



THE SPOTLIGHT



The Newsletter of the Musical Dog Sport Association, Inc.
Created By Freestylers For Freestylers

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The Road to Competition in MDSA

by Susanna Pathak, MDSA Executive Board

With over 50 entries for our First Festival, and as many if not more expected for our Second Festival, we on the Executive Board of this fast growing organization can see the MDSA vision of canine freestyle taking shape. As the entries for our Second Freestyle Festival are arriving, we are filled with anticipation and excitement. The Festivals are a celebration of canine freestyle. In our hearts, we all know that is what matters most.



But has anyone asked you why you entered the Festival, since after all, MDSA does not offer a real competition? With the Festivals, there are no prizes or titles or ribbons. Participants get a DVD with all the routines entered which is indeed very special. But many of

us who participate in dog sports have competed and have enjoyed the experience and learned a good deal from it. All will agree that competitions have a big role in bringing us together. We understand the desire to earn titles and compete with your wonderful dogs. Your competition experience is often the measure of where you are in a sport, whether it be agility, flyball, obedience or for many of you, canine freestyle.

MDSA's road to competition is a bit different for two reasons. First, our sport is indeed different—it requires a unique blend of technique and artistry like no other dog sport. Developing a judging scheme that is fair and consistent is not an easy task. Second, there are other venues for canine freestyle competition. So the MDSA definition and vision of canine freestyle has been carefully crafted. We have always believed we were going to offer competitions but vision and guidance come first. They are the foundation of the process.

Then there is practice. Our Festival participants have a very important role in making our Performance Guidelines (which took many months to develop) a reality. Each team in the First Festival received evaluations from two of us. These were short narratives

that provided feedback on strengths as well as advice on what to work on in future routines. We feel they were a thoughtful and encouraging way to begin. After evaluating and studying the entries for the First Festival, we spent the month of September discussing ten routines in our Online Workshop. It was a wonderful, friendly, and very supportive experience and seemed a world apart from the atmosphere of competition that some of us have experienced.

In Fall 2006, we revised our Performance Guidelines a good bit by adding new classes and refining and adjusting the language based on what we learned and where we hope to go. As we move closer to developing events where titles will be earned and judging will be more formal, we want to ensure that all are celebrations of canine freestyle. Certainly the spirit of caring, support, and yes, fun!!! That is so abundant among our members will be a hallmark of all our events.

That is a complex task. It is clear we all have a bundle of mixed feelings and experiences with competition and scoring. Competition can make your spirit soar or make your heart ache – and everything in between. But let's put those feelings aside for a moment and focus on what MDSA titling events might offer. We believe we are aiming for competition of a different sort. And we are dedicated to finding a way to steer clear of a scoring/titling system that is based on beating others and ranking winners and losers.



So where are we? Here are some goals for the type of titling/scoring system MDSA is in the process of developing. We want to:

- 1) Allow for recognition of achievement in early, mid and late career dogs;
- 2) Acknowledge excellence in freestyle performance;
- 3) Build confidence of freestyle teams;
- 4) Encourage and reward innovation and artistry in our sport;
- 5) Be set up so that individuals will be challenged and be able to set individual performance goals;
- 6) Provide feedback for learning and strengthening performance.

And even more specifically, we would like to create:

- 7) An elegant and relatively simple scoring system that would be easy enough to describe to someone without a cheat sheet;
- 8) A system that allows everyone to earn the highest score possible (like obedience where we all could get a 200 if we have a perfect run).

At present, we are working with draft scoring forms that evaluate performance in five categories: Teamwork, Training, Choreography, Music, and Presentation. We are testing approaches using "Q" and "NQ" (like pass or fail) as well as scoring systems using numbers and scales. These forms will be used to evaluate routines in the Second Festival. That means YOU will be able to let us know what you think about the sample score forms we use to evaluate your performance.

Member involvement on the road to competition is important to us. Last summer we discussed competition and approaches to scoring with the MDSA Task Force and we learned a lot in the process. We recently created a small Competition Committee that is working with the Executive Board on ideas and tasks as we move toward competitive events. The Competition Committee includes MDSA members Rosalie James, Katie Tracanna and Janis Weiner. You can expect to hear more from us as we move closer to competition in MDSA. We hope you will contact us with your thoughts on our goals and our plans to move toward competitions/titling events. Please email me at sbpathak@vcu.edu and I will share your message with the Competition Committee.

