


In August 2005, an advisory group of agility enthusiasts gathered at the request of AKC Agility Director Sharon Anderson to consider changes within the AKC agility venue. Most changes became effective September 1, 2006. A new optional titling class called FAST (Fifteen And Send Time) will begin officially on January 1, 2007.

Various game ideas were considered after receiving many competitor requests for a third AKC titling class. The FAST class is based on an old British game called "What's My Line?" modified for time, scoring, and distance handling. Like many games, this is primarily a learn-by-doing exercise. Time will tell if the class becomes popular, but initial reactions are generally favorable.

FAST at Last

Implementation and Strategies

By Marquand Cheek



AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB

Fifteen And Send Time
(FAST)

Dog Number

Call name

CLASS
LEVEL

NovA NovB
Open
ExcA ExcB

Jump Height

Breed

Dog's Time

SCT:

Full seconds over SCT

1 1 1 1 1 1 (6)

2 3 4 (9)

5 6 7 (18)

8 9 10 (27)

SCTs:

8" = 38

12/16" = 35

20/24/26" = 32

Pref 4" = 41

Pref 8/12" = 38

Pref 16/20" = 35

Bonus Fault

Obstacle pts. Total

Send Bonus 20 pts.

Total points earned

subtract time penalties (if any)

TOTAL SCORE

50 to Q in Novice A/B

55 to Q in Open

60 to Q in Excellent A/B

(circle) Q or NQ

Game Defined

Simply put, FAST is a point-accumulation game with an on-course distance (send) element. FAST is an acronym for a longer string of words that define the game: **F**ifteen available point-accumulation obstacles **A**nd a **S**end distance-bonus element completed within a prescribed amount of **T**ime. At each height and class level, titling legs are earned by successfully completing a handler-chosen course of obstacles that includes the Send bonus. Training, handling, flow assessment, strategy, teamwork, obstacle performance, timing, and the ability to complete some obstacles at a distance are rewarded in this game. FAST class legs and titles are independent of any other titles, including the MACH.

The 15 obstacles are comprised of standard AKC agility equipment. The maximum score that can be earned on course is 80 points. Nine obstacles (or combinations of obstacles) are assigned a unique value from 2 through 10 points by the judge. Points earned on obstacles valued at 2 through 10 cannot be earned more than once per run. Successfully completing all these obstacles earns 54 points: (2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10). The remainder of obstacles on course is six jumps, assigned a value of 1 point each. Points earned on 1-point jumps can be earned up to six times as long as the same jump is not taken back to back. Therefore, total available obstacle points are 60 (6 x 1 + 54 = 60). The handler-restricted Send portion of two to three obstacles will earn the team an additional 20-point bonus. High score, then time determine placements. Total points required at each level to qualify: Novice 50 (30 obstacle points + 20 Send bonus = 50), Open 55 (35 + 20), and Excellent 60 (40 + 20).

There is no penalty for repeating jumps or tunnels. Weave poles and contacts, however, may only be repeated if faulted. Refused obstacles are not penalized except after the first obstacle in a Send bonus sequence.

For the complete rules, go to www.akc.org/pdfs/rulebooks/REAGIL_9-06.pdf (refer to Chapter 9). In addition, there is a FAST class informational video available online at www.akc.org/events/agility/index.cfm, and a scribe sheet specifically for the new class at www.akc.org/pdfs/masterform.cfm#show_events.

