

SNOOKER The Agility Game by Dave Hanson

There are two parts to the execution of a Snooker course:

- The opening sequence
- The closing sequence

The colored flags or marker cones next to each obstacle represent the number of points you receive if you successfully complete that obstacle. They also show the order in which the obstacles are to be taken during the closing sequence.

At the USDAA Advanced and Masters level, you need a minimum of 37 points to achieve a qualifying score in Snooker. Beginning in 2004, this qualifying requirement also applies to the Starters/Novice level.

The maximum score possible on a course that uses three red obstacles is 51 points. Maximum score with four red obstacles is 59 points.

A red obstacle is worth 1 point and is always a single bar jump, which usually can be performed in either direction. All the other colored obstacles are considered “bonus” obstacles.

The following table shows the individual points for the bonus obstacles. It also shows the cumulative points available in the closing sequence. For example, if you successfully get through the #4 (brown) obstacle in the closing, you will earn 9 points in the closing sequence (2+3+4).

	Yellow	Green	Brown	Blue	Pink	Black
Obstacle Point Value	2	3	4	5	6	7
Closing Sequence Cumulative Score	2	5	9	14	20	27

The Opening Sequence

- You accumulate points in the opening sequence by taking: red-bonus obstacle, red-bonus obstacle, and red-bonus obstacle. A fourth red-bonus obstacle combination may be available, depending on the course.
- Once you have attempted a particular red, it is “retired” from the course and is not available for you to take a second time.
- Successfully completing a red jump earns you the right (and the obligation) to perform a bonus point (#2-#7) obstacle. If you fault that red, however, you have not yet earned the right to attempt an obstacle of higher point value.
- In the opening, there is the possibility of taking as many bonus point obstacles as there are reds available on that course. You may take the same bonus point obstacle after each red you perform successfully, or all of your bonus obstacles may be obstacles of different point values.
- If you commit to a particular bonus obstacle, you must perform that obstacle. Be aware that the “four-paws rule” defines being committed to an obstacle at the Starter/Novice and Advanced levels, while a single touch of the obstacle by the dog is all it takes at the Masters level.
- Refusals are not faulted in the opening sequence.
- If you fault a bonus obstacle, you must complete the obstacle, but you will not be awarded points for that obstacle.

Examples

- If you miss a weave pole in a set, you must go back and fix it. In Starters/Novice, you will be awarded the bonus points since a missed pole is not a fault at this level. In Advanced and Masters, however, you will not be awarded the bonus points since a missed pole is a fault at this level.
- If the dog commits to a contact obstacle and misses the up or down contact, you will not be awarded the points.



SNOOKER The Agility Game by Dave Hanson (continued from page 1)

- If a dog enters a tunnel and backs out, having committed to the obstacle, the dog must perform the obstacle and will be awarded points. (Backing out of the tunnel is a refusal, but it is not faulted in the opening sequence).

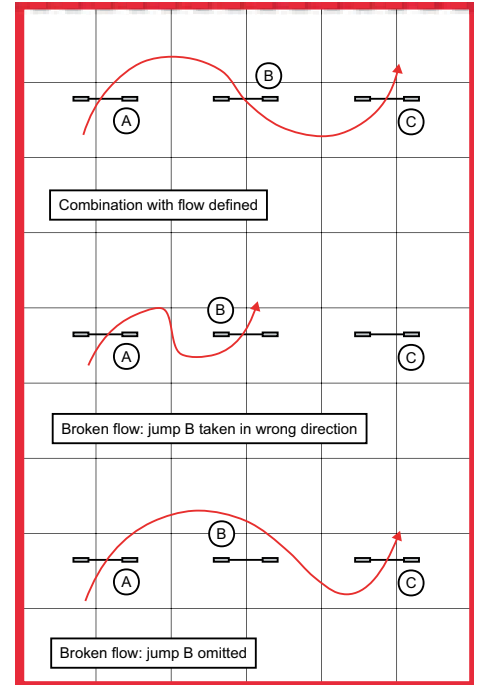
Combination Obstacles

- The judge may set up a combination of two or more obstacles that have to be completed as a unit for points. The judge may indicate an order and direction in which these obstacles must be performed.
- If you fault any single obstacle in the combination, you must complete all the obstacles in the combination to continue the opening. You will not be awarded the bonus points.
- If you break the order of the sequence, either by taking an obstacle in the wrong direction or by taking an obstacle out of order (see graphic), you must go back and complete the defined sequence of the combination to continue the opening. You will not be awarded the bonus points.

