INTRODUCTION TO CANINE SPORTS AND SPORTS-RELATED INJURIES
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Key Points
- Increasing numbers of dogs and owners are participating in canine athletic activities
- Veterinarians practicing rehabilitation need to be familiar with the physical requirements of the sports in which their patients participate

The number of canine sports events and the number of dogs participating in those events are growing by leaps and bounds. Despite economic downturns, in the last 15 years the number of entries in agility events sponsored by the American Kennel Club (AKC) has continued to rise every year. These data represent just one dog sport and just one organization that offers competitions in that dog sport, yet it does give an idea of the public's interest in canine athletics. In addition, it is estimated that there are upwards of 75,000 police dogs in the United States in addition to unknown numbers of assistance dogs (dog guides for the blind, hearing dogs, physical assistance dogs, etc.), that also require specialized care similar to that needed for canine athletes.

Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation is the newest specialty in veterinary medicine, established in April 2010. It incorporates an understanding of many different fields of veterinary medicine, including anatomy, biomechanics, exercise physiology and sports conditioning, orthopedics, internal medicine, pulmonology, cardiology, neurology, gerontology, nutrition, comparative/alternative medicine, and others.

Veterinary sports medicine gives veterinary practitioners the opportunity to practice state-of-the-art medicine on highly fit, well cared-for patients owned by people who have a significant ongoing financial and time commitment in their dogs. This is win-win for all parties.

It is critical for veterinarians that work with canine athletes to be fully versant with the physical requirements of each sport if they are to provide appropriate care for canine athletes. A thorough knowledge of the sport helps veterinarians to communicate more effectively with the owner of a canine athlete and builds confidence on the part of the owner. For example a common history for an agility dog might be, "My dog is slowing down in the weaves." This would be meaningless to a veterinarian who is not familiar with the sport of agility, but can be critical to making an accurate diagnosis. A knowledge of canine sports and the owner's goals in that sport can help the veterinarian choose the most appropriate surgical technique (e.g., for CCL insufficiency), helps the veterinarian communicate with the owner regarding prognosis for a return to the sport, and guides important decisions regarding rehabilitation and retraining.

Below is a list of many of the most popular canine sports, some working dog activities and some of the best websites describing these activities. The reader is encouraged to visit each of these sites to become more familiar with the world of canine sports and working dogs. In addition, a visit to http://www.AKC.org/events will allow the reader to search for a variety of AKC events in his or her area of the country. There is nothing as educational as attending the sports events themselves and talking to exhibitors.
CONFORMATION
Purebred dogs are judged on their structure and gait against a written description of the ideal dog of that breed.

Websites
- American Kennel Club
  http://www.akc.org/index.cfm

Obedience
Judges instruct handlers to direct their dogs to perform a number of exercises on command including heeling, retrieving, jumping, etc. Dogs are judged on the precision of their responses.

Website
http://www.akc.org/events/obedience

AGILITY
A fast-growing canine sport in which a person directs a dog over an obstacle course. Dogs are judged on speed and accuracy.

Websites
- http://www.squidoo.com/startingdogagility
- http://www.agilityability.com/node/681
- http://www.usdaa.com/
- http://www.nadac.com/
- www.akc.org/events/agility
- http://www.cleanrun.com/

RALLY
A less formal version of obedience in which the dog and handler complete a course that includes obedience-type exercises (such as heeling) as well as jumps and other behaviors. The course consists of stations (10 - 20, depending on the level), each of which has a sign providing instructions regarding the skill that is to be performed.

Website: http://www.akc.org/events/rally/index.cfm

FREESTYLE
Dogs and handlers perform a thematic routine, moving together to music. Similar to the musical freestyle performed by dressage horses.

Websites
- http://www.canine-freestyle.org/
- http://www.worldcaninefreestyle.org/

CANINE DISC
Dogs retrieve flying discs while performing various movements, such as leaps, flips, etc.

Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disc_dog
**HUNT TESTS/FIELD TRIALS**
Retrievers, Setters, Pointers, Spaniels and Poodles retrieve upland game birds on land and in water.

*Websites*
- www.akc.org/events/hunting_tests/retrievers
- www.akc.org/events/hunting_tests/pointing_breeds
- www.akc.org/events/hunting_tests/spaniels
- http://www.akc.org/events/field_trials/beagles/

**EARTHDOG TESTS**
Terriers and dachshunds run through underground tunnels to find a caged rat. Dogs are judged on persistence and accuracy.

*Website:* http://members.tripod.com/~Jerrier/Earthdog.html

**FLYBALL**
A relay race in which dogs run over 4 small hurdles 50 feet, retrieve a tennis ball from a loaded box, then return over the hurdles.

*Website:* http://www.flyball.org/

**TRACKING**
Dogs follow the scent of a person over 400 to 800 yard tracks aged from 1 to 4 hours, picking up marker objects such as gloves along the way.

*Website:* http://www.akc.org/events/tracking

**SCHUTZHUND**
Working dog competition that combines obedience, tracing and protection work.

*Website:* http://leerburg.com/schusa.htm

**LURE COURSING**
Sighthounds (Borzoi, Greyhounds, Basenji, etc.) chase three white plastic bags (to imitate bunnies) that are moved quickly along the ground by a battery operated string and pulley system.

*Websites*
- http://www.akc.org/events/lure_coursing/
- http://www.asfa.org/

**HERDING**
Herding breeds such as border collies and Australian shepherds herd sheep, cattle or ducks over a specified course and move selected animals into a pen.

*Websites*
- http://www.akc.org/events/herding/
- http://www.akc.org/dic/clubs/search/club_search.cfm?action=perf&display=on
- http://www.asca.org/Programs/Stockdog
- http://www.ahba-herding.org/
MUSHING
Dogs pull sleds (or dry land rigs) over a specified course, which may vary from one to 1150 miles. Both sprinting and distance events are offered.

Websites
http://www.iditarod.com/
http://www.mushwithpride.org

CANICROSS
A sport of running or walking with the dog in harness pulling the handler, the term canicross is of European origin, indicating that competitors move crosscountry.

Website: http://www.skijor.com/canicross.html

WEIGHT PULLING
Dogs pull a loaded sled across the ground for various distances. Bully breeds are especially popular.

Website: http://www.iwpa.net

POLICE DOGS
Police dogs have a wide variety of duties including offender apprehension, scent work – tracking people, finding drugs, bombs, searching buildings, etc. Many police dogs participate in competitions designed to hone and test their abilities.

Websites
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_dog
http://www.npca.net/
http://www.uspcak9.com/

SEARCH AND RESCUE DOGS
Search and rescue dogs detect human scent and are typically worked by a small team on foot, and occasionally from horseback. Scent discriminating dogs have proven their ability to alert only on the scent of an individual person, after being given a sample of that person's scent. Non-scent discriminating dogs alert on or follow any scent of a given type, such as any human scent or any cadaver scent. SAR dogs can be trained specifically for rubble searches, for water searches, and for avalanche searches.

Websites
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_and_rescue_dog
http://www.sardogsus.org/
**USDA BEAGLE BRIGADE**

The Beagle Brigade is a team of beagles and their human handlers who, as part of the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), inspect luggage at U.S. airports searching for agricultural products. According to the USDA, the Beagle Brigade program averages around 75,000 seizures of prohibited agricultural products a year.

Websites