



Below is the next in a series of Random Tidbits of information (from me) in regards to the AKC Obedience Regulations. Knowledge of the Regulations provides you the power for...

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Today's Random Little Tidbit – Judging The **Giants.**



If you are considering judging obedience one very important factor is to be fair and consistent to all dogs that enter your ring. This is not only accomplished by having a thorough knowledge of the Obedience Regulations and enforcing every section, but the **pre-planning** of your ring will have an impact on the performances of the different breeds of dogs you judge. **If you fail to set up your ring without considering all the different sizes of breeds, physically challenged handlers and their space needs, your judging will lack fairness and consistency.** When you are invited to judge at a trial or match, there is an important Chapter and Section to keep in mind, Chapter 2, Section 6.

Section 6. Judging of Classes and Different Breeds: “The same methods and standards will be used for judging and scoring the regular, preferred and optional titling classes and in judging and scoring the work of dogs of different breeds, including dogs listed with AKC Canine Partners.”

The time to be aware of this regulation is BEFORE you set up your ring and plot out the heeling pattern and the areas needed for the different exercises.

Large breeds and physically challenged handlers (in wheelchairs, crutches, etc.) require a considerable amount of room to maneuver. If this is not factored in beforehand, then the dog's performance could be compromised. All breeds need be given ample space so they have the opportunity to work towards perfection. Also, heeling patterns should be smooth and not choppy. Choppy patterns (explained below) seem to be more of a hindrance to the larger breeds and physically challenged handlers. The next time you go to a match or trial, notice how the judge has set up their ring. Pay attention to how the space is used for the different exercises. Make note of the heeling pattern and how much space (or lack of) is used for all elements, including providing significant length for the Fast and Slow.

There is NO perfect way to set up a ring or a perfect heeling pattern, but some judges make better use of the ring space. When judging at an all-breed trial, you have to be ready for whatever breed may come into your ring -- be it a Chihuahua or an Irish Wolfhound. It is imperative that all breeds be given an equal chance to earn a perfect score if you wish to be a fair judge.

I have been in many obedience rings with my Saint Bernards (earning 7 U.D.s & 2 U.D.X.s since 1969) so I have a good idea what a large breed requires in terms of space for a smooth performance. This experience of showing gave me a hands-on opportunity to observe all types of ring situations. Listed below are a few of my thoughts in regards to heeling patterns and ring planning for the individual exercises.

Heeling Patterns:

Heeling is in every AKC obedience class. You must give ALL handlers and dogs an EQUAL opportunity to do the principal features of heeling - the ability of the dog and handler working as a team. Teamwork is best performed when a heeling pattern is smooth. One way to accomplish this objective is to have only one heeling function per leg of the pattern. This provides ALL teams a chance for a smooth performance. As a judge, your orders are "Forward," "Halt," "Right turn," "Left turn," "About turn," "Slow," "Normal," and "Fast." The orders may be given in any sequence and can be repeated. When two heeling functions are on one leg of a pattern it becomes choppy and the teamwork starts to suffer. For example, a Fast, Normal, and Halt on one leg would be choppy. Picture an Irish Wolfhound doing this pattern smoothly compared to a toy breed.

Another example, heeling down the center of the ring and making a Right or Left turn and then Slow, using half the ring, before turning again. The choppy pattern will unfairly affect the performance of the larger breeds. Not to mention the Slow was not of significant length. There is just less room and time to respond if too much is going on during one leg of the heeling pattern. Remember, *you* are going to be judging these actions. The faults you observe MAY have been caused by YOU, by not giving thought to the heeling pattern. The small breeds will start to gain an advantage and you, as a judge, will find your goals of fairness and consistency going down the tubes. A pattern does not have to be long to achieve the smooth objective.

The "Forward" followed by a few steps and then a "Halt" is another example of unfairness to large breeds, plus it is also choppy. Picture the extremes. A Chihuahua and handler starts to heel and the handler walks forward two or three steps and halts on the judge's order. This small breed has had a chance to get up and walk a fair distance before going into a sit. The next dog in the ring is an Irish Wolfhound. The handler starts to heel and walks two or three steps and halts on the judge's order. The Irish Wolfhound starts to move forward in heel position, and maybe just moved one-half or one body length, and now has to go into a sit. Did this breed have the same opportunity to have a smooth performance? The handler of the Irish Wolfhound had no choice but to stop on the judge's order or be penalized for delay in following a judge's order. The judge was consistent and stopped both dogs in the same spot, *but lacked good judgment* in setting up a heeling pattern that was fair to all breeds. Had the judge halted each dog further away from the Forward order, both breeds would have had an equal opportunity for a smooth performance.

Individual Exercises:

I will not go into detail on how to set up each exercise for the large breeds. Instead, I will cover two exercises, pointing out items you need to consider when planning your ring, as examples. As you set up for the different individual exercises ask yourself, "Is this exercise going to be fair to ALL breeds and handlers when they enter my ring?" Keep in mind the physically challenged handlers and their space requirements. Make a mental picture of an Irish Wolfhound being handled by a person in a wheelchair. With this in mind you should have no problem in setting up the ring that is fair to all who enter.

1. Figure Eight

When planning the area for the Figure Eight think about the ring barriers and, in Open, also consider the jumps. You want to provide ALL dogs the opportunity to go around the outside post and not have to concern themselves with the possibility of running into an object. Figure Eight posts that are in the corners of a ring or too close to a jump jeopardize the performance of the larger breeds. This type of set up is also too restrictive for the physically challenged handlers and their dogs. If you are judging indoors and using mats on slick floors use **three** mats (if mats are limited), if possible for the Figure Eight. Large breeds should have mats under them at all times during the Figure Eight if that is the case for the smaller breeds.

2. Scent Discrimination

Give thought to where you are going to place the scent articles. You want to allow the largest breeds ample space to go briskly out to the articles and also be able to circle them. I have observed judges placing the scent articles close to the corner of the ring. Or too close to a ring barrier. This type set up will not allow the larger breeds the freedom of motion, and they will be at a disadvantage. Large breeds are aware of their size and do not like to get into tight spots. Also consider the possibility, if the articles are tight in the corner (or too close to the ring barrier) and a dog was to step on the correct article, it could flip outside the ring due to the close proximity. Another potential problem area is placing the scent articles too close to the jumps. Allow plenty of room for the dog to work without physical restrictions. These types of situations can be avoided with a little thought prior to the start of the class.

Judging is more than just observing and scoring Fronts and Finishes. It requires a lot of thought and judgment *before the first dog enters the ring* and the first order is given. Judging the giants is just one aspect to keep in mind at your next assignment. Besides, the giants can be a welcome relief to your back when it comes to the examinations and measuring, if required! 😊

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