The Drafting Community has worked hard over the years to promote a friendly and helpful attitude and it's been very well received and appreciated. Now, more than just a few handlers are taking that to the extreme and taking advantage of some judges. I think it's important for us to draw a line and not let this trend continue. We can remain friendly and helpful without allowing handlers to take advantage of us! It often seems innocent enough until you start thinking of the big picture. That's where my job comes in, to see "the big picture" and help everyone else see it as well.

I think in many cases we self-correct, and some judges that have made these decisions may very well have questioned it afterwards. In fact, I've had judges tell me, "I did this and just in case anyone reports it to you, I can tell you that later I felt it wasn't right and I won't be doing that again."

The following is meant to be educational and not meant to be pointing fingers. The examples below are meant to bring us all on the same page, as some situations have "gone too far" and need reigning in.

**Training in The Ring:**
At one point it seemed ok to allow teams to be in the ring to train at the end of the day, but this has also gone too far so I'm asking that there be no training in the ring once you've arrived and then through the weekend. The exception to this would be an advertised clinic the day before (must be included in the premium and/or judging schedule). Any matches/clinics held in the ring prior to testing may allow toys but NOT food. On the day of the test and after the test, if there's another test the next day, all training must be outside the ring. Pull equipment out if wanted, but don't let teams in the ring to use the test equipment.

We do encourage helping handlers and providing guidance, just keep it fair and not in the ring until all days of the test are completed.

**Special Favors:**
This is a "big picture" item for sure! What seems like an innocent question/favor, can sometimes becomes a big headache for me. As many of you know, I get grouchy when I get these headaches. That's because what could have been answered with a pleasant "no", was answered with a "sure, we don't see why not," and now I'm suddenly dealing with complaints, more education, calling people, or whatever, and that takes away from my time with family, friends and dogs! I gave up on sleep a long time ago, so that's not a problem.
Here's an example I've seen twice - two different tests, two different handlers - but with the same intent, to give one of their teams an advantage they didn't get with the draw they were given.

1. The owner had two teams entered, dog B was going for an advanced title and eventually a Grand Master DD Award, dog A the owner didn't think would pass and had training issues the owner was trying to work through. Dog B doesn't like to work in the heat according to the owner and drew a "late in the day" test spot. The owner was willing to show Dog A in the heat because it wasn't as important for this dog to pass. So the owner asked to switch the running order of her dogs. No harm right?

2. Owner again had two dogs entered, one needed one pass to earn an advanced title, the other dog has issues with a particular aspect of the test and isn't expected to ever earn an advanced title. This handler asked me first and I asked them to please not ask the judges and explained why and how it's not fair to the other teams. They choose to ask anyway~ I was told that if the judges said yes they were going with it!

So you say, "The handler has two spots, no one else is impacted (unless you ask the other owners standing by that would like to move their "end of the day" dog up to an earlier spot too) so what's the negative here?" Presented with the question when you are in the middle of a long day of judging, it can seem like it's not a problem, but handlers are more often looking to get an advantage with one team they wouldn't be able to do otherwise. The other teams in the test may have one team in Open, and one team in Novice, or they only have one team entered, so they're stuck with the draw the way it is.

The most fair and equitable way to handle these situations is to have all teams keep the order that was drawn by the secretary, then take care of any conflicts not known previously (such as teams sharing a cart), but retaining order for dogs with the same handler, (i.e. Dog A stays ahead of Dog B in the lineup).

Here's another common scenario: Two handlers don't want to be in the same freight haul because their dogs know each other and each handler. This is a training issue, and not something judges should be asked to accommodate. We have all shown dogs to judges that are good friends. And we all judge our friend's dogs. Test stewards are often spouses and kids. Our sport is very friendly, and family-like. It is virtually impossible to remove all people from a draft test that MIGHT have a pre-existing relationship with a dog. Handlers need to train for this - they should not expect test committees and judges to find ways to work around their potential issues.

Recently an owner tried to tell my fellow judge and me exactly how her teams needed
to be moved. She wanted to move their two teams apart that were being handled by her and her husband. We did move the ones that had a conflict where one dog was in brace and as a single dog and it was impossible for the dog to be in two places at once. We DID NOT move the two teams apart that were owned by the same family. They likely train together and they entered the same tests knowing that both of them would be in the same test. If they didn't want to be in the same freight haul, then they shouldn't both enter. Again, a training issue! (They did great and the failure for one dog was in the ring work.)

We have instructed the secretaries to not allow any moving around of the team order as long as all teams are appropriately spaced to avoid conflicts with multiple teams per handler or shared equipment. Do the draw and leave it.

I'm asking you, our judges, to please do the same! Please don't let handlers swap their own teams or swap with friends. If there's a true conflict, then Dog A should still show before Dog B, so that one is moved earlier or the other is moved into a later spot. Also, if someone pulls one team, and has another team in an earlier spot, they shouldn't move the later team into the spot of the earlier team. Just let all the teams behind them move up one spot.

Questions Specific to Handling in the Ring:
Many of us have heard the, "Can I do X when approaching the x?" The best one I've heard from another judge was in reference to the visual distraction, "Can I stop my dog, move in front of him, blocking the view of the 'critter on a string' and then after it's out of the ring, go to the side, to further block the view of the critter, and then proceed?" The answer provided was excellent - "How about you do what you're going to do and we'll judge it!

I like to remember that I can always say, "You run the course and we'll judge you", or "The other judge and I will discuss it and get back to you."

You don't have to give a yes or no answer to questions just because someone asked!

Dogs with Issues:
We are seeing more issues with dogs that either need more training or who just don't have the temperament to be with other dogs in the setting of a draft test.

The DWC has been discussing this and we have seen the following scenarios that could potentially cause problems:
1. A dog that can't be with specific dogs, such as intact males.
2. A dog that the owner wants at the end of the line for the group exercises in the hope of minimizing distractions and/or potential triggers.
3. A dog that an owner wants moved to a different group to avoid specific other dogs and/or handlers.
All of the dogs in these examples should not be accommodated. These are temperament and training issues. Instead, please let the owner know that they can pull the dog if they think the dog can't compete in the circumstances given. You can also tell them that if their dog choses to go into another dog's space, that you have to report it to the DWC. What, if any, action will be taken will depend on the severity of the dog's behavior.

**Judges are to report:**
Any dog on dog aggression, no matter how insignificant it may seem.
Any dog with inappropriate behavior towards another dog.
Any attempt to, or actually, attack a person.
The DWC will look at the situation and decide if the owner needs to be asked to explain what they feel happened. This would include a dog that during the group stay gets up and walks over to another dog. We are trying to catch any trend with a dog to avoid a more serious infraction.
This does not apply to a dog that goes towards it's owner/handler during the group stay.

In many cases, the owner will just be reminded that their dog needs to be able to be in a group, without interfering with the other dogs, or they could be sanctioned from showing for a period of time. We can't let other dogs be intimidated and possibly afraid to show in a draft test.

The bottom line here is that every handler should be treated the same, whether that handler is a personal friend or a total stranger. We love the friendliness and camaraderie that is a hallmark of our draft program but we must remember that this is a titling sport, not a social gathering. It is important to maintain consistency and a level playing field for all.

Thank you,

Jennifer