

## Prep for Game Day

Contributed by The Crew at SportMutt

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Finally the day has come. You've been working so hard and waiting ever so patiently. Sleepless nights full of anticipation. Not knowing what to expect yet willing to take on the challenge of your first DockDogs event.

You arrive at the venue. The scene is everything you imagined. Your anxiety quickly turns in to impatience. You can't wait to get up on the dock and start jumping. The event coordinator announces the dock won't be open for a few hours. You decide this would be a great opportunity to take to a field or a pond and throw the object for a while. You know, keep your dog excited and ready to tackle the dock. Finally after you've thrown the object at the pond, walked your dog around the venue for a while, gotten your dog to jump up after the object for a while, the event coordinator opens the dock.

A line quickly forms in front of the dock. You get in line and hold your dog on lead trying to keep the excitement level up. Finally, finally, it's your turn. Everything works to perfection. After a few jumps your dog is looking pretty good. You tell yourself "We can do this", "We fit right in". So, you take a few more. The distances are improving. Pretty soon you start thinking, "Hey, we have a shot at this, let's try a few more".

Competition begins. Your dog stumbles but still has a pretty good jump. The next jump your dog has a really good jump but leaves a few feet early. You're still very excited and you've made it to the finals on Sunday.

That night you notice your dog is pretty tired. You know you have a big day on Sunday so you let your dog rest. The next day you notice your dog doesn't quite have the spunk of yesterday but you tell yourself "once we get going, the spunk will come back". That day you notice the jumps are not as long as the previous days jumps. You notice your dogs simply do not have the energy of the previous day.

This is a common scenario with our new competitors. Your dog is whooped. This is a sport that requires optimum energy that must be maintained for a certain period of time. Your dog begins to burn that invaluable energy the moment you arrive at the venue. Then, to take your dog out to a pond, or jump up after the object, well, that would be like Michael Jordan doing a 1000 deep knee bends right before a slam dunk contest.

The key to a successful competition is proper preparation. This preparation starts well before you arrive at the event and follows completely through the entire event.

Training should consist of Technique, Strength, and Condition. I'm not going to take this time to discuss scheduling in detail but I will say this, a good big air training schedule should include these entities and should also include lots of rest. The schedule should be constructed so that you have a minimum of 3 days rest prior to competition.

The following is a general but effective way to prep for an event whether you're a first timer or an experienced GOG competitor. Tucker has been to many competitions and we always follow this routine:

- 1) **Breakfast.** Every dog's eating schedule will be different, but you'll want to make sure your dog has been fed a good 3 – 4 hours prior to a competition.

- 2) **Potty Break.** Make sure you give your dog plenty of time to relieve themselves. I usually take Tucker for a small walk an hour after breakfast. It loosens him up in more ways than one, if you know what I mean.
- 3) **Set up your home.** When you arrive at the event you'll want to find an area where you can get away from the competition. This allows your dog to conserve energy and rest until it's time. I understand the each venue is different where some have more room than others. A kennel is a great way to keep your dog rested.
- 4) **Acclimate to your surroundings.** Once you set up home you'll want to acclimate to the surroundings. Every venue is different and will introduce new sights and smells to your dog. Walk around the venue. Let your dog look at and smell everything in sight. Dogs are naturally curious creatures and will be distracted by these new sights and smells.
- 5) **Register.** When it comes time to register, take your dog back to your home area. It is always a good idea to have a support person with you at an event. This person can stay with your dog while you register. I understand that not everyone can have a support person. In this case you would have to bring your dog along to registration. NEVER leave your dog unattended.
- 6) **Acclimate to the Dock.** When the dock opens you'll want to take this opportunity to acclimate to the dock. Every dog should be acclimated to the dock. The best competitors in the world acclimate and will usually take the opportunity to take a practice run.
- 7) **Practice.** Usually your practice jumps will take place the same time you are acclimating to the dock. Keep in mind your dog has never been off this dock before. The most effective way to practice is this: on your first jump start your dog no further than half way back from the jump point. Experienced dogs should start half way back. New dogs should start about 10 feet back. This is a quick way to ensure confidence on that particular dock. The second jump relies on the first jump. If your dog had a successful first jump, you can start at your desired start point. If you dog did not have a successful first jump, move the dog up a bit. Keep doing this until you've had a successful jump, then move your dog to your desired start point. Once you've taken 1 or 2 jumps from your desired start point you are done. Competition will be your next jump.
- 8) **Wait for Competition.** You are now ready to compete. Take your dog back your home area and wait for competition to begin. Do NOT take your dog to the Judges briefing if you don't have to.

That's it. The most successful dogs in Big Air follow this routine to some extent. The idea is not to over work your dog. The results will reflect that and you will leave the competition knowing your dog could have done much better. I know, I've been there.

Good Luck and Keep it Fun