

Dog Training Articles By Beth Bradley

It's All About Obedience

The sport of Dogs is growing by the minute. Every time I pick up a dog magazine I read about a new sport or activity for owners and their dogs. What was a past time enjoyed by a few is now a past time enjoyed by a few million. People are now realizing that owning a dog is not only about feeding, giving fresh water and walking but about utilizing the natural instincts in their specific breed for fun, exercise and for mental stimulation. All dogs are working animals and your average person now realizes that if their dog is mentally and physically stimulated, many normal, household problems will fall by the wayside.

There are too many dog sports to mention but here are few of them; fly ball, luring, agility, obedience, hunting and retrieving, flushing, search and rescue, water rescue, weight pulling, sledding, disc catching, diving, Schutzhund, herding, etc. When I think about each sport, I can see the particular breeds working and I can imagine each breed doing what it loves to do and does best, for example, I can see the Labrador diving into the water or the Newfoundland pulling a row boat to shore. Not only can I see the dog but I can see the proud owner standing behind the dog and I can imagine the hours the owner spent instructing that dog and fine tuning his skills and instincts to give his top performance that day. No matter what sport you see a dog competing in, you must not forget that the root of his performance is Obedience. Obedience to his owner to accomplish the task at hand in a timely fashion with the expertise and precision he was taught to complete it with.

Though there are so many dog sports that I find interesting, unfortunately, do not have the time to involve myself in all of them. My life is full of so many dogs and their owners that in my past time the only sport I am able to enjoy with my dogs is the sport of Schutzhund. Schutzhund, the German translates into "protection dog" but that was not the intention of the creation of the sport. Schutzhund was created as a temperament test for German Shepherds by the man responsible for creating the breed, Max von Stephanhaus. Max wanted to set a standard for the German Shepherd Breed for temperament and mental stability and developed this test called Schutzhund. Schutzhund is a test of obedience, olfactory and courage. A dog competing in Schutzhund should be able to obey commands, follow a trail and protect his owner if needed. The dog should also be safe to have around other people and dogs and be able to overcome all distractions to obey his owner and do his job. Schutzhund is divided into three phases: Obedience, Tracking and Protection. But the key aspect of all three phases is Obedience. A well breed dog should have all of the instincts required to accomplish all of the above without the handler or owner, it is the handler who adds the obedience and teaches the dog the self control to accomplish all of the tasks at hand according to the handler's time frame and schedule. And that is what separates the pups from the dogs. I see many people enter Schutzhund competitions and they brag about how hard their dog bites, only

to fail the competition because the dog refused to 'out' or release the arm on command. Instincts and drive are great but Obedience is going to win the competition. If the dog has all of the instincts in the world, and the drive to work in any type of weather or in any condition but refuses to obey his handler, he is worthless in the sport. The dog that wins the competition may not be the strongest dog on the field, but he performed with precision and expertise and obedience to his handler's commands; and the obedience is what made him a great dog deserving of winning the competition.

And, the same is true for any dog sport. Most well bred dogs can accomplish the tasks at hand, but each dog must wait for the release or command from the owner to begin and then to end each exercise and to do it with precision. The drive is there, the obedience is taught. I hear many people belittle other sports because it doesn't require as much upon the dogs. Sure a retriever is going to jump into the water, big deal. Yes, it is a big deal because he did it on the command of his handler and not when he wanted to dive into the water. Before I competed in Schutzhund I competed in AKC Obedience. Well, I had many Schutzhund people laugh at me, because the obedience is different. And then I had AKC people say that their Obedience is harder. Obedience is obedience, not easier for one or the other.

Obedience is the foundation for everything, from not going into the kitchen garbage can, to not jumping on people when they enter your home, to biting a man's arm and releasing it on command from the handler. Too often I hear my colleagues wishing for a point in their career when they only have to work with dogs and people who want to do high competition with their dogs. I only ask myself why? When obedience is the foundation, and if you have a strong foundation, who knows who you will be working with when that puppy grows up? And, the obedience shouldn't be different for someone who is training a pet and someone who is raising a puppy for herding. Ultimately, both clients are looking for the same, a well mannered companion who obeys commands.

Pet owners are now more involved in their dog's life. Even if they do not compete on any level, most owners are out and about with their dogs; shopping, to parks, to dog runs, etc. The key to make those trips enjoyable is Obedience. In my Basic Obedience classes I teach good manners, Sit, Down, Stay, Heel, Come, Stand, not jumping, etc. These are all the same commands that are used in each and every sport. Each time I see a young puppy in my class, I wonder what that puppy may grow up to be. Maybe the adults in the house have no desire to compete, but their young son or daughter may be interested in a sport of some kind and if that is the case, their instruction is going to be very important at that level.

So, the next time you are watching television and you see a police dog searching for narcotics, or an avalanche dog searching for people on a mountain, take the time and think about the hours the handler spent fine tuning the dog's skills and teaching obedience. Think about that dog as a young puppy in a puppy kindergarten class learning sit, or down or stay and how those skills taught at such a young age impacted this dog and helped him become the dog he is today. It's all about Obedience and the willingness to please, and that is why they are called 'man's best friend'.

Beth Bradley

Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company, Animal Action PetCenter, Inc. in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-Roms and DVD's on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club.

Beth presently owns 3 German Shepherds and a Jack Russel Terrier. If you would like more information on Beth's achievements and qualifications you can view her extensive resume at <http://www.dog-trainer.biz>.