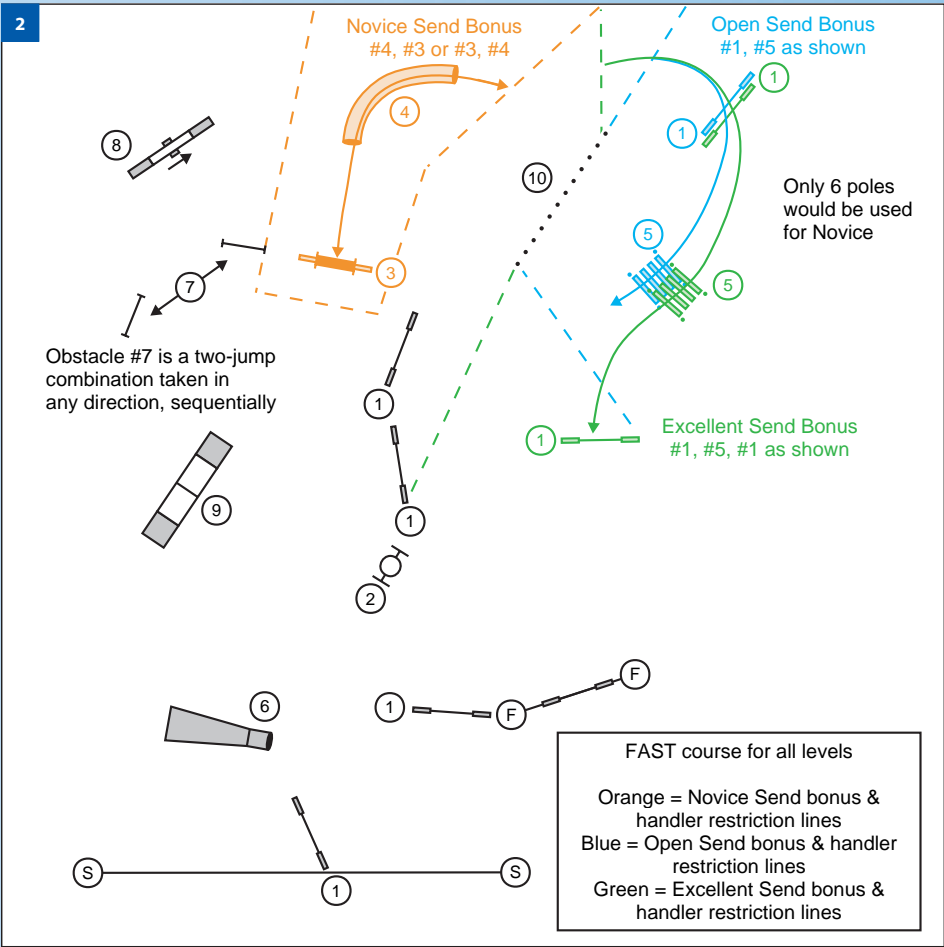
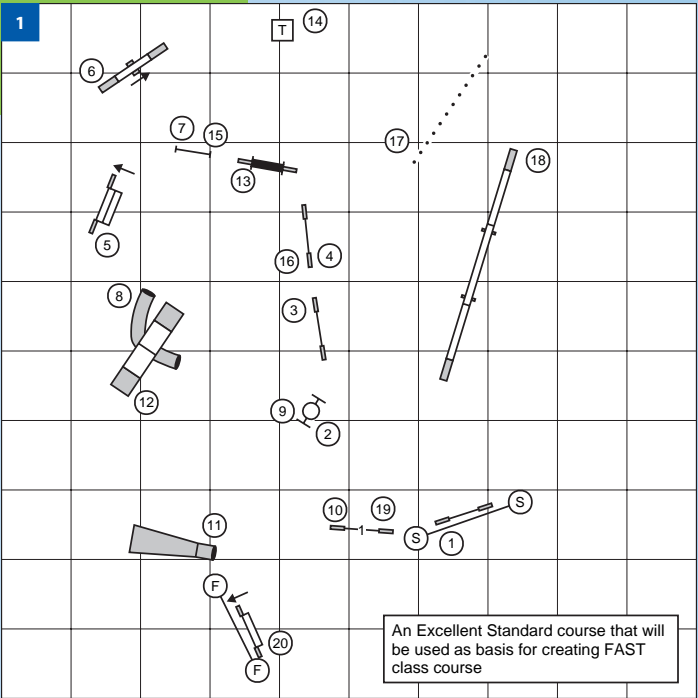
Course Examples and Strategic Analyses

A FAST course requires a minimum of 2 contact obstacles, a set of 9-12 weave poles for Open/Excellent, and a set of 6 weave poles for Novice. Various jumps and tunnels make up the balance of obstacles on the course. The assumption is that judges will assign highest point values to contacts, weave poles, and combination obstacles or obstacles set in “out of flow” positions on course.

In practical application, the plan is that judges will create FAST courses from modified Standard or JWW courses. Let’s assume the Excellent Standard course seen in **Figure 1** will be the basis for a FAST course. When the class starts in January, all dogs will start at the Novice level; however, all three levels are shown in **Figure 2**. For this course modification, the dogwalk and table have been removed. The table can be used as a Send Bonus completion obstacle per the rules, but my speculation is that most judges will not choose this option.

