



## Introduction

The 1st series at a licensed field trial stake has been completed. The Judges summon the marshal who receives the callback sheet. The marshal reads aloud to the gathered handlers, holding their pencils and catalogs, the numbers of the dogs to be tested in the next series. Your dog's number was not called. How did that make you feel? This is often a time of frustration and consternation for handlers whose dogs have been eliminated. Much time, energy, money, and training has been invested in their retrievers. Failure can be difficult to accept. Some of us act like victims and others go about improving their dog for next time. If your dog 'got the birds,' you wonder ... why was the dog dropped?<sup>1</sup>

There is, on the other hand, relief from the anxiety about the callbacks for recalled handlers who were uncertain about the performance of their dog(s) in the series. They were pleased to hear their number(s) called by the marshal.

Callbacks, the listing of retrievers to be further tried, are a major part of field trials. How are callbacks determined, anyway? What are the Rules concerning callbacks?<sup>2</sup> What should handlers do if they think the Judges made a mistake? Answers to these questions, and others, will be addressed in this essay.

## How are the Callbacks Determined?

The discussions between the Judges prior to the start of the stake assist greatly in arriving at callbacks after the stake begins. Judges have a book with a numbered page for each entry. They draw a schematic of each test. It includes the location of the guns, the birds, and the order of fall in marking tests. For blind tests, the schematic indicates the placement of birds to be retrieved. Prominent features are included. Judges draw the performance of each dog onto its page in a manner that permits them to recall completely what happened.<sup>3</sup> Judges develop personal styles for recording performances and artistic skills are not a necessity – and clear note-taking is helpful.

## Scoring and Note-Taking

There are several methods used by Judges when scoring the performance of the dogs. Some use a letter system (A-B-C-D-F.) Others use a numerical system based on a scale of 10<sup>4</sup>; where the highest score is a 10, a good score is in the 9-8 range and an average score is in the 7-6 range and worse performances are scored lower. Some judges merely rate the performances as *excellent*, *good*, *fair*, *poor* or *fail*. These three systems, "letters" – "numbers" – "words," are the ones most often used. A Judge's score of "A"

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will be the same as a score of “10” or a score of “Excellent” by a co-Judge if each Judge is consistent in the use of a preferred system. Their callbacks will reflect this symmetry.

The different methods of scoring correlate well. Watchful eyes, numerous judging assignments, the personal training of one’s dogs, handling at field trials, attendance at judging and training seminars, hunting experience with dogs, working with professionals and skilled amateurs and knowledge of the Rules all contribute to a Judge’s understanding of retriever capabilities and what they can be asked to do in a test. We recommend that new Judges try the numerical system (10-1) with personal notes added.

As a test progresses, especially a first series, the Judges learn about the nature of the test and how the retrievers are responding to it. A brief pause and discussion between the Judges, perhaps during a ‘rebird,’ should occur after a dozen or so dogs have been tried. At this time, the Judges can review their personal assessments of the early dogs already tested. They will decide whether the test is working as planned and, if not, how their scoring may need to be adjusted. For example, a hunt on a bird by a dog that was scored low may look very good if it becomes a key mark failed by many dogs tested later. It is important to note that this review is not aimed at scrapping the test which would require a serious discussion between the Judges. Handlers should know that the scoring matrix can become more or less severe based upon the difficulty of a test or the lack thereof.

Also, as the test continues, wind changes, weather conditions, light conditions and changes in gunners and throws can effect the test so that it is not exactly the same test as experienced by the early dogs. The Judges’ scoring and callbacks lead to completion of testing in later series so as to arrive at final placements and awards during the time available.

Personal notes are very important as they assist the Judge in fully recalling the retrieves at a later time. Judges often add stars (\*) or plus (+) signs to their scores to emphasize outstanding work and stellar performances.

