine the merits, quality of dog work, and resulting placements. Far less understood is who has authority when questions arise involving safety, scheduling, weather, rule compliance, handler conduct, injuries, aggressive dogs, management or operational issues.

Our AKC Retriever Field Trial Rules establish two distinct but overlapping spheres of responsibility. Judges control the evaluation of dogs and matters relating to field trial performance. The Field Trial Committee is charged with planning, managing, and conducting the event in accordance with AKC rules and policies. When questions of authority situations arise, confusion can occur because people attempt to answer a management question with a judging rule, or a judging question with a management rule. Or, we just point fingers at someone else because maybe we are running a dog and we don't want to ruffle feathers.

Two provisions of the AKC Retriever Field Trial Rules provide the framework for nearly every question of authority and are discussed in this article:

Chapter 5, Section 3:
"The decisions of the Judges shall be final in all matters relating to the field trial performance of the dogs."

Chapter 6, Section 4:
"The Field Trial Committee of a club holding a licensed or member trial shall have the authority to decide upon any matter arising during the running of the trial, except a matter coming within the jurisdiction of the Judges..."

Neither provision makes Judges subordinate to the committee, nor the committee subordinate to the Judges. Rather, the rulebook divides authority. Judges are entrusted with evaluating dogs and determining merit. Field Trial Committees are entrusted with conducting safe, orderly, and "rule-compliant" events. Read that last one again - Field Trial Committees are responsible for rule-compliant events! This should be emphasized because its so frequently lost on people on The Field Trial Committees - even at our National Championships!

The following questions are based on situations that may arise at retriever field trials. They are intended to educate and inform Judges, committee members, marshals, and competitors to review and understand the AKC Retriever Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedures, and to better understand where authority and responsibility reside when difficult situations arise. In many cases, the answer to questions are not found in a single rule. Instead, it requires reading several provisions together and determining whether the issue primarily concerns the performance of dogs, the conduct of the event, or both.

Where safety, scheduling, misconduct, weather, logistics, or rule compliance are involved, the committee authority is absolute. Where the question concerns evaluation of dog work, Judges retain final authority. It bears repeating, the governing framework regarding authority at trials begins with two key provisions: Chapter 5, Section 3 states that Judges are final in all matters relating to field trial performance of dogs, while Chapter 6, Section 4 grants the Field Trial Committee authority to decide matters arising during the trial except those within the jurisdiction of the Judges.

The following rule citations will pertain to most, if not all of these proposed questions:

- Chapter 5, Section 3 – Judges are final in matters relating to field trial performance of dogs.
- Chapter 6, Section 2 – Committee has complete responsibility for planning and conducting the trial.
- Chapter 6, Section 3 – Committee responsible for compliance with rules except matters under sole jurisdiction of Judges.
- Chapter 6, Section 4 – Committee may decide matters arising during the trial except those within Judges' jurisdiction.
- Standard Procedure For Non-Slip Retriever Trials, Trial Procedure - Paragraph 3 – The cooperation between Judges and the Field Trial Committee is anticipated in conducting tests.

Common Questions at Field Trials

1.) Lightning has struck, thunder is heard within 10 miles of the event. Should the Field Trial Committee stop the trial or must they get the Judge's approval?

The Judges may suspend the stake and/or the Field Trial Committee may suspend the stake. Either may act to suspend the stake. There should be mutual agreement to stop a stake, but in the absence of a Judge's decision or agreement with the Judges, the committee should absolutely stop the stake until it's safe to proceed. The committee has the authority and responsibility to do so.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 2 and Section 4.

2.) A safety concern is raised regarding a test. May the Field Trial Committee require a change to the test to remove the hazard?

This question requires determining whether the issue is primarily one of dog evaluation or event management and safety. Where safety, scheduling, misconduct, weather, logistics, or rule compliance are involved, committee authority is absolute. Where the question concerns evaluation of dog work, Judges retain authority.

Apply the governing principle: Judges control dog performance issues; committees control event management issues unless a specific rule provides otherwise. In this case, the Field Trial Committee may and should insist that the safety hazard is eliminated prior to the stake running.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 4 with emphasis on Chapter 6, Section 2.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

3.) A dog is injured during a stake, and the Judges want to continue the stake. Should the Field Trial Committee suspend the stake or do the Judges decide if the stake continues?

The following is printed in every event catalog from Entry Express.