The Novice Send element depicted in Figure 2 is comprised of a jump/tunnel combination taken in either order. The Open Send element is a jump/broad jump combination behind a natural handler restriction line of weave poles. Finally, the Excellent Send element is the Open combination plus one more winged jump. Handler-restriction distances increase for each level and will be clearly marked for handlers.

One clever strategic feature of the game is a 1-point penalty assessment for each full second over standard course time (SCT). Handlers who can accurately predict the number of obstacles their team can complete in the prescribed time will have an advantage. One tip to give you a head start on mastering this game is to analyze your previous SCTs on Standard agility courses to develop an average seconds per obstacle (SPO) ratio (see the next section for calculations).



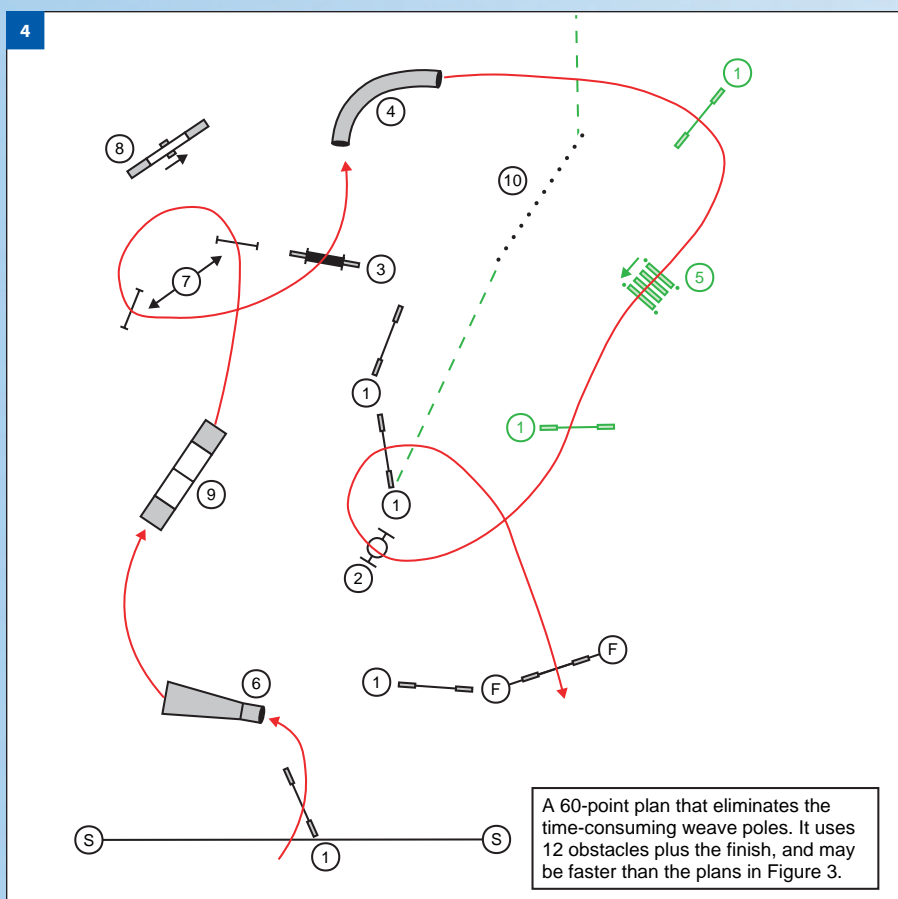
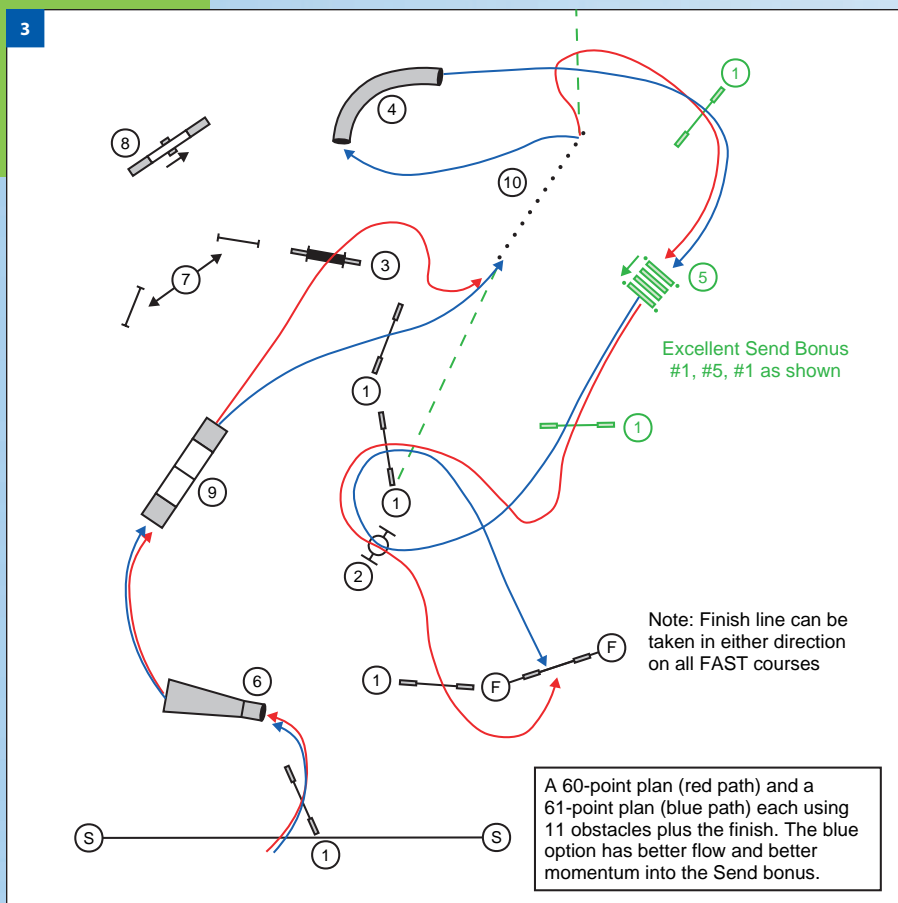
Excellent-level Strategies for Dogs of Various Speeds and Heights

