

FLYBALL

DRAG RACING FOR DOGS



More about Flyball

Flyball is a team sport for dogs that was invented in California in the late 1970's. Periodically, Flyball demonstrations were seen during intermissions at professional basketball games or other unrelated sporting events. Interest and participation in Flyball has soared since its beginning and is now enjoyed throughout North America, Europe, Australia, and other countries. NAFA (North American Flyball Association) currently has over 700 registered clubs with more than 16,000 registered dogs.

Flyball is a relay race with four dogs on a team. The course consists of a starting line, four hurdles spaced 10 feet apart and a spring loaded box. The first hurdle is 6 feet from the start line and the box is 15 feet from the last hurdle for a 51 foot overall length. The hurdles' heights are dependent on the height of the dogs in the team, 5 inches below the shoulder height of the shortest dog. 7 inches is the minimum height and 14 inches is the maximum height.

The dog jumps the hurdles and steps on a spring loaded box that shoots out a tennis ball. The dog catches the tennis ball and then runs back over the four hurdles. When the dog crosses the starting line the next dog goes. The first team to have all four dogs run without errors wins the heat. To achieve a clean run, each dog must jump all four hurdles on the way to and from the box, trigger the ball-release mechanism on the box, and return over all four hurdles, carrying the ball all the way across the finish line. In addition, dogs may not false start (cross the start line before the timing light turns green) or pass illegally (crossing the start line before a returning dog crosses the finish line). Flyball began in Alaska in 2004 with the creation of Alaska Dogs Gone Wild Flyball Club. The first Alaskan tournament was held in 2006. Subsequent tournaments were also held in 2007 and 2008. Alaska's newest flyball club, Northern LightSpeed formed in 2008. Both clubs hope to compete in another Alaskan tournament this year, tentatively set for late November, 2008 at Valley Canine Camp and Training Center .

Get your dog involved with Flyball.

If you are interested in getting your dog involved with Flyball training watch the Alaska Dog News calendar for upcoming events with Alaska Dogs Gone Wild and Northern LightSpeed. Contact the club located near you for information on practices and classes.

New classes will start in Wasilla in each month Prospective dogs should have basic obedience training, be dog-friendly and people-friendly, be in good physical shape, and be up to date on their vaccinations. Since flyball is a team-based sport, it takes an organized group of fellow canine enthusiasts to help you and your dog put it all together. Attending practices or classes would be a great opportunity to see what it takes and to ask all those questions you have about Alaska's newest fast-paced dog sport.

In June Alaska Dog News attended a few hours of the Alaska Summer Solstice 2008 Flyball tournament at the Palmer Fairgrounds. On review of the photos at home I found that I needed to go back the next day and increase the shutter speed of my camera from 800/second to 1600/second. The dogs were that fast. What I didn't understand after watching for just a few hours was the detail that goes into training the dogs as well as complying with the extensive rules.

October 10<sup>th</sup> Lucy, our 6 year old field bred Labrador Retriever and I attended our first Flyball class. Lucy is fast and a maniac retriever. Since she was 8 weeks old she has been trained to retrieve ultimately leading to hunt tests and field trial competition as well as bird hunting. Our first of 4 classes was held by Northern LightSpeed, the Mat-Su Valley's new Flyball club, at Valley Canine Camp and Training Center in Wasilla. It was a bit surprising to find out that we had to start from the beginning even though Lucy retrieves on command delivering the ball, bumper or bird to hand. The class began with a brief overview of the sport and a short video of a tournament in Michigan. I envisioned that Lucy would have no problem running a series of hurdles to retrieve a tennis ball. I was wrong.

Ken and Linda Bullard started us on the first steps of "back chaining" the Flyball course, doing what the dog will do last: clear the first hurdle, fetch the tennis ball and bring it to me. In this new environment Lucy squirreled around playing keep-away with the tennis ball. We have a lot of work to do. While it looks easy, Flyball is a sport of controlled precision and speed. A lot depends on the dog's drive, temperament, ability to focus on the task and his obedience level. Equally important are the handler's abilities for the very same abilities combined with team spirit and cooperation with team members.



In the Mat-Su Valley [www.northernlightspeed.com](http://www.northernlightspeed.com) (contact: [huskiez6@yahoo.com](mailto:huskiez6@yahoo.com))  
In Anchorage and Eagle River [www.flyballdogs.com/alaska](http://www.flyballdogs.com/alaska)  
(contact: [alaskaflyball@gmail.com](mailto:alaskaflyball@gmail.com))  
National site (North American Flyball Association) <http://flyballdogs.com/>