In compliance with AKC Rulebook and the Dealing with Misconduct guide, Section V, page 6, "When a dog is seriously injured or dies in connection with an event, the Event Committee must conduct a preliminary investigation... as part of the mandatory investigation required when a dog is seriously injured..., the Event Committee should immediately intervene to consider/determine the further possibility of injury/death to other animals. Only after a close inspection of the grounds being utilized and by a collective decision of the Committee in consultation with the Judges should a test be allowed to continue."

THIS MEANS THE STAKE STOPS, THE JUDGES NOTIFY THE EVENT COMMITTEE AND THE STAKE DOES NOT RESTART UNTIL THE EVENT COMMITTEE INVESTIGATES THE INJURY AND ITS CAUSE. ONLY AFTER THE EVENT COMMITTEE MEETS WITH THE JUDGES AND BY JOINT APPROVAL OF BOTH THE COMMITTEE AND THE JUDGES MAY A TEST BE CONTINUED. IT IS A JOINT RESPONSIBILITY TO DECIDE TO CONTINUE WITH ANY TEST WHEN A DOG IS SERIOUSLY INJURED OR DIES - (cannot continue a test where veterinarian care is deemed necessary or a dog dies.) IN SUMMARY, JUDGES ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT ALL SERIOUS INJURIES IMMEDIATELY TO THE EVENT COMMITTEE BEFORE CONTINUING ANY TEST AND THE EVENT COMMITTEE MUST REPORT ALL INJURIES IN ITS EVENT REPORT TO THE AKC, INCLUDING THE INVESTIGATION AND OUTCOME.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 3. Dealing with Misconduct: Explicitly provides direction for Field Trial Committee.

4.) Can the Field Trial Committee declare an ending time for a stake or do the Judges alone have this control over a stake start and stop times?

The committee has the right to state an ending time and a joint decision with Judges is always preferred. The Field Trial Committee runs the operations including worker availability so the final authority rests with the Committee.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 4.

5.) A rule is violated in a test design, does the Field Trial Committee have the authority and responsibility to require the issue be corrected or do Judges alone control test design?

Yes, the committee does have the authority to require the issues be corrected.

The rule reads that the committee shall be held responsible for compliance with all Field Trial Rules and Procedures except those coming under the sole jurisdiction of the Judges. If Judges are not following a rule or procedure, the Field Trial Committee has the specific duty and responsibility to ensure the issue is corrected.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 3 applies.

6.) A test is designed that is believed by the Field Trial Committee to be too large for the heat later in the day. Can the Field Trial Committee determine the test is too large and threatens dog safety? Can the Field Trial Committee determine the stake is done for the day or is the decision up to the Judges alone?

These should be joint decisions between the Judges and the Field Trial Committee. However, if the committee determines it is unsafe to continue due to heat, they can stop the series. Swimming pools to cool the dogs are an indication somebody is wor-

ried about the heat - generally when the pools come out, we need to consider if the test maybe too big for conditions.

The potential issues related to temperatures should be resolved during set up or at least before the test beginning - not after the test has started because that is when potentially poor decisions tend to crop up.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 4.

7.) The lighting is not adequate to begin or continue a stake. May the Field Trial Committee postpone the start or ending of a stake, until guns are conspicuous per the rule book or do the Judges exclusively decide when a stake starts or stops?

Yes, the committee may postpone the start, or the ending, if they believe the visibility is inadequate. If a Judge says " it will get better in a few dogs," somebody is not doing their job. This should be a joint decision, but, if the Judges insist on starting in this situation and the committee doesn't agree, the Field Trial Committee's decision takes precedence.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 4 applies.

8.) A dog is aggressive towards another dog, and the dogs get into a conflict behind the holding blind and Judges. Do the Judges exclusively decide what occurs, or is the Field Trial Committee required to resolve it? Who reports what, to whom?

Here we have potentially two paths to take. One, the Judges can disqualify the dog and report it on their judging sheets and in the club's report to AKC. Two, if there is an injury and the committee disqualifies the dog, they must file a report with the Executive Secretary of the AKC. Either may make a decision to DQ the dog, but the reporting structure is outlined in the rulebook.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 6, Section 3 applies as well as DQ'd by Judges and DQ'd by committee.

Also see Dealing with Misconduct

9.) A handler is unable to be located and is supposed to be running at a stake. Can the Judges put the handler on the clock? Can the stake marshal put the handler on the clock? Can the Chief Marshal put the handler on the clock? Can either turn the handler away as a no-show?

The Judges, together or just with the approval of the Field Trial Committee, may place a dog on the clock for 15 minutes. (Neither the marshal or the Judges alone have the authority to place a handler on the clock.)

