

COONHOUND ADVISOR

Trevor Wade

I'm writing this the morning after the Tennessee Volunteers won the College Baseball National Championship and feeling a bit hungover, although I didn't indulge in any adult beverages. It's probably just my blood pressure trying to stabilize itself after a week of watching do or die games in Omaha, Nebraska with everything on the line. All the hard work, dedication, and discipline leads a team to winning something of that magnitude. Dog sports are no different. Listen or read any interview with any winner out there. Grand American, Winter Classic, Youth Nationals, Autumn Oaks, Tournament of Champions, World Championship, etc. Yes, you may hunt hard. But to win at that level, and for some folks consistently, it takes another level of commitment. Sometimes you have to put those boots on when you really don't feel like it. Sometimes you have to cut that hound one more time to work on a fault or gear up for that late round cast. There's no glory in walking 1,000 yards to a treed hound at 4 AM while the rest of the world sleeps. But glory could be on the horizon. And that is part of why we do it. Or part of why we did it for some. It's always been that way. Hard work prevails. Then why does it seem the new trendy fad is, not trying hard?

People have their different hobbies. Mine has always been sports and coon hunting. So, a lot of times I seem to find parallels between the two. One thing that seems to irk me more as time progresses is people who don't seem to give the effort that we know is required to succeed. Think of a major leaguer not running out a ground ball in the infield. Some may not notice until the ball is bobbled, or the throw is off course. Then it's, "Uh oh". Or maybe you're a basketball fan. Think about a player scoring a basket and then trotting downcourt while the other team throws an outlet pass down court for an easy "two". If you're neither of those, you may be a football fan. Hot dogging or failing to give maximum effort in the NFL is liable to get your bell rung. But I have seen backs and receivers with the ball duck out of bounds a yard or two shy of a first down instead of putting their pads down and going after it. There are tons of examples and as you go down the leagues into high school and middle school ball, it seems to be way more prevalent than I remember. Kids pulling up for a 30-footer and hanging their head instead of following their shot or getting back on defense. Kids trying to backhand a grounder that they had plenty of time to get around and through, causing an errant throw. News flash, it's happening in coonhunting too.

I go to a lot of events, and I hear things or see things that make me cringe sometimes. It can be discouraging to hear a young man or woman talk about trying to take a short cut on winning when the most obvious path, and the one that won't ruin your reputation, is simply working harder.

Maybe they are just blowing smoke, but no amount of rule bending can take the place of hunting harder. Or knowing your dog better. And it certainly isn't going to impress the true coonhunters who have put the hard work in to hear you brag about backing into a win. I guess all I'm saying is that it has always been cool to work hard. That's because it's always been cool to be successful, and those two things go hand in hand. Forget the fancy hats. Forget the vests or hoodies or all that jazz. If you want to impress coonhunters, work hard, be respectful to others and the hound on your leash, you'll earn all the respect you need in this sport. For those who may be nodding your head in agreement, remember the next generation typically follows their role models. So set the standard with your hard work. Be careful of the things you say or do because you never know who may be paying attention.

Cross Out and Your Conscience.

I've been getting some calls recently on trees touching and how to score them. It's just the time of year I suppose with full foliage on the trees and sometimes tough tracking conditions. You won't find much of anything in the rulebook putting a limit on how many trees or how far from a treed hound a coon can be and still get scored. Like many things, it's a judgment call. I went way back to the archives to pull some material from the experts, Allen and Todd. Let's see what they had to say.

Todd's Column from July 2000

It's always been understood that if you see a coon in the tree next to the one your dog is treeing on, that you could plus the dog, provided the coon could have legitimately crossed over. I do agree that is the way it should be. Although, it's also my opinion that in most of those cases the dog missed the coon. Maybe the dog did do a nice job and is treeing a layup coon off the scent which is several yards from the base of the tree that the coon is in. Or maybe it was a bad track, and the dog just missed the coon. At any rate, provided that there are legitimate limbs that will allow a coon to cross, the dog is plussed and I have no problem with that.

However, I do have a problem, as do many other hunters who have called in recently complaining of a new term and scoring practice that is showing up frequently in the hunts. A fairly new competition hunter contacted me the other day for advice concerning the scoring of "cross outs." Through the limited number of events that he had attended, he was already under the assumption that you could circle a dog's points, even if the coon was not in the tree the dogs were treed on, provided that there was another tree nearby where the coon could escape to, even if the coon was obviously not in the next tree. The theory being the coon could cross over, go down the next tree and get away. His particular question to me was whether it was correct to base your decision regarding "cross outs" on how hard the dogs were treeing. In essence, if they were treeing hard and confident, then you could circle their points as most likely

they had the right tree, but the coon got away. On the other hand, if they were not hitting it like they should, they would be minused because they probably messed up.

