

Who's Who at a Lure Coursing Event

By Frank Yeh

At any lure coursing event there are a number of people filling different roles, all helping to make the event run as smoothly as possible and in compliance to AKC rules. This article is meant to help newcomers to the sport understand who these people are and why they do what they do.

Collectively, the team running the event is called the Field Committee and their roles and responsibilities are spelled out in Chapter III of the AKC Regulations.

Some, but not all, of the members of the Field Committee must be members of the event's host club. It's also common for several people to share the roles, which gives them a chance to run their own hounds at the event. The AKC rules designate certain responsibilities to certain roles. Outside of these explicit designations, clubs are free to decide who does what.

In the Forefront

The Field Secretary is the one who runs the "front office" at the event_ keeping track of the entered hounds, the scorekeeping, performing the draw for the various courses, and announcing when various things are to happen. Before the first course is run, you will hear the Field Secretary announce that registration is open, call contestants to Inspection and Roll Call, and announce the Draw. During the event they will announce when the Preliminaries and Finals are to be run and might also call for a lunch break between prelims and finals.

Before the event starts you will also see people setting up the equipment that will run the lure and setting up pulleys and perhaps cones in the field (setting the course). This is usually the Lure Operator, although most clubs have several people who help set things up. The Lure Operator is the one who will be running the lure during the courses and is usually standing on a ladder while running it.

Supporting Cast

The next people you will notice are the Inspection and Measuring Committee, who are responsible for checking that each entered hound is fit to compete. They will visually inspect the hounds for lameness, ensure that any bitches entered are not in heat, and check for breed disqualifications. In addition, they will measure whippets for compliance to the ACK standards for height. Once inspection is complete, they are done and can move on to other roles or simply enjoy the event.

The Paddock Master is responsible for calling the hounds for the next course to the paddock, which is a waiting area where the hounds wait until it is their turn to run. The Paddock Master is also responsible for checking that the hounds who come to the paddock are properly blanketed.

The Hunt Master is the "starter" for the courses and is basically the one who runs the field. He will call the hounds to the line for each course, make sure their equipment is in order, and explain the rules to the Handlers. He will then check that the Judges, Lure Operator, and Handlers are ready, signal the Lure Operator to start the lure, and call out "Tally-Ho" which is when the Handlers may release their hounds.

Once courses have started running, you will see the Field Clerk in action. The Field Clerk will collect scores from the Judges, run them back to the Field Secretary to be entered, and post score sheets on the board.

Behind the Scenes

As you look around, you will notice one or several people stationed somewhere out in the field watching each course intently. These are the Judges, who score the hounds. You may never notice the Field Chairman, as most of what they do is not visible. However, they did a lot of work to arrange for the field, the equipment, selecting the Field Committee, etc.

The Stars of the Show

The hounds are why we have these events. It's always a thrill for me to watch these amazing creatures doing what they were born and bred to do. Seeing the speed, agility and pure joy that these athletes display is all the reward that those of us who love the sport need to do whatever we can to help.

Making It All Happen

A well-run event depends on coordination amongst the members of the Field Committee. In many cases the Field Chairman and/or the Field Secretary will orchestrate the other roles so that everything runs smoothly. To start with, the Field Secretary and Inspection Committee get all the hounds registered and inspected, and Field Secretary performs the draw for the Preliminaries. The Lure Operator, Judges, and Field Chairman will make sure the course is set and safe. This is where even the first time attendee can help. Many fields will have gopher holes scattered about and these are a big hazard to the hounds. So don't be surprised if someone asks you to help out with walking the course and filling in some gopher holes. Nobody wants to see a hound travelling at thirty miles an hour step into a gopher hole.

Next, the Hunt Master, Lure Operator, and Judges will watch a "pilot" hound run the course to test it out. This also gives the Lure Operator a chance to see how the equipment is running. After the pilot run, a few changes may be made to the equipment and course to optimize things before the Preliminary courses. When everything is ready, the Paddock Master will call the hounds for the first course to the Paddock, the Judges, Hunt Master, and Lure Operator will take their places, and we are ready to start.