Closing Sequence

Compared to the opening sequence, the closing sequence is relatively straightforward.

- Immediately following the completion of the opening sequence, you complete the “bonus” obstacles in numerical order, beginning with #2 and continuing through #7.
- If you fault an obstacle or commit to an obstacle out of the numeric sequence, the judge will blow the whistle to signal your opportunity to accumulate points is over. At this point, you keep all the points you have earned and must cross the finish line to stop the clock.
- Refusals are not faulted in the closing sequence at the Starters/Novice level. Refusals are faulted in the closing sequence at contact obstacles only in the Advanced level. Refusals are faulted at all obstacles in the closing sequence at the Masters level.
- Combinations are still active during the closing sequence. Be aware that the rules of performance may be more defined than in the opening sequence.



Opening Sequence Reference Chart

If...	Then...
Your dog drops the top bar on a red jump...	Move on to another red jump.
Your dog drops the top bar on the last red jump...	Start the closing sequence.
You do a red and two bonus obstacles in a row...	The whistle will blow. Run, don't walk, across the finish line to stop the clock.
You do the same red jump twice...	The whistle will blow. Run, don't walk, across the finish line to stop the clock.
Your dog faults a bonus obstacle (no refusals are counted in the opening; weave poles must be corrected before going on)...	Complete that obstacle and then continue with your planned opening sequence. You will not get the points for that obstacle.
Your dog performs a combination out of the prescribed sequence, (commonly referred to as "broken flow")...	Complete the sequence in the prescribed order, and continue with your planned opening sequence. You will not get the points for that obstacle.

Closing Sequence Reference Chart

If...	Then...
Your dog faults an obstacle (drops a bar, misses a contact, misses a weave, earns a refusal)...	The whistle will blow. Run, don't walk, across the finish line to stop the clock.
You take obstacles out of numerical order...	The whistle will blow. Run, don't walk, across the finish line to stop the clock.
You take obstacles out of numerical order...	The whistle will blow. Run, don't walk, across the finish line to stop the clock.
Time expires...	The whistle will blow. Run, don't walk, across the finish line to stop the clock.

Strategy for Playing the Game

- At most events, judges prepare exhibitor handouts with course diagrams. Study the Snooker course and decide on your preferred sequence. You may take a timing device (such as a stopwatch or a kitchen timer) into the ring during the walk-through.
- Remember, at the Advanced and Masters level (and in 2004, at the Starters/Novice level), you need a minimum of 37 points to achieve a qualifying score.
- Verify which obstacles are used for the 7- and 6-point bonus obstacles. If your dog can perform these obstacles well, plan to attempt all the closing obstacles for points. If your dog is slow or has problems weaving, however, and weaves are the 7-point obstacle, plan to complete the course through the 6-point obstacle. The same strategy would apply if the 7-point obstacle is a contact, and you know your dog misses the down side of the contact at least 50% of the time.
- Consult the chart at the beginning of this article to see how many points you can expect to earn in the closing. Subtract this number from 37

and you will see how many points you need in the opening.

- During the walk-through, run the closing sequence to get an idea of how long it will take. Subtract this from the time allotted by the judge and plot your opening strategy.
- Know the direction in which obstacles must be taken. While sometimes obstacles are “bidirectional” and can be taken either way, often the judge will specify a direction in which they must be taken.

Points to Consider for Your Opening Strategy

- Taking the yellow (2-point obstacle) after the last red puts you in place for the closing sequence. Remember, however, that you must perform the yellow again as the first obstacle of the closing sequence.

- Weaves take time to perform, as do contact obstacles.
- Unless you fail to complete them, tunnels and tires cannot be faulted in the opening sequence (the only fault possible on these particular obstacles is a refusal, and refusals are not faulted in the opening).
- If your dog regularly drops jump bars, stay away from jump combinations.

