

IWS and flyball



Foto by Teemu Silius

I have an 3 year old Irish water spaniel. We do basic obedience and flyball together. This is a short story about IWS and flyball.

Flyball is a dog sport in which teams of dogs race against each other. They start from a start/finish line, run and jump over a line of hurdles to a box that releases a tennis ball to be caught by the dog when he presses a spring-loaded pad and then runs back to the handler with the ball.

Flyball is a team sport, in the team there are four dogs and it is a relay race. The track consists of four hurdles placed 10 feet (3 m) apart from each other, the starting line 6 feet (1.8 m) from the first hurdle, and the fly ball box is situated 15 feet (4.5 m) after the last hurdle. The total track is 51-feet (15.5 m) long. The hurdle height is determined by the shoulder height of the smallest dog in the team. Each dog must return and cross the start line before the next dog can leave. Ideal running is nose-to-nose at the start line. The first team whose all 4 four dogs have crossed the finish line without mistakes wins the heat. Penalties are applied to teams if the ball is dropped or if the next relay dog is released too early.

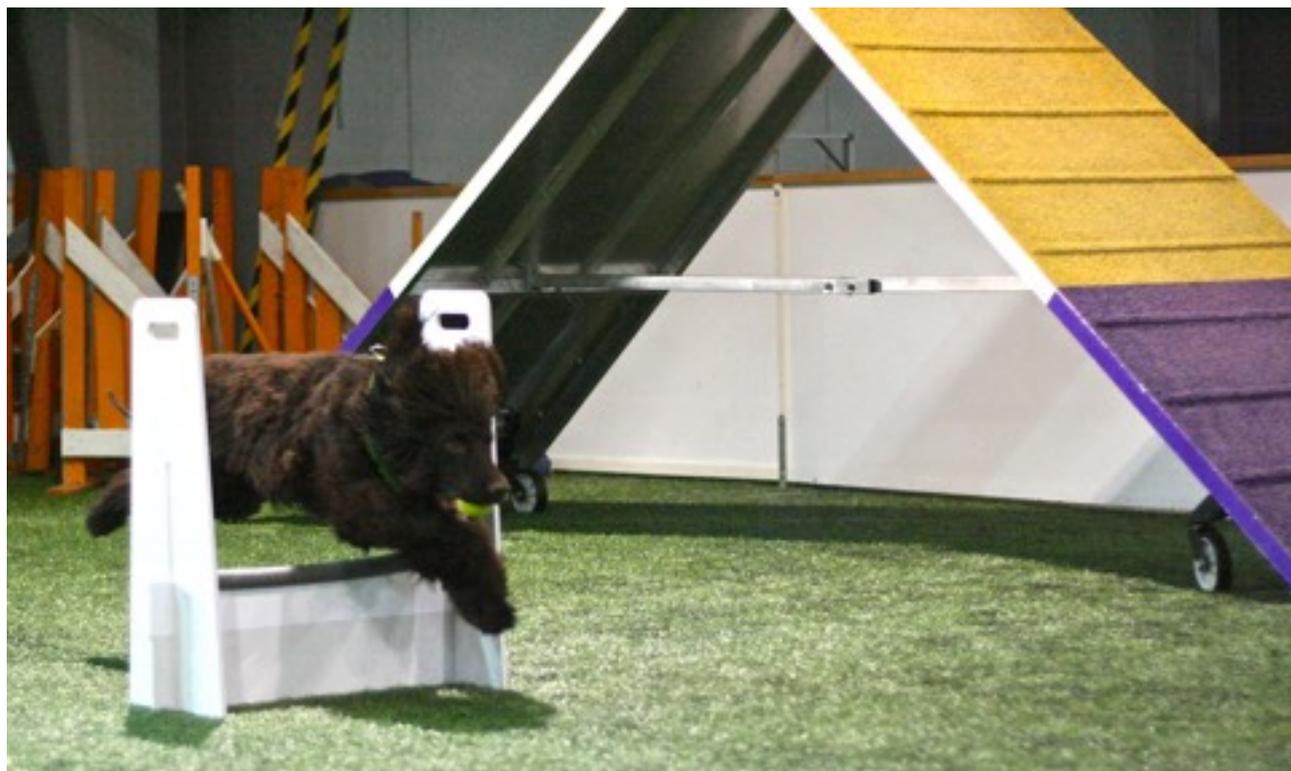
I had heard about fly ball and tried it once with my first IWS in the early 2000`s. So I was a bit familiar with this sport.

We participated in a beginners` course and started from there. Luffy already loved playing with a tennis ball so we didn`t have any problems with that. A tennis ball is the best reward to Luffy and he would do anything for it. In flyball we naturally couldn`t use a tennisball as a reward so there I had a rubber dummy and some delicious treats.



The first thing that you do in flyball practises is to get the dog familiar with the flyball box. So the dog has to run towards the box and jump on it so that the pressure of his paws on the box makes the tennis ball fly out from the box. Because of the size of IWS we first teached Luffy to touch the box with his paw. Luffy was so excited when he touched the box and the tennisball flew. So this was easy to Luffy. After we went further and Luffy got faster, he started to jump on the box naturally.

After this you teach the dog to jump the hurdles and then go to the box to get the tennisball. As we know IWS is a breed that apparently LOVES to jump! And Luffy.. He really loves to jump so this was again easy for him. Everything in order so far.



The first problems occurred when Luffy was supposed to come back from the box and jump all the hurdles again. Luffy made so wide a curve by the box that he was off the line towards the hurdles so he usually got around them to get quicker to me. It was all six-six for Luffy from the box to me. To be honest I was a bit frustrated at that time.



Then we decided to put an obstacle on the right side of the box, as that was the way Luffy was always turning to and getting off the track. So after this Luffy made a tighter curve and was back on the track/lane and could easily jump the hurdles straight.

The next thing to learn is to do all this with the other dog/dogs. So you have to do a "change" because flyball is a teamsport. So we first did this with a dog which already knows how to do it. Basicly it's the same thing but you just have two dogs on the track. I was afraid that Luffy would be more interested in the other dog and wouldn't go to the ball and jump the hurdles and get back to me. When we waited for the first time behind another dog, I was like on tenderhooks. We watched the other dog "fly" easily and after that I released my dog to the lane. There he was.. He jumped all the four hurdles and rushed to the box and got the tennisball and turned easily and jumped ALL the hurdles again and rushed back to me with the tennisball. I was so happy and amazed! I must have a fly ball genius!

If you think about IWS and fly ball I have to admit that IWS is not the best dog for this kind of dog sport. IWS is not that fast and in flyball the faster your dog and your teammates are the better you are as a team. So I don't expect me and Luffy to be world champions in this sport. But it's fun and Luffy loves it so that's enough for me.

Johanna and Luffy aka Cúboglach Purple Emperor



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