Every MDSA event will be a joyful celebration of our wonderful sport—you can count on that!



Benefits of Freestyle in our Therapy Dog Visits

By Katie Tracanna

We are very lucky to be a part of The Capering Canines of Cape Cod, where we have the opportunity to participate in Freestyle Demos at Nursing Home facilities and fundraisers

for local Cape Cod Groups. Aside from these demos, we (like many therapy dog teams) have also been fortunate to witness the benefits of incorporating freestyle into our "regular" therapy dog visits.

For the past 2 years, we have been visiting a local nursing home facility on Cape Cod. When we started to visit, we noticed that most residents loved to interact with the dogs while a few folks preferred to admire them from a distance. During our visits, we started to entertain a few of the residents who would often wait for our arrival.

This being a small facility, we perform in the hallways where we each take a turn demonstrating different behaviors like spins, arounds and backs. Since the residents enjoy our mini performances, they often line the hallways during each visit to watch Sammy, Inky and Onyx strut their stuff. The various freestyle behaviors showcase the happy goofy personality of each dog. It's wonderful when a resident who might have initially shown hesitation toward the dogs, demonstrates comfort with the "performing canines" by asking for a personal visit.

One friend is particularly special to us since our first therapy visit to this facility. About 10 months ago, she underwent treatment for skin cancer. The treatment was taking a toll on her frail body. Although she didn't have the energy for long personal visits, she still enjoyed watching the dogs perform. We started to worry when 3 visits lapsed without seeing our friend. One day as we arrived at the facility, we came around the corner and noticed a familiar face wheeling down the hallway with a smile from ear to ear. We met her half way as she hugged each of her special canine friends. It's wonderful that as she's about to celebrate her 94th birthday, she still enjoys the company of her performing pups.

The director of the facility has told us that she's often stopped in the grocery store by the families of the folks in the nursing home, who love to brag about the performing dogs who visit with them. When we enter the facility with the dogs, it becomes a light and happy place as dog lovers and dog watchers sit back to enjoy our special canine partners.

HEELING

by MDSA Member Ilona Wright

[Note: Ilona wrote this mini-manual on Heeling for her training club in Australia. She has graciously given permission to MDSA to publish it and we will gladly do so since great heeling is the foundation of freestyle performance. Here the first of several instalments. Happy Heeling!]

- Diagram legend:
- ↑ = dog, arrow point is dog's head
 - ▲△ = handler's feet (▲ left foot, △ right foot) facing forwards;
 - ↓ = direction of handler movement
 - = direction of dog movement
 - ↘ = start of dog movement

Description:	Position
"Heel" implies the dog is on the left hand side of the handler. Part of the dog between the ears and shoulder is next to and parallel to the outside of the handler's left leg, both facing forwards.	↑▲△

Suggested Cue: "Heel", "Close"

Heeling consists of the following components:

- heel position
- start
- left turn
- right turn
- left about turn
- right about turn
- normal pace forwards
- slow pace forwards
- fast pace forwards
- halt (stationary, sit or stand or drop) but parallel to the handler.
- putting it all together – the heel dance

Advanced heel work includes:

- moving backward
- stepping left
- stepping right
- 270 & 360 left turns
- 270 & 360 right turns
- all of the above on the handler's right hand side.

Moving the dog in the following techniques can be achieved by:

- having the dog target a stick or hand;
- using a food lure. The dog's reward is not the food lure;
- guide the dog with the left hand on the leash close to the collar. Do not pull the dog.

Heel Position

This technique teaches the dog to "square" its back end and stay close to you, ie, put itself into heel position.



1.	Dog can be anywhere. Decide which way you are facing and point your toes in that direction.	
2.	Keeping the right foot anchored, move the left leg back and place it behind the right foot. The larger the dog, the further back this left foot has to go. If the dog is away from you, move the dog so its head comes towards you, then out and away from the back foot and turn the dog around (into you) at a point just beyond (further behind) the left foot. This is referred to as "taking the dog back".	
3.	Bring the dog forward and when the dog is in line with the left foot bring the dog and left foot up to the right foot. Bring the dog close into the left leg. When the dog is straight and in position, click/treat.	