This is just one example of many that I have heard where casts are circling minus trees because the coon could have crossed out. Another related problem is coons being scored two or more trees down the line. In Michigan we hunt fence rows where the trees may touch for a couple hundred yards. How many trees down the line should we be able to score when the dogs tree and we find a coon somewhere in the fence row?

I really hoped for this column to get into some hard and specific interpretations regarding when you could and couldn't score "cross outs". But the more I thought about it and the more people I contacted; it became apparent that you simply can't. There are too many variables involved. I guess I'll just have to leave it as a plea for everyone to buckle up and start scoring the situations the way you know they should be scored. Stop looking for loopholes. The benefit of the doubt to a dog is fine. Outright making excuses for one and giving him credit for something he doesn't deserve is not. Today's new hunters are going to be under the assumption that coon cross more frequently than squirrels, but, that they only do it on Nite Hunt casts.

It's funny that hide hunters know the coons don't cross out much. They don't care. If the dog trees and there is a coon in the vicinity, that's a coon for them and a good dog. They don't shoot the coon as a reward for the dog thinking it crossed out. You know who else knows that coons don't cross much? Those who are trying out dogs to buy and critically evaluating the performance of a particular dog. When they make three blank trees in a row, they don't talk themselves into the fact that each time the coon crossed over to that big leafy tree next to it. When you listen to as many accounts of Nite Hunts each week as I do, it's amazing how many cross out trees are the result of a track that is breaking down and dogs just getting hooked as opposed to good tracks when they have the coon. It almost leads one to believe that coons who cross like squirrels don't smell as much like a coon as their cousins who don't cross.

On a personal note, I don't think coon should be scored more than one tree away. I don't think coon should be determined to have crossed out unless you have limbs the size of your wrist for them to cross on. I think a potential cross out situation should be addressed before the tree is searched in the same manner that we determine whether split trees in close proximity will be scored as one tree or two before we shine them. I think 90% of the legitimate cross out trees are those that grow up into a larger tree, not stand next to one. I don't think coon jump, ride trees into other trees or walk grapevines like tightropes. I think even the best of hounds miss the coon once in a while and because they are not perfect, deserve minus points. I also feel that despite a few problems that come to my attention (the nature of the job), that the vast majority of competition

hunters are still fair and knowledgeable individuals with the best interest of our hounds at heart.

Allen's Column from July 2015

Back in July of 2000 Todd Kellam wrote an interesting column on this very topic titled "Cross Outs and Your Conscience". It touched on concerns about new hunters at that time and how they might be led too into thinking it to be the name of the game to look for any loophole possible to give a dog the benefit of the doubt when it comes to scoring trees and "cross outs" specifically. Now, 15 years later, have we done that? I guess that's something each seasoned individual needs to ask ourselves.

"Trees are touching!" seems to be common vocabulary during the course of a nite hunt still these days. Too common it seems in many situations and a theory most honest handlers will surely divest themselves from. First, when the leaves are on, most trees in the woods do obviously "touch" each other. Second, simply because tree limbs or leaves touch the next tree over doesn't mean a coon can cross from one to the other. At least not to the degree that some tend to be far too quick to speculate as such.

Further, a judge should find a legitimate cross-over before ever considering scoring a coon in a tree other than the one the dogs are treed on. Lastly, UKC maintains it to be in the best interest of the sport to never consider scoring a coon in anything other than the next tree over with the exception of using good common sense in situations where a tree the dogs are on might be laying into a tree or two over.

Noting on a few other points made in the aforementioned article relative to this topic; do you realize who else thinks that coon don't cross out as much we tend to give dogs the benefit of the doubt to sometimes? That's right. Those guys that are trying dogs out to buy who critically evaluate their performance. Or, hide hunters who could care less if the coon is sitting over several trees. It's fur in the bag! Just some things to think about when it comes to scoring coons in trees other than the one the dogs are treed on.

I'll end this topic with a stolen quote from that past article "despite a few problem individuals, with not much when it comes to their conscience, it is felt that the vast majority of competition coonhunters are still fair and knowledgeable individuals with the best interest of our hounds at heart."



ATTENTION!

The following person's Nite Hunt Director and Nite Hunt Judging privileges have been suspended until the date listed.

- Andrew Ratliff • Winchester, KY • January 1, 2025**
- Cliff Monroe • Mooresboro, NC • Indefinitely**
- Chris Simmons • Cramerton, NC • Indefinitely**

Violations to these privileges should be reported to the United Kennel Club.



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