



## MEMORANDUM

### **WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DOG SPORTS**

The following is a summary of two academic studies concerning what motivates people to participate in dog sports. This information was presented to the Board of Directors. It is being made available to AKC clubs for their consideration when deciding how to structure their events/club activities.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In order to grow our sports, having an understanding of what motivates dog owners to participate in sporting events is insightful. Two studies in the canine literature in particular reported findings that are relevant to AKC sports. A recent study, “Dog- Sport Competitors: What Motivates People to Participate with Their Dogs in Sporting Events” explored why people participate in dog sports. The second study, “Exploring the Dimensions of Serious Leisure: “Love me-Love My Dog!” discussed the multiple roles of individuals within dog clubs and the factors related to their involvement. (1)

#### **BACKGROUND**

The studies start with a discussion of the nature of motivation and proceed to apply these concepts to dog sports.

#### **Motivation**

Two types of motivation -

- Extrinsic motivation – external motivation. For example, to earn a title or reward.
- Intrinsic motivation – internal motivation. The satisfaction resulting from gaining knowledge and skill while perfecting one’s abilities.

Studies have shown that intrinsic motivation is long lasting and self-sustaining. Dog sport participants scored significantly higher in intrinsic motivation than in extrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation (titles/rewards) has a role in terms of providing participants a publically acknowledged goal. Achieving this goal results in a sense of confidence and competency, and provides a public symbol of accomplishment.

Factors that are identified as increasing motivation in dog sports –

1. **The Challenge of Improvement:** People are intrinsically motivated when pursuing activities they feel are improving their skills and knowledge. This is best achieved when performance feedback is available (scores, times, mentor comments) and when pursuing goals that are reasonably achievable.

2. **Building a Relationship with Their Dogs:** People are intrinsically motivated if they feel they are building a relationship with their dogs and the dogs enjoy the sport. Participants express this in terms of “fun” or “enjoyable.”
3. **Social Interaction:** People are motivated by the satisfaction they feel by interacting with like-minded individuals and helping others by sharing their knowledge. Social aspects are a major determinate of frequency of participation
4. **Physical/Mental Activity:** This factor manifests itself in two ways. (1) The physical/mental aspect of the sport itself. (2) The planning and preparation to attend the event. (“The Adventure” of the event.) Both these aspects are stimulating provided they are within an individual’s personal ability.
5. **Recognition:** People are more motivated if their accomplishments are recognized by others.
6. **The Participant Feels a Sense of Control:** People are more motivated when they feel the sport is not subject to factors out of their control or that they have difficulty understanding. They desire feedback that is understandable and reasonably consistent.
7. **Sense of Belonging or Identity:** Many participants desire to express their affinity to a sport or to their breed through the display of symbols.
8. **Broadening One’s Dog Knowledge:** In addition to interest in a particular sport, dog owners desire to be knowledgeable on a wide variety of dog related topics.

### How Do Dog Owners Get Started?

- Through the involvement of friends or family.
- Desire to enrich their dog’s life. A common pattern was when new dog owners enroll in a training class and then realize that they gain satisfaction from working with their dog or they owned a particularly talented dog. This resulted in these owners joining a club where they hoped they could continue the self-development of both themselves and their dog.

### Types of Individuals Involved in Dog Sports

1. **Beginner:** Just starting out in the sport of dogs. They seek out advice from experienced participants. Ease of entry is important and involves a number of factors -
  - Cost of equipment.
  - Understanding of the rules.
  - Amount of training required.
  - Willingness of club members to share knowledge.
  - Social acceptance.
2. **Participant:** Developing their skills in dog activities. Participants are usually also club members but see the club as a means to gain knowledge.
3. **Active club member:** Organizer, leadership, volunteer. Usually become more involved with the club after they have participated for a period of time. Then they become both a participant and an active club member.

4. Supporter: Support because of spouse's interest. Usually do not participate themselves but help with club activities.
5. Associate: Have achieved a level of skill and accomplishment that provides personal satisfaction. Their involvement has moved away from participation with their dogs in the sport yet they maintain their association through other roles.

### **Factors Limiting Involvement**

The following limiting factors were identified:

- Monetary costs (training costs, travel costs, cost of entry)
- Time constraints
- Physical/Health constraints
- Negative emotional experiences
  - The inhibition of the unknown
  - Uncomfortable social interactions

### **Conclusion**

The majority of dog sport participants are motivated by the gratification they receive from the activities associated with developing their skills and their dog's skills, achieving their personal goals and the pleasure of social interactions associated with a sport. The degree of involvement is limited by the costs associated with their participation.

### **WHAT CAN CLUBS THAT ADMINISTER DOG SPORTS LEARN FROM THESE STUDIES?**

1. Within the limitations of the sport and club resources, considering how the motivation factors interact with the five types of individuals involved in the club when structuring an event or deciding on the activities of the club.
2. If the sport allows, clubs should consider holding events for novice level only to promote a friendly experience for new participants.
3. Packaging an event with other activities (CAT, dock diving, CGC, etc) can serve to make the event experience more enjoyable and attract new participants.
4. "Show and Go" events can contribute to the growth of members skills while reducing time costs.
5. Mentorship is important for transferring knowledge to new members.
6. Social activities are important.
7. Clubs can retain members by providing classes/outings on a variety of dog related topics in order for owners to be knowledgeable.
8. Recognize the accomplishments of club members.

- (1) Dog-Sport Competitors: What Motivates People to Participate with Their Dogs in Sporting Events? Jocelyn Farrell, Ashley Hope, Rodney Hulstein and Sandi Spaulding, from Lakehead University and Western University, Ontario, Canada. Published in *Anthrozoos*, March 2015.

Exploring the Dimensions of Serious Leisure: "Love Me-Love My Dog!" Cheryl Baldwin (University of Iowa) and Patricia Norris. Published in the *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol. 31, No.1, 1999.