Good luck! And remember: Always smile... no matter what happens!

This article was reprinted with permission. Dave Hanson is a Civil Engineer for the Texas Department of Transportation (Highway Department). He is originally from Hessle in Yorkshire, England. Dave's passion is dog agility. He is a competitor, a judge, a teacher, and a supervisor for other judges.

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Starter Snooker Updates by Dan Roy

Since the article Snooker - The Agility Game by Dave Hanson was written, there have been some updates to the USDAA Starter Snooker Class. Those updates are as follows:

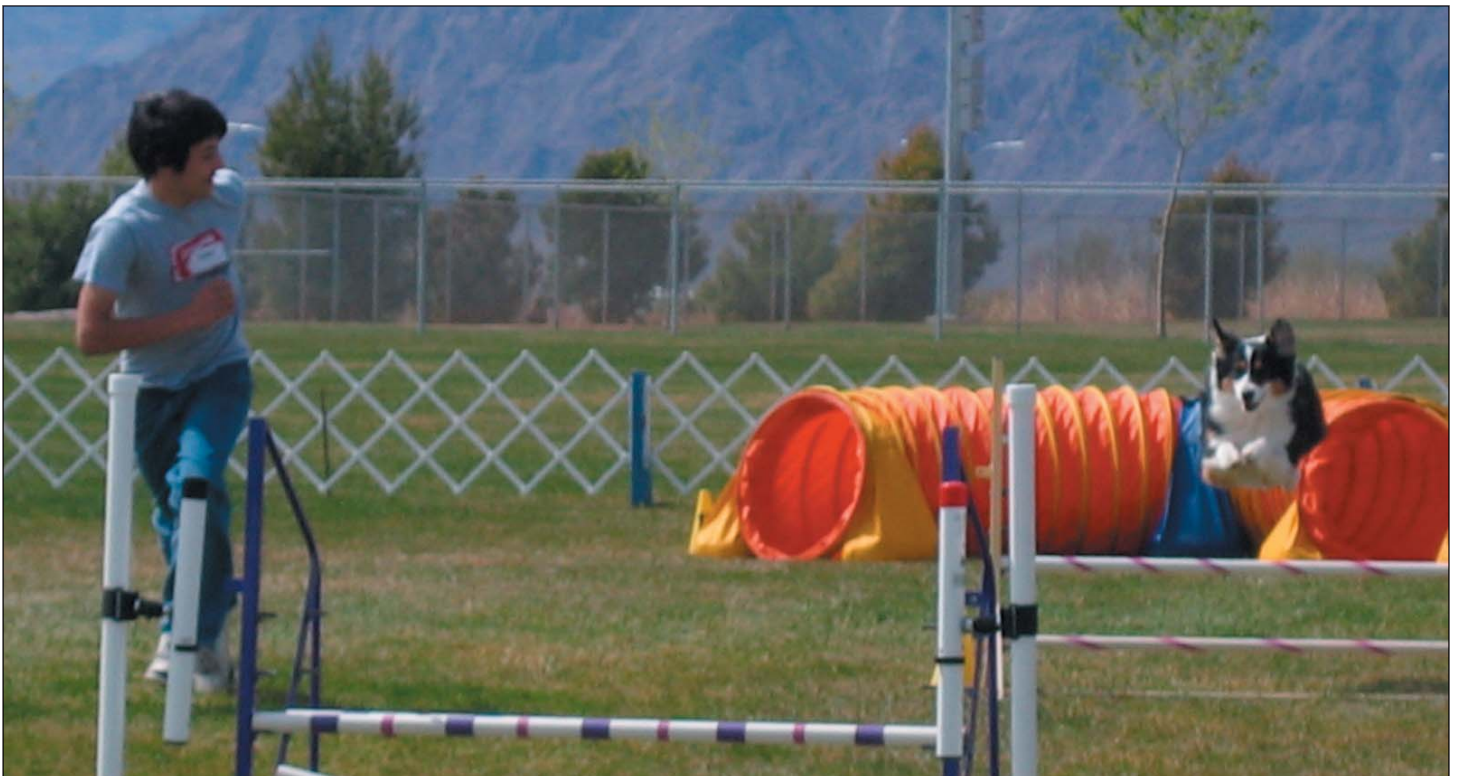
Starters Snooker Class

- A dog shall not be required to place in the top 15% but must accumulate a minimum of 37 points to earn a qualifying score.
- The course shall be constructed with the obstacles placed in one of four (4) different general configurations instead of six (6), as shown below:

Starter Snooker Course Configurations

1. Standard snooker configuration; 3 reds positioned near the black (7) and pink (6)
2. Modified snooker configuration; 3 reds positioned near yellow (2), green (3) and brown (4)
3. A single “color” combination involving contact obstacles and/or weave poles
4. Only jumps and tunnels are used

Also, within the judging core, there are different interpretations on what constitutes a “broken sequence” and how it can be fixed. It is wise to ask the judge how they will judge a “broken sequence”.



JUDGE'S DEBRIEFING

The Judge's Debriefing. An Interview with Scott Lovelis, by Dan Roy

Dan: How-ya-doin Scott? It's nice to have you in San Diego.

Scott: Hey-a Dan, I m doing great! Thanks to the ring crew for working hard and being on time. Everything is running very smooth.

Dan: This Snooker course had some challenges in it, but it also was not overly complicated. What was your objective when designing this Advanced / PII Snooker course?

Scott: I wanted a course that was a bridge from Starters Level into Advanced Level. The course was designed to further prepare teams for the game of Snooker and the strategies involved. Those skills include choosing a productive opening and a good approach into the closing sequence.

Dan: That sounds fair. What impresses you the most when you watch a team run?

Scott: I like to see teams make good choices in the Snooker opening, with obstacle patterns that encourage high scores while also incorporating speed and flow .

Dan: That is really something to strive for, especially on Snooker courses. So, what did you think would be the most challenging part of this Snooker?

Scott: I knew that it would be difficult to score all three #7 combination obstacles (7a and 7b) in the opening. The successful teams where going to have to choose a high scoring opening that would also set them up to enter the closing sequence without too much trouble.

Dan: Talking about that closing part; a few teams started with good opening points only to get "snookered", and whistled in the closing with a wrong tunnel entrance at 4a.

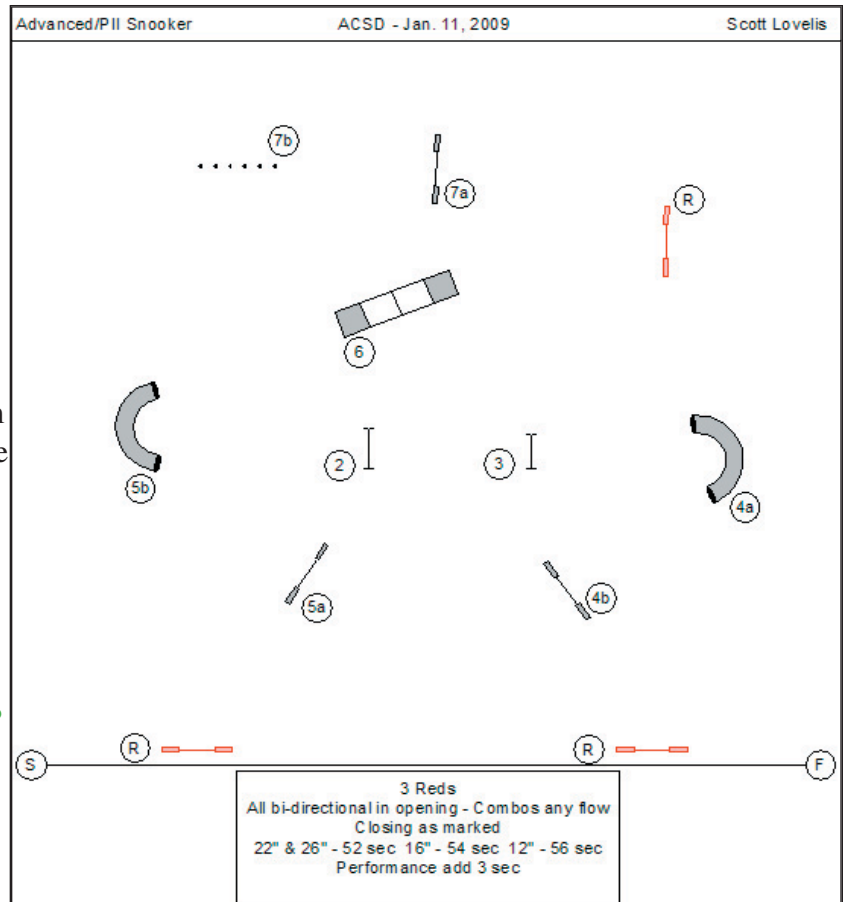
Scott: Yep. That was a difficult section. Many handlers were caught on the left side of the closing obstacles #2 and #3 which then made it more difficult to get the dog into 4a.

