

Dealing with  
**Misconduct**  
and  
**Dog Aggression**  
in  
**Barn Hunt®**



*A guide for Club Admins and  
Judges*

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## Misconduct

Like all dog sports, Barn Hunt has a basic Code of Conduct that it expects all people to follow at Barn Hunt events, including competitors, spectators, Club Admins, and Judges. While we can't always hold spectators to the same exact Code as people participating in the sport, we can set an example which will encourage spectators to also act in a manner consistent with those practiced by good sportsmen and sportswomen.

The Code of Good Sportsmanship is found on Page 4 of the Barn Hunt Rules, and states:

*All participants and spectators attending Barn Hunt Events are required to operate as good sportsmen and sportswomen. Good sportsmanship includes honesty, courtesy, respect, and graciousness in both victory and defeat. No harsh, punitive or corrective training is allowed on Trial grounds. Any handler who displays poor sportsmanship and/or who verbally or physically abuses his or her dog either in or out of the ring can face discipline ranging from a verbal warning, dismissal from class, dismissal from show grounds and up to expulsion from future Events, depending on the severity of the infraction. Handlers and spectators must show good sportsmanship toward the Judge, show committee, stewards and competitors. The BHA empowers the Trial Chair and Committee to make disciplinary decisions on behalf of the BHA, and all decisions made at a Trial are considered official BHA rulings. Parties may appeal permanent bans to the BHA who will make a final decision on whether or not the person(s) involved will be able to return to any Barn Hunt Event.*

*Barn Hunt is a family-friendly sport. Actions which, for example, would cause a family with young children to conclude the sport is inappropriate will result in disciplinary action.*

## Breaking down the meaning of the Code

There are several key sections to the Code of Good Sportsmanship, but in general the important thing to remember is that the Code sets expectations of an atmosphere of respect, kindness, and courtesy towards all, including our canine (and rodent) partners. Key provisions are:

- Graciousness in both victory and defeat
- No harsh, punitive, or corrective training
- No physical or verbal abuse of a dog either in or out of the ring
- Treating the judge, trial committee, and fellow competitors with courtesy and respect
- Setting a good example for our many newcomers

The code will not cover every incident which will result in a Misconduct hearing. For instance, cheating is not specifically mentioned in the code, but would result in a hearing.

## **Barn Hunt as a Gateway Sport**

We are a young sport and have many people attending who have never seen a dog sport before. The way those people are treated, and the impression they get of the sport, may well influence not only whether or not they do Barn Hunt again but whether they do any dog sport. We take that responsibility very seriously, so when making a decision about misconduct it is important to refer back to that family-friendly aspect so critical to our growth and to engaging new people in the dog sport world.

## **How do I Determine if it is Misconduct?**

On the surface, this is an easy question to answer; it's misconduct when it violates the Code of Good Sportsmanship. But in reality, there will always be some question about when a Misconduct Hearing should be called. In some cases an issue between people can be quickly and peacefully resolved without having to have a hearing. One example a club might use is if the incident is severe enough to be noted in the Trial Summary Report, a Misconduct Hearing must be held.

Judges and Club Admins who witness Misconduct are to be especially alert to the consequences of not acting. They must also take very seriously any competitor's complaint against another competitor. All competitors reporting incidents should be respectfully heard. Sometimes just being able to talk out the issue helps resolve it. If not, a hearing must be held.

Attempting to ignore and not report an issue of Misconduct never works. Information on the incident inevitably makes its way to the Barn Hunt office, and clubs who have deliberately decided not to act even when misconduct is clear may be sanctioned. Clubs should not take that to mean that every tiny incident must have a hearing. However, if the incident clearly meets the criteria of misconduct, a hearing must be held.

## **Dog Abuse**

It goes without saying that dog abuse is very serious. Our Code states that abuse can be either physical or verbal. Physical abuse is usually fairly black and white, while verbal abuse is often more nuanced. When competitors get excited, sometimes their tone of voice gets loud and commanding. That is not necessarily verbal abuse. Two possible litmus tests for verbal abuse are:

- It makes me feel very uncomfortable
- The dog acts upset/is cowering/afraid

Sometimes in these instances all that is necessary is to issue a verbal warning. Whether or not there needs to be a hearing depends on the severity and/or frequency. If a handler is warned to watch their tone with their dog and is immediately contrite and the next time in the ring moderates their tone, that may be a different outcome than a handler who when told to watch their tone becomes combative and argumentative, and/or a handler who is warned repeatedly and still does not moderate their tone, and the dog acts upset/afraid.