All efforts should be made to locate and notify a handler that they are scheduled to run. The committee and the Chief Marshal should make effective communications between the stakes possible regarding any changes in the running order.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 14, Section 2, paragraph 6.

10.) A competing dog runs into the field and interferes with a working dog. Can the Judges put the dog out of the stake? Can the Judges put the dog out of the entire trial? Can the Field Trial Committee put the dog out of the entire trial?

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Where the judges and/or field trial committee are not performing their duties and/or responsibilities, what is the process for a participant notifying the AKC?

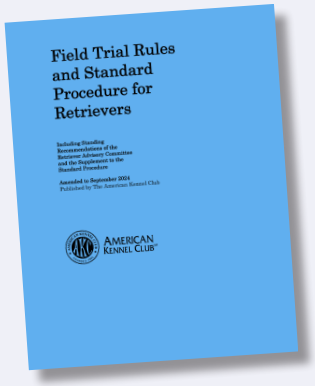
The proper procedure would be to contact the Event Chairperson or Event Secretary to ask if they are aware of the problem and the procedures to be followed. Experience tells us that most committee failures are not due to their failure to read the rulebook, it's that they are unsure how to initiate the necessary action. If either ignores the request to cure a problem, we will strongly suggest contacting an AKC Field Representative for intervention. Most of the time and especially on weekends, Russ Reavis, the AKC Field Director for Retrievers, is available via cell phone. The call needs to be made immediately when no action is being taken regarding rules, safety or procedures.

Russ can be reached at **303-550-2758.**

Judges and members of the field trial committees, when accepting assignments, consent to represent the AKC, be present at events, and to oversee the responsibilities which clearly include that the tests are developed and executed within the Rules. Trials should be executed without personal bias, unfounded interpretations, interference with Judges, or personal preferences regarding event rules and procedures. The AKC considers the FTC and Judges to be a cohesive team.

Russ Reavis
AKC Field Director for Retrievers

Large Version of the AKC Rule Book is Now Available at the RN website!



We currently have an 8.5 x 11 version of the ***Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedure for Retrievers*** booklet available to download for FREE on our website, or for purchase if you want to get a book mailed to you.

www.theretrievernews.com

NOTE: *You can also download a free "Classification of Faults" sheet to print out with the full listing of faults on our website. Find this and many more useful tools located under the Resources tab of our website.*

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

It is clearly stated in the rules that if a dog that is entered in the stake, but not under judgement, breaks for a fall for a dog that is under judgement, that dog shall be eliminated from the stake. The Judges or the committee may not eliminate the dog from the entire trial.

Rulebook Citation: Standard Procedure for Non-Slip Retriever Trials, Line Manners, Section 26, paragraph 6.

11.) Does the Field Trial Committee have authority to appoint a replacement judge at any time and continue the stake?

Yes, this can take place for a number of reasons, and the committee may replace the judge with a substitute.

Rulebook Citation: Chapter 5, Section 2.

12.) A handler engages in abusive language or conduct toward workers, Judges, contestants, or club members, etc. Who has authority to discipline the individual, remove them from the grounds, or file the complaint with AKC?

Conduct prejudicial to the sport/trial applies a simple standard - if it would offend a young family, then it's inexcusable. The misconduct process is a detailed and lengthy process but is necessary to preserve the program. The Dealing with Misconduct booklet is too long to cite verbatim, but it is available at the AKC website, and the field trial secretary should be present with a copy for any trial.

Numerous Citations: Standard Procedure for Non-Slip Retriever Trials, General, Section 40. Also see the Dealing with Misconduct Booklet. ■

About the Author – John Stracka

John has contributed to our sport through leadership positions with Retriever News, Entry Express, National Clubs, Local Clubs, and as a fundraising liaison for Canine Health Foundation. John has also edited and curated hundreds of articles for Retriever News and has been a major contributor to the Judges Corner since 2010.

Stay tuned for additional articles on subjects like:

- *Running Order Integrity*
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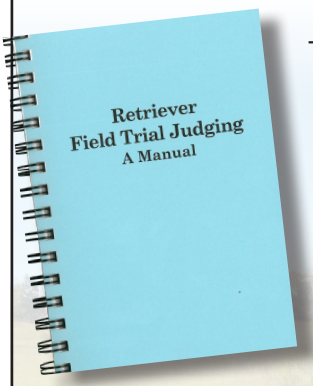

This manual represents the group effort of a number of field trialers across the country who, among themselves, represent more than 300 years in field trial competition, close to 1,000 points as field trial judges.

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