Blind work features control and it begins when the dog leaves the holding blind and is at the handler’s side. When a good line is taken and maintained by excellent handling, Judges sometimes note something like ... “super control,” or, “great initial line.” A large dot at the point of a whistle stop on a blind is often used.<sup>5</sup> Some Judges draw a line from the start to the blind-planted bird and record deviations from that line. The initials “CR” means a cast refusal, “WR” means a whistle refusal, “PIL” means ‘poor initial line.’ These shorthand notes help. For example, “OOS” suggests that the dog was ‘out of sight’ on a blind or lost on a mark. “SOB” means ‘stumbled onto the bird’ (among other things...) and an “X” suggests failure. The initials, “PU” do not suggest that the dog stunk up the place; rather, that it was ‘picked up.’ Style notes might include “fast,” “slow,” or “lopes,” “quick pickup,” “attentive” and the like. The scoring methods and recorded notes for each dog are the Judges’ guides used in their evaluations of the dogs.

Saving time during callback discussions is a major consideration for Judges. Lost time can create problems for later series. The setting sun,

darkness, a threatening storm or poor mechanics have no concern for callbacks or when a stake will end. Judges, therefore, should quickly prepare a list of the numbers of the dogs which they wish to see tried further soon after the last dog has run in each of the first two series.

The Rules stipulate that the Judges must agree to drop a dog from further testing. (emphasis supplied.) The Judges add to the official callback list the numbers of dogs which either co-Judge wishes to have tried further. It is a waste of time to debate or discuss at length whether a dog should be carried or dropped if one Judge is determined to see it again.<sup>6</sup> The caveat here is that when an experienced and competent Judge is working with a neophyte Judge, a brief discussion of why certain dogs are to be recalled or dropped is an educational process which is to be encouraged.

It is imperative that Judges have in mind when deciding to drop a dog that their reason(s) can be found in the Rules. Put another way, there are



Photos by Molly Schlachter

recognized faults (*serious, moderate, minor*) which detract from the quality of the retrieve. These faults should be well known to the Judges. Some faults are much more serious than others and, in fact, some faults require elimination: *'breaking'* and *'switching'* are two examples.

Many Judges drop a dog after two serious faults have been committed. Other Judges, who are more stringent in their assessments, drop dogs after one serious fault and it should always be a failure. Some Judges have been known to drop dogs after a moderate or even a minor fault as, for example, a single cast refusal during a blind retrieve. A dog should not be dropped after committing only a single moderate or lesser fault. These retrievers should not pay the price for judging shortcomings. A central question always is this: did the dog fail the test? Another question is:

*has the dog 'committed faults to the point where it could not be placed even should its work in succeeding series be perfect?' (p. 47)*

The Judges consider the answers to these questions when eliminating a dog.

It is common for Judges to put a question mark on the page of dogs, which may not be called back and to discuss them with their co-Judge when the callbacks are being determined. Before arriving at consensus concerning the callbacks after a series has completed, the Judges review the faults committed by dogs not to be recalled. They check to ensure that none of the recalled dogs have exhibited faults similar or perhaps the same as the faults of the dropped dogs and that there are no other significant differences. This is a search for consistency in the callbacks. Judges will either call back all dogs with similar faults or drop all of them.

The careful review for consistency in the callbacks can help to eliminate the notion of poor judging felt by handlers who see that other dogs with performances similar to their dog's performance on the test were called back and their dog was not. Handlers are not nearly as objective about these matters as are the Judges. Handlers sometimes forget that the Judges review the work of the dogs in all the completed series and not only the series just finished when making callback lists.

When all deliberations are completed, it is a common practice for each Judge to read the numbers of dogs called back from his/her book as the other Judge checks them against the callback sheet. This practice assists in insuring that no dog was somehow overlooked.

Field trial competitors all have horror stories to relate respecting callbacks. Judges sometimes make mistakes in the callbacks because they are susceptible to human error. The process of callbacks is guided by the Rules but is also a part of the subjective nature of decision-making. Human nature, being what it is, can cause Judges from time to time to make mistakes or issue "tough" decisions in the callbacks. This is why there can be surprises in them. The issue of surprises in the callbacks is discussed in **THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE STANDARD PROCEDURE** as follows:

*"... the work expected of the dog should not be subject to ... wide variations. In most instances, there should be little doubt in anyone's mind as to the type of work, which constitutes a perfect performance in a given test. However, there is unlimited opportunity for an honest difference of opinion on the severity of the penalty to assess for any given infraction or deviation from perfect work." (p. 41)*

And also:

*"Therefore, there must always be the possibility of owners and handlers being confused and dismayed because their dog is dropped from further competition, or not being included in the placements due to faults which other Judges at other trials had not so severely penalized ... everyone has a right to know which particular faults will be penalized severely, moderately, or only to a minor degree." (p. 41)*

## Faults

Our advice is ... READ THE RULES! For example, a *'pop'* on the first occurrence during a blind retrieve is a *minor fault*. This is because the dog may have heard a whistle from another stake. A loud bird whistle or a popper gun blast from another test can cause a well trained dog to *'pop'*. Since Judges may not have heard the sound which caused the dog to stop, or know the reason for it, there is leniency in the Rules concerning the penalty for a single *'pop'*. But, repeated *'pops'* are faults calling for elimination. Judges have dropped dogs with no other faults after a single *'pop'* during a blind retrieve when it ought to be treated as a minor infraction. A *'pop'* on a mark is another matter entirely and is a much more serious fault.

Consider this example. A dog that was far ahead and winning the Amateur stake had one mark to get in the water marking series. When on a line to it and half way there, the stake marshal ushered a loud yell. The dog in the water heard the shout, stopped its forward motion and looked to the handler. Now the Judges had a dilemma. Should they do nothing thinking that perhaps the dog will continue without assistance? They probably will see the dog handled. Or, should they instruct the handler to pick up the dog for a rerun and then score it on the last bird only during the rerun? This was a *'pop'* with consequences and it was caused by interference. The Judges have options; none are good. What would you have done? The Judges lost their winning dog for on the "rerun;" he was handled on the key bird.<sup>7</sup>

Judges who start a field trial with the intent of eliminating dogs as their central cause are simply on the wrong mission. Their tests and callbacks will reflect this attitude.

*The primary intent of Judges of any stake at a field trial should be to find the best marking retrievers with the most style. (p. 27; p. 31; p. 41; and p. 49.)*

Remember the power attributes in retrievers: (1) MARKING; and (2) STYLE. These attributes are the ones most mentioned in the Rules. The familiar rubric often heard is ... Get the birds to hand as quickly as possible. All the faults are deviations from this primary requirement. Usually there will be one mark, and possibly more, that were the key mark(s) during the stake. They gave the most difficulty to the dogs and only a few dogs 'smacked' the mark(s). Since marking is of primary importance, the retrievers that have performed the best on these key marks receive special consideration when callbacks and placements are discussed.

Good Judges are able to set balanced tests in the first series (usually a land marking test) appropriate for the stake and the number of entries. They predict with a high success rate what the outcomes of the test will be. And, they can evaluate the performances effectively. Balanced tests identify the best marking dogs, have a number of dogs that do well and are called back, albeit with some faults, and some dogs that have failed. A balanced test is a difficult goal to achieve. Setting a test in the first series that destroys the field of dogs can be done by anyone; but, to what end? And also, it is not fun to compete in a test that is too facile with far too many highly successful completions. Handlers know that such tests will later require some dogs to be 'penciled out' by the Judges. The try for a balanced test, especially in the first series, is worth the effort and much more fair to the handlers. Remember that in All-Age stakes, handlers are attempting to make field champions. The tests should reflect this level of distinction.

When the Judges finish their callback sheet, they add the name of the trial, the date, the stake, list the numbers of the dogs called back, and sign the sheet below the numbers to validate them. They should include the total number of dogs recalled and circle that number. The circled number assists the stake marshal in preparing birds for the next series. Some Judges indicate the nature of the next series and its location and the number of the dog, which will start the series.

## Callbacks and the Rules<sup>8</sup>

The following are Rules, which apply to callbacks.

