

just for juniors

# Fun Games to Play

By Lynne Stephens

I hope you have enjoyed the last three articles in the series "Just for Juniors." I also hope that you are continuing to enjoy working and playing with your dog and that you are truly becoming a partnership that has fun together.

In this final article of the series, I should like to suggest some more activities and games that you might enjoy. Some are just for you and your dog, and some would be great to try with a friend or group of friends. If there are not enough like-minded junior handlers in your area, you could try persuading some of your adult friends to join you. We all could do with injecting more fun and variety into our training from time to time.

All of these activities assume that you are able or almost able to compete at Novice level and that your dog can safely negotiate all the obstacles on an agility course. Some of the games are adaptations of those to be found at selected British agility trials.

While you are playing the games, don't forget to:

- Have fun
- Face the way you are going
- Be consistent

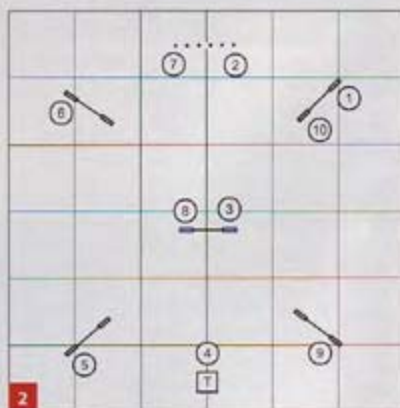
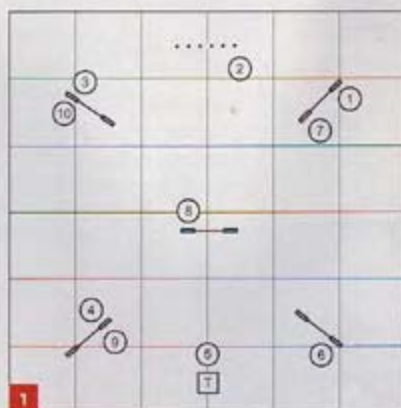
## Fun Games to Practice on Your Own

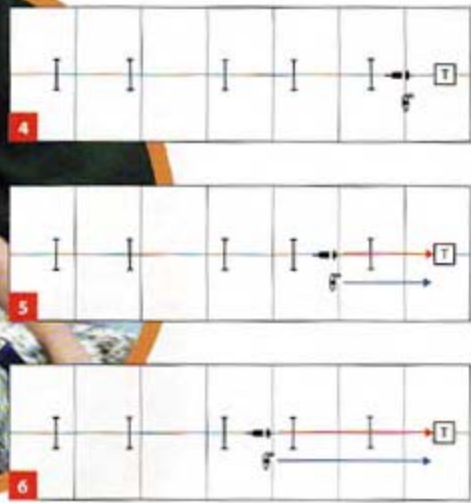
### Take Your Own Line

Set up a series of jumps and other obstacles if you have them. Give each obstacle a number and make up a short course. **Figure 1** shows such an example. Try to use all the obstacles in a logical and flowing manner. Run your course and see how smoothly it runs.

Try a different course this time. **Figure 2** is an example of another course from the same setup.

If you can get someone to time you, see which course can be run in the least amount





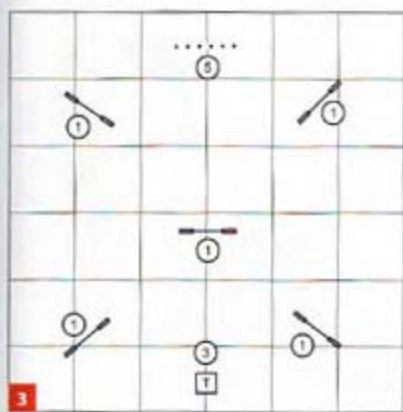
of time. (Make sure that you do not create any dangerous situations for you and your dog; ask a responsible adult to check if you are not sure.)

**Variations:**

- Set up a series of obstacles and see how many different routes you can take around them.
- Make up short sequences within the course and see how many different ways you can handle them.