## Notes on the Trial Summary Report

A note on the TSR does not replace a hearing. In order to take permanent action, the BHA must have results from a hearing plus relevant paperwork. More information about those paperwork needs are noted elsewhere in this document.

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## Dog Aggression

Dog aggression in Barn Hunt can be either dog on dog, or dog on person. There are a few very important things to know about Dog aggression as shown in Part 5 Section 5 (pp 17-18 of the rules):

1. Dog aggression results in a Disqualification (DQ) and dismissal from Trial grounds.
2. Dog Aggression is an overt threat from a dog against another dog or a person and/or an attack with contact against another dog or a person with the intent to harm.

*Overt threat is the judgment that if a person or dog was not very quickly removed from the immediate vicinity a bite or attack would certainly have taken place.*

3. Injury does not have to occur for a dog to be deemed aggressive.
4. Dogs who rumble (a quiet growl) or posture are not necessarily deemed aggressive.
5. Dogs jumping on or bumping into a Judge or Rat Wrangler with no mouth contact or intent to harm are not deemed aggressive.

A dog nipping the handler (including hands while the handler attempts to remove the tube) Judge, or Rat Wrangler as the tube is removed (prey drive nip) receives a non-qualifying (NQ) score and is dismissed from the course but is not considered aggressive or overtly threatening. Nipping is defined as teeth coming in contact with and closing on skin or clothing.

6. Dogs responding defensively to another dog's aggressive action are not deemed aggressive.
7. Dogs gripping (grabbing and not letting go with mouth/teeth) other dogs or people are deemed aggressive.
8. All dog sizes, breeds and types are to be judged equally in terms of dog aggression. Breeds or breed types are not to be considered in any decision on dog aggression.
9. Sparring or other intentional pitting of one dog against another is not allowed on Trial grounds.
10. All dogs must be able to work in a ring with the Judge, handler, and one or more Rat Wranglers.

## **Breaking down the meaning of the Rules on Dog Aggression**

All of the rules on Dog Aggression are important, but for Clubs trying to decide whether or not to hold a hearing, there are several key aspects:

- An overt threat is determined when an attack is only thwarted through very quick action which prevented what surely would have been an attack.
- A bite/injury does not actually have to take place for dog aggression to be called. If a dog jumps another dog with serious intent and it just so happens that there are no punctures, it's still dog aggression.
- Dogs who defend themselves once jumped by another dog are not to be penalized.
- Rumbling or hackling are not by themselves dog aggression.
- Prey nips/bites in the ring are not dog aggression and do not need to be written up using a Dog Aggression Report or noted on the Trial Summary Report, nor do they require a hearing. They just get an NQ score for their run. It can be noted on the scoresheet.
- A grip is not a nip. Dogs who grip realize they are gripping and have decided they are not interested in letting go right away. That is aggression and must have a DQ and a trial hearing.
- Bias by size/breed must be avoided. Not making a judgment against a dog because the Trial Committee and/or judge knows the dog and does not think the dog to be aggressive is also bias and must be avoided. Aggression is determined by the action on the day, not on how the dog behaved in the past or an expectation of how the dog may behave in the future.
- Clubs are to never give special considerations to dogs due to supposed aggression. All dogs must be **PHYSICALLY IN THE BLIND**. Handlers and/or dogs are not allowed to be outside the blind, standing behind the blind, etc. because of possible aggression. Rat Wranglers cannot be switched out for specific dogs, nor can judges make accommodations for specific dogs.
- While Barn Hunt is a place where many dogs can play, our sport does not make special accommodations for dogs with aggression issues and all dogs are expected to be able to play the game with the same set of rules.

## **How to Start the Hearing Process**

First, it must be determined if a hearing must be held. If no hearing is held, the Barn Hunt office can take no official action or sanctions against any person or dog. In order to determine if a hearing should be held, the following questions must be answered.