- *The decisions of the Judges shall be final in all matters relating to the field trial performance of the dogs.* (p. 7, emphasis supplied.)
- *A Field Trial Committee may ‘... remove any dog from its trial for cause ... . Causes are: owner ineligibility, dog not properly entered, dog attacks another dog or person, dog has a contagious disease, or, a female dog is in the estrus cycle.’* (p. 13) There was an incident in which a handler had left the line and was returning to his truck with his dog. The dog was not wearing a lead and attacked the dog in the holding blind.<sup>9</sup> Handlers are under judgment even when finished and behind the Judges if the dog is not on lead. It is a good idea to have a lead upon a dog whenever the Rules permit.
- *Dogs entered and on the grounds may be withdrawn from a stake by proper notification by the handler to the stake marshal.* (p. 13) They remain eligible to compete in other stakes at the trial.
- *A dog may be eliminated if a handler with multiple entries runs a dog out of order and the Judges determine that there was a deliberate effort by the handler to gain an unfair advantage on the test.*<sup>10</sup> (pp. 19-20)
- *Before the last dog is sent, a test can be ‘scrapped.’* When a test is ‘scrapped,’ all dogs in that series are called back even if they had failed that test prior to its cancellation. In all-age stakes, the rotation schedule is adjusted when a test has been ‘scrapped.’ Start the replacement test with the dog that would have been next to run the scrapped test. If done for the day after scrapping a test, start the next morning with the dog that previously started the series.
- *At the end of the first series, and every series thereafter, the Judges will call back all dogs which they wish to try and will cause them to run further series until the stake is decided.’* (p. 27)
- *A dog shall be eliminated for ‘hard mouth.’* This is a serious fault and Judges should never label a dog as having exhibited “hard mouth” without substantial evidence. They must have seen the dog ripping the flesh of a bird or eating it. Or, when a dog has been observed over the fall for an extended time and then delivers a badly damaged bird, the Judges should interview gunners or throwers to learn whether they witnessed the dog’s behavior and what it was doing. This fault requires that the Judges have inspected all birds so that none were used which had previously been damaged. Heavy loads used by a gun team can cause badly torn birds.

Also, marshals should insure that no birds are sent into the fields that are badly damaged. When accepting a retrieved bird from a handler, the Judge should inspect it and if any serious damage is noticed, the bird must be set aside and not used in future tests. Birds with open wounds are temptations to dogs. The Judges must be satisfied, before eliminating a dog for hard mouth, that the dog in question was alone responsible for the damage to the bird. Crushed bone structure can be a good indicator of hard mouth. “Rolling” a bird is not. A dog aggressively crushing bones in front of the judge is not acceptable – it should be eliminated, as there is no question what occurred.

*It is considered appropriate to display a damaged bird to the handler.* (p. 35) In the water marking series of an Open stake, there was a dog that was going for a bird thrown onto an island. When he arrived on the island, he went to the bird and disappeared into some bushes. Repeated whistles by the handler had no effect. At the same time, the Judges, handler, and gallery could hear bones being crunched as the dog ate the bird. The dog finally delivered a bird wing to the handler and the Judges then excused him.

- *“Freezing” occurs when a dog will not release and deliver a bird to the handler “promptly” when ordered.* Pulling and/or ripping the bird from the dog’s mouth exacerbates this problem and ripping a bird from a dog’s mouth is not an acceptable solution. It often occurs when the dog has retrieved the last bird and it will often occur repeatedly. Freezing is a fault that could require elimination as retrievers are expected to deliver the bird without a more than a momentary process on the part of the handler to obtain it. Handlers often think they are clever at hiding it – folks, it’s not hard to spot the serious fault vs a fleshy bird being rolled by a dog.
- *“A dog sent on a blind retrieve shall at once proceed in the general direction of the line given by the handler. A dog that fails to do so shall, in the absence of unusual circumstances, be eliminated from the stake.”* (p. 35.) This Rule is about “no goes” and we note for emphasis it applies to blind retrieves. When a handler commands a dog to leave the line and retrieve, it must do so promptly in the absence of any confusion or distracting factors. Failure to do so is a serious fault and requires elimination. Unusual circumstances, mentioned in this rule, pertain to any condition that becomes a major distraction for the dog. (ed. A recent article indicated a wide range of opinion regarding remote casts and side sends regarding this rule.) Judges should be alert for interference and unusual circumstances because they can happen at any time. Sometimes, a handler whose dog did not promptly leave the line when commanded, knowing that elimination is the penalty, may try to claim that the dog was confused. Judges should know whether there was any confusion. More than likely, the handler is attempting to escape the penalty. Judges should not engage in commentary about dog performance with handlers.
- *“Judges shall have the power to turn out of the stake any dog which does not obey its handler (emphasis supplied) and any handler who interferes with another handler or his dog.”* (p. 36.) WOW! Read that Rule again. It emphasizes OBEDIENCE. The central point in this example is that obedience is an important factor in the assessment of a finished All-Age dog. (emphasis supplied) Here is an example: At an “Open” stake and the last water marking series, there was a double marking test. The gallery could not see the line due to the nature of the cover and trees surrounding it. At the end, when one dog that was in excellent condition to perhaps win the stake was not even placed, the owner inquired as to the reason. When the handler commanded the dog to retrieve after the birds were down and his number was called, the dog did not leave the line. This dog was a field champion and an ‘old hand’ at field trials and knew that there usually was a live flying bird in the final water test and he was looking for it. In this test, there was no flyer. The dog’s field trial experience was his undoing for when ordered to retrieve, the dog must obey and leave the line.
- *“To the extent that time permits, Judges should be generous in their callbacks for additional series.”* (p. 46, emphasis supplied) This suggestion in the Rules should be uppermost in the minds of the Judges when doing callbacks. You accepted an assignment to judge at the field trial so judge as many dogs as possible. The number of entries, which will affect the difficulty of the tests, tempers callbacks. The weather and trial mechanics will also affect callbacks. Judges must have latitude with the callbacks when faced with these issues. A large entry for an Amateur stake that begins on a Saturday will produce a first series with considerable difficulty.
- It is a sign of inexperience when two Judges in a minor stake start with a large entry and when the callbacks are issued after the first series; only a few dogs have been recalled. The field of entries has