**Pick Up Points**

Use the same course as before, or make up a different one, and give each obstacle a point value (like in the USDAA Gamblers classes) as shown in Figure 3. Set yourself a time limit and see how many points you can safely pick up within that time. (A good time to set would be 30 seconds since it is often used in Gamblers classes, and it would be a great way to practice.)



**Fun with the Table**

Place your dog's favorite toy or tidbit on the table so that he can see it is there. Place a line of jumps leading up to the table. Vary the distances between the jumps so that your dog will need to judge his take-off point.

Start by standing near the table as shown in Figure 4. Give the *Table* command and when your dog jumps onto the table, run to the table to enjoy his reward with him (either by giving additional tidbits or by having a huge game with the toy). Do not let your dog leave the table until you give the release command.

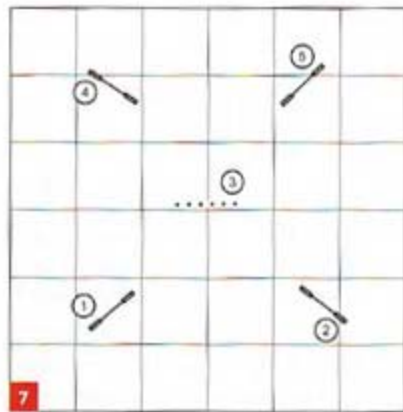
Repeat the above starting one jump back from the table as Figure 5 shows.

Repeat the above starting two jumps back from the table as in Figure 6.

Continue as above and aim to get your dog happily running ahead of you (use the *Go On* command) and jumping straight onto the table. See how many obstacles ahead of you she will go.

**Variation:**

Instead of using all jumps, vary the obstacles in a straight line between you and the table (for example, a tire, a broad jump, and so on). Still use the *Go On* command since you want your dog to understand that he can continue to run ahead as long as you use it. Make sure you have a huge game with your dog on the table at the end of each exercise. Dogs often do not want to stop in the middle of a round to do the table. This game should help them to see it as a really good place to be.



**Fun Games to Play with a Friend**

**Catch Me if You Can**

You will need a third friend to time you or, if there are only two of you present, you will need to time for one another.

Set out a simple sequence of jumps and maybe a set of weaves. Place them into a circle, a figure-eight pattern, or in a simple S-shape as seen in Figure 7.

Handler 1 tethers her dog, and then runs around the course herself, jumping each obstacle as she goes. (Don't have the bars too high!) On completion of her go round the course, she returns to her dog, unties him and runs the course with him. Record the time.

It is then the turn of the second handler and dog team.

The winning team is the one who records the quickest time with the least number of faults. (Each knocked bar counts as 5 faults). The dogs are tethered to encourage excitement and drive in the dog for this game.

**Variations:**

- Add 5 seconds each time you knock a bar. This will encourage you to be not only fast, but accurate with your dog.
- Have each handler place her dog in a down-stay while she runs her part of the course. This will help to build control at the start line. If your dog breaks the stay, you need to put him back on the start line. No extra penalties will be incurred since re-placing your dog on the start line will add time to your overall score.
- You could also set one course for the handlers to run and a different course,

with jumps set at the appropriate height for the dogs to run.

- Another idea would be for Handler 1 to run with her dog on the first part of the course to a table. Put the dog into a down or a sit on the table and then complete the human part of the course. (You could get your friend to do the judge's table count at the same time as a way of really proofing your dog's table performance.)
- One final variation to this game might be to have Handler 1 run the human course while carrying a baton. On completion of her course, she passes the baton to Handler 2 who completes the second part of the course with her dog. (You will need a third person to time this variation of the game.) Then reverse roles and see which handler/dog partnership has the winning time with the least faults.

### Boxed Pairs

For this game, set up a course of about 15 to 20 obstacles if you have them. Both handlers must be ready at the start line together. Decide who will start the course.

Handler 1 sets off and completes as much of the course as she can with no faults. As soon as a fault is incurred, Handler 1 returns to the start line as quickly as possible and Handler 2 runs with her dog to the obstacle where the mistake was made. She then continues the course. Her dog must not negotiate any obstacles on the way, or this will be counted as a mistake and she will

need to return to the start line for Handler 1 to resume the course.

