

Dogs soar on slick runway: Morning dew gives Redding flyball contest an unpredictable twist

By Rob Rogers
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Saturday's flyball competition started rather inauspiciously.

The grass at Tiger Field in Redding was wet with morning dew; too wet, in fact, for the dogs to run and jump and do all the things they do during a flyball match.

So about 9 a.m. the call went out for towels and 15 minutes later a small army of volunteers, dog owners and spectators stooped over the ground and went along drying about 50 yards of grass.

That element -- the unexpected -- is part of what makes flyball entertaining.

"It's never boring," said Linda Stevenson, a Redding resident and past flyball competitor. She was at Saturday's match as a judge.

"It's fast-paced, it's fun, it's great interaction between you and your dog," she said.

Flyball is a relay race for dogs that involves retrieving balls, jumping obstacles and beating the clock. Two teams of four dogs each compete at a time. Races move fast and are usually over in under two minutes. The winning team is the one over the finish line first.

"It's really spectator friendly," said Diana Foster, a competitor with the Bay Racers club from San Carlos. "You can tell who wins."

Foster competes with her Jack Russell terrier and serves as regional director for California in the North American Flyball Association.

"This is the farthest north we come," she said of the Redding meet.



DOG EAT DOG: Gold Coast Flyers flyball team members Fran Gilmette with her dog, Salsa, left, Jeny Blake with Pawp and Laurie Jarett with Leep, compete in Saturday's Strike Force Flyball Tournament at Tiger Field in Redding. Flyball is a competition that pits two teams of four dogs each in a relay race.

In attendance Saturday were teams from as far away as Reno and Fresno. Redding's club, Strike Force, hosted the event. In all, 20 teams competed across four divisions. The competition continues today from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Tiger Field.

"The dogs love it," said Barbara Darrow, president of Strike Force.

Flyball is designed to appeal to active dogs. Many owners get into the sport just to give their dogs something to do.

"They'd drive you crazy if you didn't do something," Foster said.

Jean Keyes, another Strike Force competitor from Redding, agreed.

"I had a pound puppy from Haven Humane, and he was very active," she said. "He was driving me crazy."

Teams compete for points and dog toys, and usually don't lose a lot of sleep if they don't win. They compete to have a good time.

"It's a team sport, and that's what makes it fun," Keyes said.

Reporter Rob Rogers

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