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been 'crucified.' Why? Unless time or weather was a factor its not how it should work. If there are extensive failures in the first series of a minor stake, scrap the test and try for a more moderate and balanced one. In the Derby stake especially, dogs that complete the tests without a fault requiring elimination should all be called back. We encourage Judges Awards for Merit if dogs finish the Derby stake and are not placed. There are good reasons to carry as many dogs as is possible in the minor stakes, even if at the end, a sizable number of Judges' Awards for Merit are given. Experienced Judges know this and are more indulgent, especially in their minor stakes callbacks. Owners of retrievers are more likely to continue in field trials if they experience at least a modicum of success. Also, the professional handlers need to be able to make that telephone call to their dog owners with some good news for them whenever possible.

- *Judging is not an exact science and there are many shades of gray in the decisions the Judges must make. Matters are not simply black and white. Callbacks can get Judges involved in varied interpretations of the Rules and the severity of penalties as they come to final agreements.* (p. 48.) **Good judges, when in doubt, make decisions which favor the dog.** (emphasis supplied.)

### Mistakes in the Callbacks

Inquiries about potential mistakes in the callbacks are uncommon. Handlers should not question the callbacks unless they think perhaps a clerical error was made; other inquiries are questioning the Judges' decision about faults and are not valid. Occasionally Judges overlook a dog that should have been on the callback list. Note pages can stick together, especially after judging in the rain. Or, a page is missing, accidentally folded, or stuck in the wrong pocket. If a handler not recalled thinks that a mistake has been made in the callback list, there is a procedure to follow. The handler should approach the stake marshal and NOT the Judges and ask the marshal to inquire of the Judges whether a mistake was made concerning the handler's dog. The marshal will report the inquiry to the Judges. The Judges then consult their notes and each other and provide an answer to the marshal. If a mistake is discovered, the Judges will add the dog's number to the callback list.

When assessing a dog's performance because of an inquiry, the Judges are not required to provide reasons for their decision but only to say whether a mistake was or was not made in the callbacks. This method of responding to the inquiry eliminates unwarranted discussion about faults.

**Inquiries about the callbacks should always pass from the handler to the stake marshal and then to the Judges and then back to the marshal.** (emphasis added.) The response to the inquiry also returns to the handler through the stake marshal. This process of inquiry intends to keep handlers, who may be emotional when their dogs were not recalled, from getting into close proximity with the Judges. Remember, the Judges' decisions are final.

When not called back, attempt to take the decision with grace. Grumbles are not against the Rules. Hundreds of callback lists are read to handlers every year and almost all of them happen without issue, which is a tribute to the character of the field trial population.