Dan: I hate it when that happens! But, these are lessons, we need to learn. I also saw some awesome teams complete the whole course. Were you impressed with any particular runs?

Scott: Yes, there were a few. I think if you view the posted, accumulator sheets you'll find the scores and names of the teams that did well.

Dan: Well, we hope to see you back in San Diego soon. I'm sure a few of us would like another go at your courses. Do you have any closing remarks?

Scott: Go San Diego Chargers!



Scott Lovelis has been the President of DART going on six years. He and his wife, Tracy, have been charter members since 1997. They are owned by The Aussie Posse of Maverick, Merlin, Jester and new pup Charlie. Scott has been a USDAA judge since 2004, and has recently become an approved judge for ASCA (Australian Shepherd Club of America).

Advanced / PII Snooker Analysis

by Dan Roy

The Agility Club of San Diego held it's first USDAA Agility Trial of 2009 in Summerlike weather on January 10 and 11. The club recruited Scott Lovelis from Alta Loma, Ca to design courses for, and judge the Starters through Advanced level classes. Scott is well known as President of the Dog Agility Racing Team (DART) and his commitment to competing, judging and hosting USDAA trials. I knew that he would have some course design challenges to spark our local interests.

As anticipated, Scott delivered. The club's weekend warriors appreciated his ability to bring courses that were level appropriate, but challenging. He was always on time to start the classes and kept the ring moving at a good pace. It was for those reasons that I asked Scott for a short, yet exclusive, interview about one of his most fun classes - The Advanced/PII Snooker course on Sunday.

There are few agility games quite as strategy oriented or as rewarding as Snooker. It is not uncommon to hear competitors say, "I just love Snooker". On the flip side, you need to understand the game. If not, you may find yourself in a state of shock or forehead slapping moment when you exit the ring. So, read the article Snooker - The Agility Game by Dave Hanson. That article is reprinted in this issue of Agile Antics with permission from Dave Hanson and USDAA.

Snooker should always be the first course map to study of the day. One needs time to plan and digest strategies before walking the course. I like to share ideas with my approachable peers. They may see things differently. I will make sure to watch others run before me. It is a clear advantage to watch and compare another handler's strategies against your own. For this reason Snooker running orders are randomly drawn before the trial. If your dog's name is at the top of the gate steward's list, then you will need to run first. Rely on your superior planning, walk through, and training prowess to put together a qualifying performance. If your plan works, you'll most likely be asked "So, what was that you did in the opening again? It was good. That's what I'm going to do too!"

So, for those of you brave enough to take on the challenges of this whistle blowing event, my hat's off to you. My wish and prayer is that you will:

1. Enjoy the competition.
2. Have time to watch others run the course before you do.
3. Be bold enough to perform a Snooker War Dance (an enthusiastic episode of rehearsal and shadow handling before entering the ring).
4. Have a few good buddies to huddle with both before and after.

Two Agility Teams stood out with their Advanced Snooker performance.

They were:

*Chris Libs and Rumba: 46 total points
Qualifying 1st Place, Championship 26" Class.*

*Renee Wilder and Lilly: 49 total points
Qualifying 1st Place, Championship 22" Class.*

Options for entering the closing sequence.

