

Playing with your dog.....

We have just finished the Devon County Show Demos, oh my god, how exciting! I loved every, well almost every minute of them. I hope our purple people did too (our t shirts are very purple.) When we were asked to do these demos, I thought, "demo vs show, show wins," however next year I'm going to be much more torn, what fun! And it made me think, we are just playing with our dogs and it is all so great. The crowd loved it and so did the dogs, see the concentration on our weave race faces, and if you have time see the youtube link at the end (thankyou Mike.) However I also saw a lot of other dogs, gundogs, show dogs, pet dogs, obedience dogs and many others. They played too but not all of them looked like they were having so much fun. Is your dog having fun?

Okay, so we all see people playing with dogs around the agility ring but is the dog playing the game the owner wants to play or is it the other way round? For me all of my dogs (yes between Matt and I we now have 5 – ahhhhh) play very differently, I have not cloned them into the same dog and forced them to play the games I want them to play, I hope I have allowed them to show me games that they like to play and I try to incorporate them into my teaching. As a teacher you learn about learning styles, abilities and preferences and why do we not do the same with dogs? I certainly learnt that from a great British dog trainer not too long ago, that trainer (who shall go unnamed) has allowed me to progress hugely and encouraged me to explore new avenues!

In terms of games I think if you watch a litter of puppies you can see very early on some of the traits that they will have forever. For example I watched Reef my young competition dog as a pup playing stalk and pounce and throw games as a tiny pup but never really saw him tug, well at least not like my pup Tiki. Reef will play tug along with any other game that he can try to entice you into playing, he loves interaction however his first choice and default game is still stalk, slowly, maintain eye contact, hop on the spot and pounce, he really makes me giggle! The pup, Tiki (pronounced Teekee) will play pounce games but her preference of game would certainly be rag, tug and then shred a toy. And then there is Indi, see picture of her waving – she is just food crazy 😊 None of these are a problem, it's just important to know and takes a creative approach to get the best from some of these dogs.

Why is this of interest?

Well at first I really wanted Reef to play all of the games that Popi (my G7 agility dog and twice represented at FCI world champs who is currently recovering from injury) played, tug, rag and shred games. When he didn't play like her I would wonder why and sometimes even become frustrated however very quickly he learnt that he could play in so many ways and all were fun and more importantly I learnt too. I really believe that enjoying your dog and play is the key to the relationship and therefore we MUST get it right.

So what games can you play?

Well my favourite has to be GAME ON body position. It starts with a stalk, and then slow, slower, maybe a play bow if you are lucky and yes, a pounce! Each dog is different, some find this too much however all of my dogs play this game, it makes me smile a lot! They pounce at me and then run away, just like they would with each other. The best bit is that no toys are needed for this game –

just you and the dog! Therefore you can play it anytime, in the ring, at home, on the beach....anywhere!

Tug, tug, tug

It is not the most creative game in the world but it's certainly very natural. With my dogs they all play this very differently. Popi can be quite punchy and rude when she plays tuggy so her sessions are shorter and not as rough so she doesn't take herself over threshold for optimum work, Reef is great at it but a little too strong for me at times so I have a good out command and also a good retrieve so if I let it go he bounces back to me with it, Tiki, well we are still learning!

One thing I have learnt from training and shows is that I do not allow my dogs to hand onto a toy out of pure frustration and excitement, they don't just tug to relieve frustration, it is about a game with me and I don't want them to exhaust themselves tugging for 30minutes in a cue before I run them!

Ball games

Reef's FAVOURITE god in his world is in the form of a golden globe, yes, a tennis ball, he can smell them a mile off and they have certainly had to be incorporated into my distraction training, he can watch them for hours and pick them up and drop them on his own all day! Ball games come in many formats, they are easy to play as you can sit down (yes I am lazy) and they are great for physical exhaustion (if you like to do that form of exercise for your dog). Mentally I'm not so sure, they take Reef onto another planet however they certainly have their place. With my dogs they invoke stalk, and I can get great action shots however not so great if i am trying to encourage my dog to work close i.e. to reward a pull through! Also they involve throwing....hmmmm less said I think (I CANNOT THROW.)

Chase Games

Chase what? You, ball, tug, rabbit skin, another dog or worse? All are games that you may/may not want to incorporate into your training. People are a little scared of incorporating some of these at times however you have to ask yourselves why agility is dominated by herding breeds and yet we do not allow chase? Hang on a second, is that not what they are bred for? However it must be under close cue control and be employed correctly. Well we are hardly started and there are loads more to say, more games and also where to start as well as introducing some high value toys but we shall leave that for part 2.

On a final note teamwork is the key, between you, the dog, the trainer and your club, well done team Devon Dogs – it gives me goose bumps being part of a good team, whether it's my dogs, my club, my partner, it's just SUCH an amazing feeling and long may it continue ☺

If you have a minute take a look at the videos on [www.devondogs.co.uk](http://www.devondogs.co.uk), the Devon Dogs display is one of my favourites and look at the faces of the people in the crowd. Also take a look at the high value toys at [www.tug-e-nuff.co.uk](http://www.tug-e-nuff.co.uk). Happy playtime ☺