Points to note:

- Always bring the left foot up to the right foot. Keep that right foot anchored to prevent turning towards the dog. The dog is being taught to position itself squarely and in line with the left leg and if the left leg keeps changing direction, the dog cannot learn the square position.
- Ensure that when bringing the dog and left foot up to the right foot that the dog has enough room to approach your left hand side with a straight spine. If the spine is not straight the dog will sit crooked. This means that handlers with large and long bodied dogs need to stretch as far behind them as possible to give the dog enough room to straighten up and approach in a straight line.
- When the dog is in position it should sit. For obedience purposes, always have the dog sit once it has squared itself in the heel position.
- If using food, keep the food right up to the dog's nose using the left hand. Then get the dog to sit in the heel position. As the dog sits, click.
- Hold food close to the body for heel reward. Reward with the right hand. Don't reward with the food lure. The food lure may be used again but eventually throw it away.
- The introduction of the cue depends on your school of thought. Clicker trainers get the behaviour before putting a cue on it. Some schools of thought like to

use the cue just as the dog acquires position. Other schools of thought like to cue before commencing the squaring of the dog.

- Never step into the dog. It is the dog's responsibility to be close to you.
- If the dog persists in moving to the front to see the food reward, do this near a wall or barrier to keep it straight. Reward in heel position before the dog gets up.
- For small dogs, can teach the dog to target a patch on your leg, eg., something that sticks on trousers. You can use a target stick for small dogs.

Having sat the dog in the heel position and rewarded, turn left 90° (without stepping away from the dog) so you are facing the dog's right hand side and repeat steps 2 and 3 above. Do this another 3 times so that you end up facing the way you originally started. When commencing training heel position, this would be one training session. Initially keep training sessions short.

You can also stand the dog instead of sitting the dog. For trial purposes sit the dog so that it learns to always (automatically) sit in the heel position when the handler is stationary.

Do this 2-3 times a day every day until you see the dog automatically positioning itself in the heel position, that is, it bypasses "the squaring process" by anticipating that you want heel position. Quite often the dog will take the shortest route to the heel position and that is by adjusting its back legs (rear end) to achieve heel position. When this happens the dog has achieved "rear end awareness". At this stage be careful that you do not reward "sloppy" position. Always reward only precise position and reward close to your body.

Once the dog understands the "heel" cue and the heel position you should be able to simply stand still and call the dog, from anywhere, into heel position. Make sure you never turn to face the dog or step into it. Excellent heel position looks spectacular, but it is easy to allow it to become "sloppy". If heel position becomes "sloppy", return to basics.

Start

The most important thing about the start is that the dog and handler take off together, that is, as one unit. This start and take off should be practised on its own. Firstly you need the dog's attention. In a trial, before heeling starts, the judge asks "Are you ready?". At this point a good word to use as a reply is "Ready". This word can also be taught to the dog as a cue for attention.

The normal cue to start heeling is "heel". Once you have the dog's attention, cue 'heel' and take off in a straight line, with the left foot, keeping your left shoulder slightly

forward. After a few steps either stop and reward in heel position or run backwards as you use a release word and reward close to your body, not necessarily in heel position.

In a given training session do not do this more than 3 times. At the end of the training session play ball or do something exciting for the dog. It is important that the dog associated "fun" with heeling.

If attention is a problem, use a toy or food motivator. It is important to make yourself interesting to the dog and one way is to use voice, varying tone and pitch.

If using food or a toy to motivate the dog, try the last take-off of the training session without the food or toy. Reward only with the food/toy at the end of the exercise. Lures and motivators need to be faded from training as soon as possible.

[Look for Part II of "HEELING" by Ilona Wright in the next issue of THE SPOTLIGHT]

Eyes on Japan

by Pam Martin

MDSA Executive Board



This was my second trip to Japan and it was even better than the first. Knowing what to expect made my travel and stay a piece of cake this go around. The long flight was worth it when I reached my final destination of the Animal Fanciers' Club (AFC) in the town of Nasushiobara about two hours north of Tokyo. AFC is no ordinary school; it's a beautiful facility on about ten acres. A dog lovers dream, AFC is a weekend getaway equipped with boarding rooms and a fully staffed kitchen with a full time chef.

