

COONHOUND ADVISOR

Trevor Wade

Grand American has passed, and Winter Classic is on the way. It's hard to believe, but we are about to be in the thick of competition season. And thank goodness for the sake of this article. I was starting to really struggle to get topic ideas that aren't the same ones that are harped on over and over again. I did have a couple that seemed to pop up at Grand American that I think we can discuss here a little bit.

Scratched For Fighting on Leash

One question from a scenario on a cast seemed to pop up several times on Saturday afternoon after Friday night's casts. You all know how it is when you hear recounts of a hunt or situation; all of them are a little bit different. But this recount is the best I could surmise from the collection of stories I heard.

The cast arrives at the tree, and the handlers are in the process of handling the dogs. A handler grabs the collar of their hound, which becomes involved in a dog fight before the dog can be leashed. Since the handler has hold of the dog's collar, should this count as the dog being handled and, in turn, keep the dog from being scratched from the hunt?

Let's head to Rule 6(b) of the Rulebook and read the rule. Rule 6(b) reads that a dog will be scratched, For fighting or attempting to fight* when off-leash during the hunt, including any time-out periods. When the aggressive dog is known, scratch the aggressor only. If not known, scratch dogs involved. Withdrawing to avoid dog being reported for fighting is not permitted.

The question here isn't determining if the dog was fighting or not or even if the dog was the aggressor. This has everything to do with UKC's interpretation of "off-leash." And to make it as simple as possible, we would define off-leash exactly as described. If the leash is snapped on the dog's collar, it's on-leash. If the leash has not been snapped on the dog's collar, it's off-leash. No need to muddy the waters here. When you start trying to make certain exceptions for instances that are so rare, you open yourself up to tougher rulings and harder instances to judge in the future.

Striking under the minute vs. babbling rule

Q: It's a three-dog cast. Dog A struck in before the minute was up, Dog B struck after the minute was up, and both were trailing straight from us about 200 yards away. Dog C strikes in 100 yards to our right and shortly after falls

treed. Dogs A & B hush and are at Dog C's tree a minute later. Should dogs A & B be minused their strike points for leaving their track?

A: While we can all agree that we don't want our hounds pulling to other dogs, switching tracks is not cause to minus strike points per the rulebook. Some folks will point out Rule 4(c), but when reading that rule, you have to take the entire rule into account. Rule 4(c) When a dog quits a track that is being worked and comes in to cast. The key part there that has to be remembered is "comes in to cast." That means that a dog has quit its track altogether, not that it has switched tracks.

You also mention the dogs striking before and after the minute. Maybe we should touch base a little bit on some of the misinterpretations of the babbling rule. A lot of people put the minute with the babbling rule hand in hand when, in fact, the minute is just a grace period where someone doesn't have to strike their hound if it is, in fact, babbling. The definition of babbling per the rulebook is when a dog opens three times or has been struck where no track is evident. It is as simple as that. If at any point the judge feels a dog is opening where no track is evident after the minute has elapsed, the dog may be minused for babbling. As is so often the case with the nite hunt rules, this is a judgement call. If the handler of the minused hound disagrees, the call can be called to question, and a cast vote would then determine the ruling, per Rule 2(b).

Can A Cast Utilize a Motor Vehicle While Hunting?

I can't tell you how many times I've had this question. I think it is one of those that has various misinterpretations floating all over the country. The old-timers' rules, as I call them, where they travel more by word of mouth than actual written verification. Well, as I was digging for some new topics that haven't been touched on in a while, this popped up. Allen last wrote about it back in February of 2018. I found the original article by Todd Kellam back in June of 2001. So safe to say this interpretation has been consistent in UKC since the late 1980s by the very latest, using the context clues in Todd's column. Enough yapping by me; let's see what Todd says.

Real Life Scenario #1. A handler has access to enough four-wheelers (or one Jeep, for that matter) to accommodate all cast members. Is it permissible to follow the dogs by vehicle during the course of the hunt?

Real Life Scenario #2. While hunting typical one-mile square, Midwest farm country, the cast releases the dogs from 34th St. They fall treed approximately one mile east, very near to 35th St. Is it permissible to drive around to the dogs, or are we required to walk the one mile over

and one mile back?

A: I've been dreading this one for two reasons. The answer doesn't seem very consistent, but it's been the UKC policy for the 13 years I've worked here, and it has served us well. It always makes me nervous that someone will take unreasonable advantage of the situation. Luckily, the coonhound checks and balances system is both strict and accurate, and for that reason, troubles are few.

In regards to scenario #1, no, you cannot hunt from a motorized vehicle. Nor can you hunt from mules, horses, bicycles, etc. This is a sport whereby we free-cast our dogs and hunt from foot. It always has been, and I hope it always will be. A cast may not utilize any type of vehicle as its source of transportation after dogs have been cast.

In regards to scenario #2, yes, you can move around a section by vehicle to get closer to the dogs. Perhaps the key is moving around a section rather than "following" the dogs through one. I know all the arguments against this policy, such as not being able to keep the time on the dogs, not being able to tell if they move etc., etc. I agree that this is not the most accurate means of judging the cast. I agree that it is not fair for one cast to move by vehicle while another cast walks. But when you consider the safety of the dogs and situations where they may be treeing next to roads, treeing in some crazy guy's front yard, etc., I can see the need to allow casts to be more mobile. If this scenario was said to have happened more than once on a cast, I would be suspicious that the situation was more in line with scenario #1, and I would be tempted to scratch the cast for hunting out of a vehicle.

Yes, a situation can arise where it is necessary to drive to the dogs, but it shouldn't happen frequently.

I've made an observation that is a good one for discussion. It appears to me that the reason this issue is not more of a problem is that in this part of the country, where you have the sections all laid out in one-mile squares, you have enough coon that the dogs rarely get through the section on you. In those parts of the country that have the big, rough sections, where the dogs tend to get deeper, there is usually not an easy way around to them anyway.




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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