

reporterherald.com

Publish Date: 2/25/2008

Dogs have a field day at The Ranch

By Cara O'Brien
The Reporter-Herald

The dogs could barely hold still.

Pulling at their leashes the second they were released from their cages, barking maniacally, tails wagging rapidly, hardly able to stay on all four paws, the dogs prepped for the race.

“Oh they love this. They’ll stand back there just quivering, let’s go,” said Mark Creager.

Creager was one of dozens who showed up at The Ranch, dogs and family in tow, Sunday morning for a flyball tournament.

Flyball is one of those dog sports shown on ESPN 2 sometimes with dogs flying down a hurdled course, tennis ball in mouth.

The four-dog relay teams run one dog at a time through a course of hurdles to retrieve a tennis ball out of a wall at the end.

The dogs then run back to their handlers, again, over the hurdles.

“The dogs love it, the people love it,” said Steve Miller, from Laramie, Wyo.

Miller owns seven dogs, five of which compete in flyball tournaments.

Sunday his dog Tink, an Australian cattle dog, hurtled through the course, giving the team some, sometimes-needed speed.

“Any dog can run,” Miller said.

Labradors, a bulldog, a Great Dane, terriers, cattle dogs: they all wandered the floor of The Ranch, waiting for their turn to race, their turn to shine, on Sunday.

“She’s totally ball-crazy,” said David Ginnow, of Westminster, of his toy fox terrier, Lady, who balanced on his arms. Ginnow said Lady is second in the nation in flyball for her breed.



A 12-year-old Jack Russell terrier named Nifty jumps over hurdles during Sunday’s Flyball tournament at The Ranch. Reporter-Herald/Chris Stark

And she was one of the smallest dogs in the arena Sunday morning.

Involvement in flyball came for many of those at Sunday's tournament in the search for distractions for energetic dogs.

Melinda Vernon-Fitts, the regional director for flyball in Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico, got involved in flyball after getting a border collie.

"We were throwing our arms out throwing the tennis ball," she said. "(We thought) the dog needs a job."

That was eight years ago.

"We liked that it was a family sport," Vernon-Fitts said.

Creager agreed. His family is now involved in flyball alongside him. His 13-year-old daughter, Christeena, is helping to train a new cattle dog they have.

Sunday, though, she cuddled with a decidedly furrier dog, their Pomeranian.

"I love dogs," Mark Creager said.

The love for the dogs and the dogs' love for the sport united the cacophonous arena Sunday.

The dogs raced, the owners screamed encouragements and dangled treats, and judges carefully watched the lines and tennis balls.

"You bet (the dogs) will (sleep all the way home)," Miller said. "But they'll be ready to go by the time we get there."

Comments

Any one with a dog that wants to get involved should go to www.region19flyball.com, find a club in their area and contact the club regarding classes to learn how to Flyball!

Tara Sterk, Westminster, CO 2/25/2008 10:17:40 AM

I loved this! Does anyone know how you get your dog involved? Or are there training facilities available locally? What a great outlet for parents, kids - everyone!

Thanks!

Curious Dog Owner, Loveland, CO 2/25/2008 9:22:14 AM

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