If she gets there without taking any other obstacles, Handler 2 then continues the course until she incurs a fault. If this happens, she must return quickly to the start line and Handler 1 will continue the course (as previously described).

Keep going like this until the course has been completed. See how long it takes to finish the course and how many times you had to change handlers.

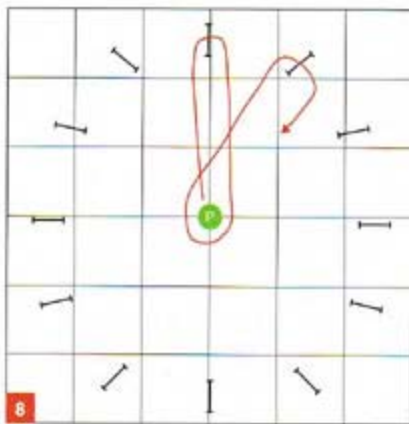
When you play the game again, try to better your last performance.

This game can be played with the second handler at the start line holding her dog (probably a good idea with a dog that becomes more motivated or excited) or by keeping the dog in a controlled sit, stand, or down position while your partner is running (this is good practice for those of you who have difficulty controlling your dogs on the start line since you can re-place them and it may just help to re-create the excitement of a trial situation for you and your dog).

Start by designing a fairly simple course at first. As your expertise and confidence grows, you can increase the difficulty of the course.

### Beat the Clock

Set out a circle of 12 jumps to look like the 5-minute intervals on a clock face shown in **Figure 8**.



Place a pole, cone, or something similar in the center of the circle.

Handler 1 starts at the center of the circle with her dog by her side. She sends him out to jump the first obstacle in the outer circle and then brings him back to go around the center marker. Continue around the clock face in a similar fashion for 30 seconds.

Handler 2 then takes a turn at the above. The winner is the handler and dog team that gets furthest round the clock face in the time allowed with no jumping faults.

The further away from your dog will work, the less running you will have to do—another good reason to work hard on your *Go On* command.



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PHOTO BY MARY FISH ARANGO

*(Just for the record, one of the quickest rounds I ever did in this game took about 3 seconds, when my dog ran through the side of the first obstacle, the tire, and I had to run for the finish line before I had even started. It may have been the fastest round of the day, but it certainly wasn't the winning round! On my best days, however, we got around the course almost twice; so make sure you have plenty of stamina for this game.)*

Recording your time is important just in case both handlers and dogs complete the same number of obstacles before a fault is incurred. Handler 2 then completes the above and the winning team is the one that completes the highest number of obstacles in 50 seconds.

I hope you have fun trying out these games and activities. Maybe you'll even feel inspired to create some original games of your own. If you're happy to share, then I'd love to hear from you.

Happy jumping—and remember—whatever else you do, have fun! 🐾

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*Lynne Stephens was a member of the British Agility World Cup team in 2003/2004. She currently competes and has great fun with her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Quiz, and Border Collie, Chess, both of whom have competed at most major U.K. finals, including Crufts and Olympia. Lynne and husband, Pete, are presently setting up an agility and dog training facility (Premier Agility Dog School) in Statesville, North Carolina. They can be contacted at premierpads@aol.com.*

### Time, Fault, and Out!

Using whatever agility equipment you are lucky enough to have, set up a straightforward course with not too many traps. If you have contact equipment and weave poles, be sure to include them in your course.

Set yourself a course time of about 50 seconds.

Handler 1 runs the course with her dog. If she has a clean run in less than 50 seconds, she must continue to run around the course for a second time until her time runs out.

If she continues to run clean, Handler 2 (or a third person timing) blows a whistle at the end of the 50 seconds.

Handler 1 then runs to the finish line as quickly as possible to record her final time. Her score will be the number of obstacles that she completed in the 50 seconds (that is, 15 to 20 obstacles in the course plus the number of additional obstacles completed in the 50 seconds.)

If, at any time a fault is incurred (either by knocking a bar or missing a contact or weave for example), the whistle will blow and you must run to the finish line as quickly as possible to record your time. Just as the game's title says: if you make a fault, then you are out.