The Hunt Master will call the hounds to the line, perform his duties, and start the course. Meanwhile, the Paddock Master should already have called the hounds for the next course to the Paddock. When each course is completed the Hunt Master will instruct the Handlers to retrieve their hounds and once they are all back on leads, will call out "Hold Your Hounds" while the Lure Operator runs the lure around to the starting line. The Judges will be writing down their scores and the Field Clerk will occasionally run out to collect them. When ready, the Hunt Master will call the hounds to the line for the next course.

As things progress, the judges' scores will be taken to the Field Secretary by the Field Clerk. They will be recorded on score sheets. Courses are run by breed and within each breed by class. There may be an Open class, a Special (or Field Champion's) class, and a Veteran's class for each breed. Within each class there may be several courses, depending on the number of hounds entered in the class. If enough hounds are entered in a single class to qualify for two "majors" the class will be split into two stakes, so that there are more points available to the hounds in that class. As soon as all of the courses for a breed are done and the scores for the breed recorded, the score sheets will be posted on the board. There will be a separate score sheet for each class in each breed.

This process continues until all of the Preliminary courses have been completed. At this time the Field Secretary will often call for a lunch break and will then perform the Draw for the Finals. They will then call for the Finals to begin. The Finals are basically a repeat of the Preliminaries but usually hounds will run against different hounds than they did in the prelims. This is all determined by the number of entries and random chance in the Draw.

Once Finals are completed, the scores will be tabulated and there may be run-offs to break any ties in the point-scoring positions in each class. After run-offs, there will be Best-of-Breed runoffs where the winners of each class in a breed compete. All of this can affect how many points a hound wins at the event.

Finally, Best-in-Field will be run between the winners of each breed. The Best-in-Field results will not be posted on the board.

At the end of the day, it is time for awards. The point winners and winners of each class and breed are announced and awarded a ribbon and other prizes provided by the host club. Finally, the Best-in-Field winner will be announced and awarded. The event is then officially over.

Time permitting, the club may then run “fun” or training runs. This is when people get a chance to introduce new hounds to the lure and get an idea of whether a hound is going to take to the sport. Then it’s time to clean up, put everything away, clean up any trash, and head for home.

Growing into the Sport

There are a lot of things that have to happen before an event can be pulled off. First, a host club has to be sanctioned by the AKC to run events. A suitable field and equipment have to be arranged, a Field Committee formed, and a lot of paperwork submitted to AKC both before and after the event.

Judges have to be solicited and confirmed, premium lists prepared, entries registered, and funds collected. All of this is done by the Field Chairman and Field Secretary so these roles are usually manned by the most experienced people in the sport.

Judging and Lure Operating both require significant experience and in the case of Judges, apprenticeships have to be served and tests passed to get licensed by the AKC. These roles are also typically grown into after years of experience in the sport.

Hunt Master is another role that benefits from significant experience. This role is complicated and important so some training is highly desirable before someone is ready for it.

Inspection and Measuring Committee, Paddock Master, and Field Clerk are usually where novices can start helping out and gaining experience on Field Committees.

So if you want to get into the sport, you can just start showing up to events, watching, and hopefully volunteering to fill in a few gopher holes. You can also get your hound started with fun runs after events. Next, you can enter your hound in Junior Coursing tests and Qualification Tests, which are required before a hound can be entered in an event. This is where you will learn how to be a Handler and your hound will show how much prey drive he has. Next comes entering your hound in events and perhaps volunteering for Inspection and Measuring Committee, Field Clerk, or Paddock Master. As you gain experience, you will probably find yourself gravitating towards the field or the “office”. Many of those who decide to get trained as Hunt Masters will eventually end up as Lure Operators. Those who like the scoring can start as Field Clerks and then become Field Secretaries. Field Chairmen come from both sides of the sport. Finally, you can start apprenticing with Judges and apply for a Judging License with AKC. No matter how far you decide to go, the sport has its own rewards.