Dog 1

Assume a medium-paced dog with an average SCT of 63 seconds on a 20-obstacle Standard agility course. Subtract the average table performance of approximately 6 seconds (since no ground is being covered) and the calculation becomes 19 obstacles in 57 seconds. Therefore, this dog has a 3.0 SPO ratio, or an average of 3 seconds per each obstacle performed. An 8" dog is granted 38 seconds for all FAST courses. Therefore, we can assume that an 8" dog with a 3.0 SPO could complete 12-13 obstacles in flow in 38 seconds ($38 \div 3.0 = 12.67$). Technically you have 38.99 seconds before time faults are incurred, but let's save the 0.99 seconds as margin for error. Preferred-class dogs are granted an additional 3 seconds. The finish-line obstacle with a 0-point value should also be included in your count of obstacles. I recommend that this team select an 11- to 12-obstacle course plus the finish-line jump with a minimum value of 40 points plus the Send bonus to earn a 60-point qualifying score. Two paths using 11 obstacles plus the finish-line obstacle are shown in **Figure 3**.

A good idea is to draw out your options in two different colors before you even walk the course to assist you in selecting the best course flow.

The blue option is superior to the red path because it has more places on the course where the handler can maintain the dog's forward movement. In the red path, a severe pull back to the poles off the 3-point panel jump and another pull back to a winged jump after the Send bonus are more time-consuming. An additional goal is to generate momentum into the handler-restricted Send area. The blue path allows for a slingshot approach to the Send bonus from a tunnel versus the slower, weave-exit approach on the red path.



Additional tips as you walk the course: Use a stopwatch to try to imagine the pace your dog will achieve to accomplish your plan of attack and engage the maneuvers you foresee using when competing. If you choose a path that has more than 30' to 40' between obstacles you should add an "imaginary" obstacle to your obstacle count. Once you choose a path, it's only important to remember the flow of the obstacles, not the point values. Avoid obstacles that are higher risk or deemed time-consuming for your dog. For example, if the weave poles are your most faulted obstacle or you consider them slow, then look for flowing paths that will leave out the poles until you've trained them proficiently. **Figure 4** shows a 60-point plan without the weave poles.