A facility like none other in the world, building AFC was like a dream come true for owner Naomi Sagara. A retired singer, Naomi has an abundant love for animals and set out to make a difference in Japan regarding relationships between animals and humans. Naomi, a trainer and author, has brought in many famous trainers throughout the years from around the world to further educate all interested parties in Japan. She, her training staff and students never stop seeking a better way to communicate with their animals. The list of great trainers who have come to AFC is long and following Carolyn Scott to the AFC is a big honor for me.

Canine Freestyle is one of their favorite things to do. I found the Japanese love music and enjoy the sport of freestyle with their best friends. Their relationship is no different from ours and is based on trust first and foremost with their partners.

My training theme this year was "The Invisible Leash, Eye Contact." Whether I was working with students in obedience or freestyle it was eye contact that I preached. We worked on many exercises to improve this essential skill and the instant benefits were easy to see (ha ha). I demonstrated how to use eye contact with their dogs at home and in everyday life situations making for better all around communication. Also I taught Quiet Time exercises for calming down in everyday life and other practical obedience exercises. Last but not least I taught two other K9 sports, Flyball and Frisbee. My assignment included judging an obedience trial, giving a Frisbee seminar (a first at AFC) and group and private training.

I'm happy to say that AFC has a couple of routines to submit in MDSA's Second Freestyle Festival. I'm very excited to have them join in on the fun.

I'll be keeping a close eye on Japan until my return next year. I'm already looking forward to seeing my friends again. My only regret was not taking a video camera and you can bet next time I will have one.

MDSA Membership Update

MDSA continues to experience steady growth in 2007. Here is the list of new members that have joined since the last update in Fall 2006. Please keep this list handy alongside your MDSA membership roster:

Jill	Stuart	18780 W 116th Street Olathe, KS 66061
Nancy	Sanders	404 Park St SE Vienna, VA 22180
Joyce	Miller	6001 Blue Bay Dr Dallas, TX 75248
Judy	Azaren	49 Toledo Lane Willingboro, NJ 8046
Joyce	DelSanto	97 Elm Ave San Anselmo, CA 94960
Elizabeth	Reid	2012 Rockland Ave Rockville, MD 20851
Deborah	Joyce	9011 Banyon Ridge Rd Fairfax Sta, VA 22039
Linda	Nicholson	4407 Aragon Place Alexandria, VA 22309
Susan	Klavon	15 Jeffrey Cir Bedford, MA 01730
Jo	Renn	52 Winthrop St West Boylston, MA 01583
Sandy	Taylor	PO Box 1075 Harwich, MA 02645
Boots	Gibson	PO Box 233 South Orleans, MA 02662
Verne	Foster	8410 Cabin Branch CT Manassas, VA 20111
Sumac	Grant Johnson	PO Box 413 Lincolnton, ME 4849

Pam	Jones	786 Hoyt Ave W St. Paul, MN 5517
Katharine	Carroll	1100 Hallam Ave NO Nagtinedum, MN 55115
Beth	Glommen	5830 Loring Lane Golden Valley, MN 55422
Kim	Mayes	4614 Pinewood Dr NE Palm Bay, FL 32905

A warm MDSA welcome to each of you!!!!

We hope current members will encourage your freestyle buddies to join MDSA. It's fun to be an ambassador for our wonderful sport. MDSA has a strong education and outreach effort with our online discussion group, workshop, and instructor's lists. Our publications, including the revised Performance Guidelines, are available on our website (www.musicaldogsport.org).

Be sure to take a look yourself at our website and be prepared to direct others to our resources and discussion lists. If you know of anyone who forgot to renew their membership last fall, please remind them of how important their participation and support is to the future of MDSA.

ALL memberships are due October 1 of each year but it is never too late to join or to renew a membership. To do so please do one of the following:

- Go to the website, download a membership application, and send it on in!
- Email me at sbpathak@vcu.edu for help.
- Call me at 804-502-3309 if you don't have email access and would like a form or any information. I'd be delighted to help you.

--Susanna Pathak, MDSA Executive Board

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