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# Top dogs: Canines compete in a league of their own

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By Marguerite Marsh

Playing sports requires plenty of practice, focus and determination - and that's true whether a competitor has two legs or four.

Our furry friends of the canine variety have plenty of sports to choose from to get some exercise and have fun. Popular picks range from the obstacle courses of agility to the high-flying, big-splashing fun of dock diving.

And then there are more specific feats, like the ancient practice of carting (dogs literally haul around a cart) and earthdog trials, where competitors hunt down vermin in underground tunnels.

"All dogs can participate in all sports," said Ron McClelland, president of the Columbus All-Breed Training Club. "What they compete in depends on the commitment of the handler to build the bond, and the focus and intensity they can get out of their dogs."

Finding the sport that best suits your dog's breed and temperament is one good way to start out.

"Dogs will show an aptitude," said McClelland, whose dogs are involved in agility and herding. "If you are happy and positive, they'll respond."

Staying mentally and physically active can help dogs live longer and happier lives, he added. Sports can also build their confidence and help them socialize.

"It's not such a shock to them to see another dog," McClelland said. "The dog is much happier, more stable and a better citizen. Anyone who is willing to invest time in their dog can do this."

Let's take a quick look at four popular canine sports.

### Agility

Probably one of the best-known competitions, it involves owners directing their dogs through an obstacle course involving jumps, tunnels, poles and obstacles, and requiring them cross a one-foot-wide, 36-foot-long dog walk. And any dog can participate, from Chihuahuas to Great Danes.

"The course is essentially the same," McClelland explained, "but the jump height is adjusted."

### Dock Diving

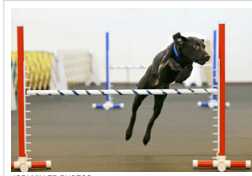
If you've ever watched it on TV, you know how fun dock diving is. Dogs compete to see who can jump the furthest from a raised platform into the water. To lure pups into completing this maneuver, called the Big Air, their favorite toy is thrown into the water. For the Extreme Vertical, more of a high jump, dogs try to knock down a bumper suspended above the water. This sport is great for any water-loving canine.

### Earthdogs

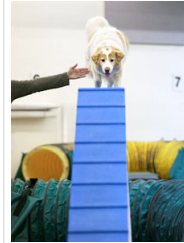
This sport was created mostly for Jack Russell Terriers and other small dogs bred to dig after vermin, McClelland explained. Dogs race through a tunnel dug into the earth trying find their prey, a caged rat waiting at the end. The tunnels become longer and more complex the more advanced the dogs are, and participating pups are limited only by the size of the tunnel.

### Carting

Working dogs bred to pull carts with supplies - like the Bernese Mountain Dog and Newfoundland - are the primary competitors here. These animals compete in a trifecta called the Draft Test, incorporating obedience, an obstacle course and freight haul. During the obstacle course, dogs must exhibit obedience and patience by alternately staying in position and going through various movable and stationary obstacles. And for the final challenge, dogs pull their freight for up to a mile.



JODI MILLER PHOTOS



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2164 Williams Rd., Obetz  
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Buckeye Dock Dogs  
36590 Grafton Eastern Rd., Grafton  
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