1. Did the incident happen?
2. Did the incident happen on trial grounds? (note that some clubs include hotels as trial grounds)
3. Did the incident meet the definition/criteria to be called dog aggression and/or misconduct?

**If the answers to all three of those questions are YES, then a hearing must be held.** Detailing the incident on a Trial Summary Report without supporting records and documentation from a hearing will result in no permanent action being taken.

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## **Conducting a Misconduct or Dog Aggression Hearing**

Once it has been determined that a misconduct and/or dog aggression hearing must be held, there are some rules that must be followed.

- All clubs must have an Event Committee, and at least 3 Event Committee members must be on trial grounds at all times to serve in case of a need for a hearing. While it is not a rule, it is of great advantage to not have the Trial Secretary as one of the three mandatory committee members (they can be a committee member but if so, should be a fourth). This will allow the trial to proceed even if there is a hearing.
- The hearing must be held on the same day of the incident OR, if that is impossible, must be scheduled at a period within 7 days of the event, at a time and place convenient for the trial committee and all witnesses including the accused to attend. Though it takes time, holding the hearing on the day of the incident is strongly preferred to any delay. The hearing can be held immediately or deferred to just after the end of classes.
- The accused (or owner of the dog accused) must be given proper time and opportunity to defend themselves and tell their side of the incident. At no time can the accused be denied that opportunity. Every effort must be made to contact the accused as soon as possible to let them know there will be a hearing and the time of the hearing. If the person accused knows of the hearing and chooses to leave trial grounds, the hearing may be held without their testimony. Alternately, they may provide written testimony. Clubs cannot deliberately schedule a hearing at a time when it would be impossible for the accused to attend (i.e., 10 am on a Tuesday when the club knows the accused works from 8 to 5). Otherwise they have the right to know of the hearing and testify.

## **Collecting statements and interviews**

- All witnesses should provide written statements. They can be hand written or typed, and if written, a photo of the statement (writing legible) is admissible.
- The accused any accusers/witnesses should be interviewed separately
- The accused may bring their own witnesses if they request

## **Event Committee Meets**

After statements have been taken and collected, the Event committee meets and reaches a consensus by vote of any action(s) taken. Actions could include no action at all, NQ but not DQ, dog and/or handler dismissed from grounds, etc. The accused is advised of the committee's findings and that all information will be forwarded to the Barn Hunt Administration for a final decision. Regardless of the BHA's final decision on the incident, the Event committee may rule that the person and/or dog may not enter their events in the future.

A member of the Event Committee informs the Barn Hunt office via email ( info@barnhunt.com) as soon as possible that there has been a hearing held. The Misconduct Form and/or Dog Aggression Form(s) are filled out in full and uploaded to the Results, as well as sent to info@barnhunt.com. The committee's recommendation for a permanent action by the BHA is included on the form.

All parties are advised that a final decision from the BHA may take as long as 4-6 weeks and may either be less severe, the same as, or more severe than the Committee findings based on overall evidence and adherence to Barn Hunt Rules.

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## **Summary**

Once misconduct and/or dog aggression has happened, the club needs to:

1. Gather and inform the Trial Committee
2. Arrange a hearing time and inform all parties involved of that time
3. Collect witness statements
4. Separately interview the accused and those bringing the charges
5. Meet with the Trial Committee, reach consensus, and vote on the club's final action
6. Inform info@barnhunt.com of the hearing
7. Fill out and sign the appropriate report(s)
8. Reference the hearing in the Trial Summary Report
9. Load the reports to the website with your Results, using the Dog Aggression and/or Misconduct categories

## **Where to find forms**

The Misconduct Report and Dog Aggression Report can be located under Secretary Functions, Resources as well as on the main barn hunt website under Rules/Resources, Club/Trial forms. Other useful forms include:

Trial Handbook

Trial Summary Form

Spectator's Guide

Rat Wrangler's Guide

Trial Moveup Form

## **Uploading Reports and Documentation**

Under Secretary Functions, Event Uploads, upload the pertinent report plus any supporting documentation. Uploads can be in pdf, jpg, or word formats. Be sure to select the correct event date for your upload. This documentation is due at the same time as all other Event documentation.

*Note: This document is fluid and will be updated as necessary. Secretaries must go online and download the latest version of this document whenever a trial hearing is held.*