If you managed to read this essay to the end and have never publicly denounced the Judges or their tests after having been dropped, you are an exceptional field trial participant and get a score of ... A+ which is the same score as a 10\*, or an "Excellent!" and, in our books, ... **YOU ARE CALLED BACK!** ■

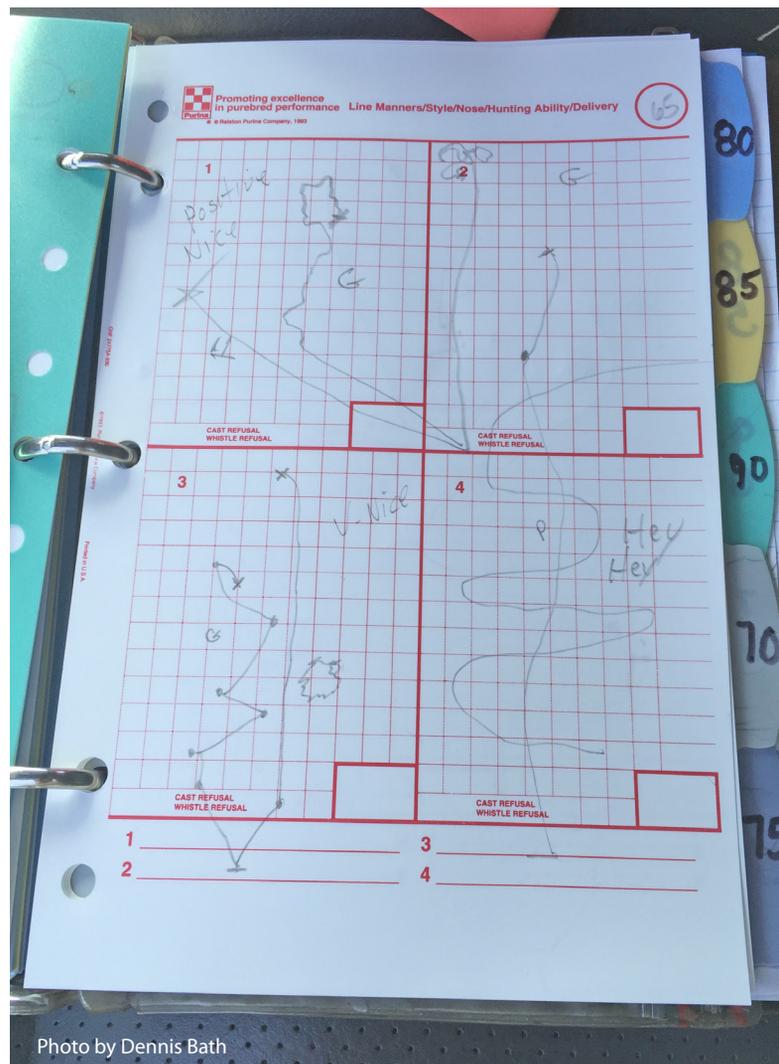


Photo by Dennis Bath

<sup>1</sup>Many handlers are also Judges and know precisely why they were not recalled.

<sup>2</sup>Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedure for Retrievers Including Standing Recommendations of the Retriever Advisory Committee and the Supplement to the Standard Procedure. Amended to June 2013, Published by The American Kennel Club.

<sup>3</sup>Judges should watch the entire performance and write in their books after the retrieve has been made. Faults can be overlooked if a Judge's eyes are on the book and not the dog.

<sup>4</sup>The numeric score is 100% for the entire series and not a score for each mark in a marking test.

<sup>5</sup>Connecting the dots indicates the path of the dog during the blind retrieve.

<sup>6</sup>The Judges should discuss the callbacks very carefully after the water blind series, as the next series should produce a winner and placements. They want to insure that the best dogs are in the final series and failures are not.

<sup>7</sup>The handler later said he wished that the Judges had permitted the dog to continue rather than issuing a "rerun." The dilemma was that if allowed to continue and the dog failed, the handler then counters with ... I wish that you had granted a "rerun."

<sup>8</sup>Field Trial Rules ...

<sup>9</sup>The attacking dog was eliminated and reported to the Field Trial Committee.

<sup>10</sup>Most such incidents occur when handlers have multiple entries and are not intentional or attempts to gain advantage.