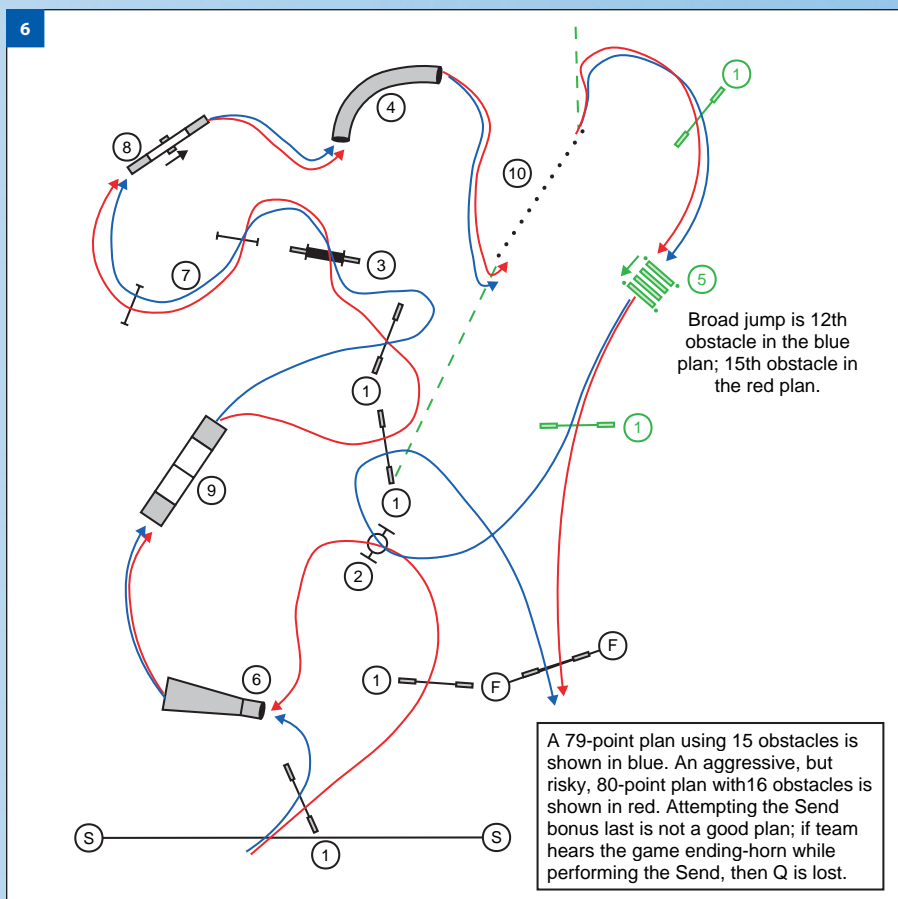
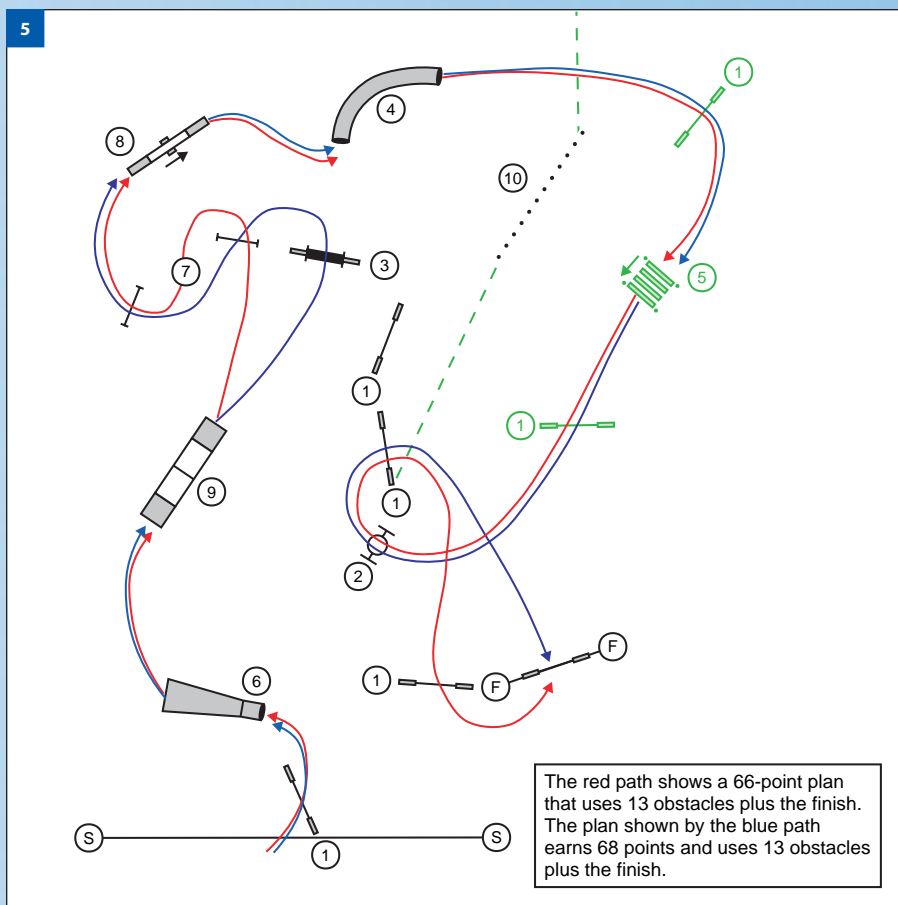
Dog 2

Assume a relatively quick dog with an average SCT of 53.5 seconds on a 20-obstacle Standard agility course. Subtract the table performance time and the calculation becomes 19 obstacles in 47.5 seconds. Therefore, this dog has a 2.5 SPO. A 12" or 16" dog has 35 seconds allowed for all FAST courses. Therefore, we can assume that this dog could complete 14 obstacles in flow in 35 seconds ($35 \div 2.5 = 14$). This team should select a 13-obstacle course plus the finish jump.

Figure 5 shows a red path of 13 obstacles worth 66 points as well as a blue path that represents a 68-point plan with a bit better flow into the #7 obstacle and into the finish jump.

Dog 3

Assume a speedy dog with lots of drive and an average SCT of 44 seconds on a 20-obstacle Standard agility course. Subtract time for the table and the calculation becomes 19 obstacles in 38 seconds. Therefore, this dog has a 2.0 SPO. A 20"/24"/26" dog has 32 seconds of time allowed for all FAST courses. We can assume that this dog could complete 16 obstacles in flow in 32 seconds ($32 \div 2.0 = 16$). Recommended for this team is a 15-obstacle course plus the finish jump. A dog with plenty of drive should be able to begin the Send portion after exiting the weave poles. **Figure 6** shows a flowing blue path of 15 obstacles worth 79 points. An 80-point maximum plan is possible as shown in red, but it adds more yards, one more obstacle, and delays the Send bonus sequence until the fourteenth obstacle. A late attempt at the Send bonus creates undue risk of losing out on a qualifying performance.

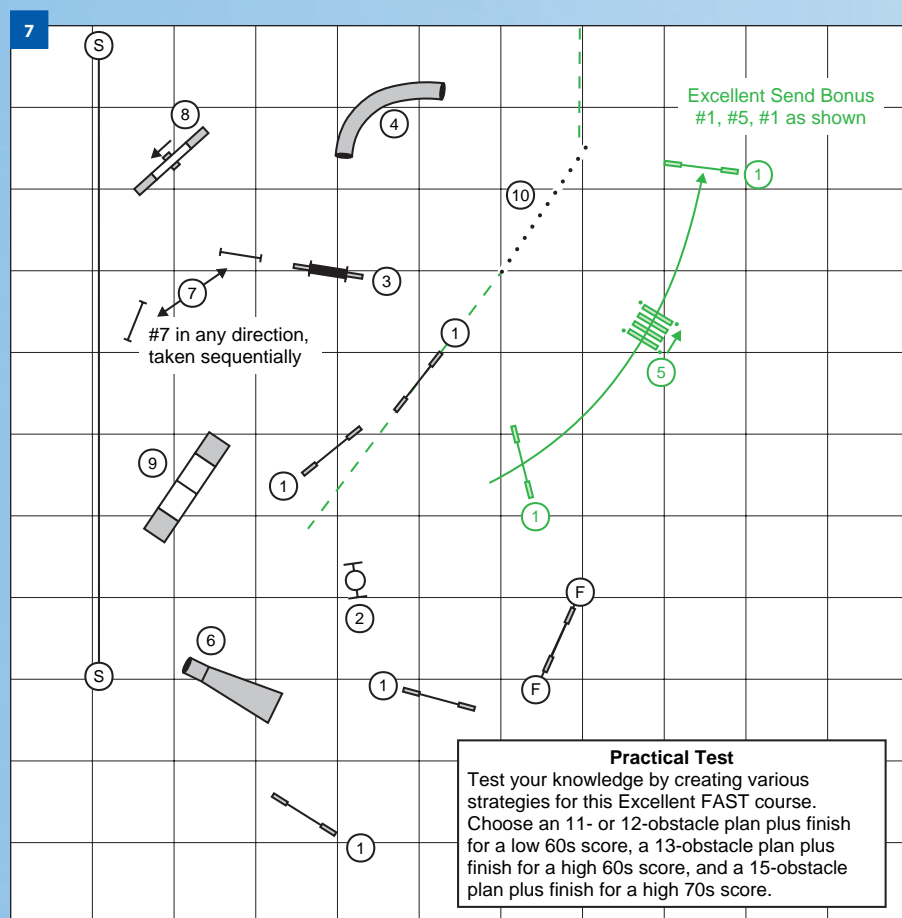


To Sum Up

- Calculate your SPO (seconds per obstacle) ratio using the following equation: Average Standard agility 20-obstacle course time less 6 seconds \div 19 = SPO. Divide the SPO into the assigned FAST course time for your height division (38, 35, or 32—plus 3 seconds for Preferred) to determine the number of obstacles recommended, including the finish-line obstacle.
- Game experience will allow you to consider obstacle-count changes based on your average class times, handling maneuvers, obstacle placements, and values.
- Before walking the course, select course-path options that have flow and accentuate your team strengths while minimizing your weaknesses.
- Look for paths that maintain speed and momentum, especially en route to the Send bonus portion.
- Use a stopwatch to time your plan during the walk-through and focus on your selected course flow.
- The Send bonus series can be attempted at any time, but is recommended that an attempt be made during the initial two-thirds of your plan to avoid running out of time.

Practical Test

Figure 7 presents a modified FAST course for your analysis. Consider choosing a path that would lead to a successful score for your specific dog. Various options exist and I have presented three possible qualifying solutions below. Here's wishing you FAST clean runs in 2007. 🐾



Distance Training Recommendations

This article gives an overview of the game's development and some strategies to employ. Clearly, a key factor in qualifying on a FAST course is the requirement to earn the 20-point Send bonus. Learning to handle at a distance is therefore a priority. Expert training advice can be sought from your local club instructor and in excellent publications by Clean Run. I highly recommend that you revisit both the outstanding "Unleashing the Velcro Dog" and "Distance Challenge" series by Jane Simmons-Moake presented in numerous *Clean Run* magazine issues since December 2003. *Agility Fun the Hobday Way Volume III* by Ruth Hobday also has rewarding exercises that focus on teaching forward movement.

Pitfalls to Avoid

For newcomers to point-accumulation games, I offer the following words of caution:

- Make sure *you* choose the obstacles to be performed and not your teammate, or it may haunt you on a Standard or JWW course later.
- Maintain your obstacle performance criteria. Develop consistency in your handling style.
- Train distance work in moderation; close work is important as well.
- If your dog gets confused performing the Send portion, then don't hesitate to step in and help him succeed to build his confidence for next time.

Possible Solutions for Practical Test

- 61 points/11 obstacles:
8, 7, 4, 3, 1, 1-5-1 (Send bonus), 10, 1, finish
- 69 points/13 obstacles:
7, 4, 3, 1, 1-5-1 (Send bonus), 10, 1, 9, 6, 1, finish
- 79 points/15 obstacles:
8, 7, 4, 3, 1, 1-5-1 (Send bonus), 10, 1, 9, 6, 1, 2, finish

Marquand has been involved in agility since 1994. His dog, Wyatt, earned the first AKC MACH title and was the first to earn dual USDAA ADCH and AKC MACH agility championship titles. Mara has twice been a member of the AKC Advisory Committee and he will be one of four judges at the 2006 AKC Invitational.