

Nationals Qualifying Points

I am very (**Very!**) pleased to announce that, after much thoughtful discussion and debate, the Board of Directors has agreed to set the number of points required to qualify for the 2008 Nationals at **350**. This is a change from the 400-point requirement set by the previous Board in November 2006, which was to become effective this year.

How and why the decision was made:

A number of factors went into this change. At first reluctant to tamper with the previous Board's decision -- particularly before it had had a chance to play out -- this year's Board was split about what to do. Directors listened carefully to what members were saying on both sides of the argument.

One important thing to remember is that, when the 400-point decision was made, the location of the 2008 Nationals had not yet been determined.

Because opinions were mixed, a long, hard look at the numbers was in order. Analyzing data from 2007 (another source of information not available when the initial decision was made), it was found that:

Of the 980 qualifiers across all regions, 540 (55.1%) got more than 400 points.

- 440 got between 300 and 400. [These were almost equally split between those who got 300-350 and those who got 350-400.]
- $440/980 = 44.9\%$ of those who qualified in 2007 would not have qualified under the new 400-point rule.

Breaking it down, 48% of regular dogs, 52% of specials dogs and 36% of veterans dogs who qualified in 2007 who would not have qualified under the new rule. (Using 350 as the qualifying number, it would be 22% of regular dogs, 24% of specials dogs and 20% of veterans dogs who would not have qualified.)

By Region, the proportions that would **not** have qualified at 400 points:

63% Saskatchewan/Manitoba
44% Alberta
50% BC
25% NB/PEI
51% NS/Nfld
41% Ontario
34% Quebec

Include the 350-400 group, and this discrepancy among class levels and regions almost disappears.

Last year, in the most populous agility area in the country, about 600 dogs entered. This is out of a total of 980 dogs who qualified (with 300 points) across the country -- that is, 63%. Approximately half of the competitors were from Ontario, and a very significant proportion lived within a couple of hours of the event site. With the 2008 Nationals being held at a much greater distance from the heavily populated regions (in agility terms) and the resulting increase in the time and resources required of competitors to attend, it seemed pretty dicey to assume that the same proportion of qualifiers would be able to attend this year.

There were resource issues to consider at the event- and Association-level as well. The time and effort that go into planning a National Championship are extraordinary, and this year's host group has been working very hard to ensure that they put on a great show. The event requires significant financial commitments, many of which are fixed well in advance of the closing date. The ability to downsize to accommodate a smaller entry is limited -- particularly given that the number would not be known until the closing date. While part of the reason for moving to 400 points was to make the event smaller and more manageable, there's a point beyond which it would become no larger than an average weekend trial -- there would just be more rental cars in the parking lot.

By bumping the qualification level to 400, 45% of the qualifiers get knocked out of contention and only 540 dogs would qualify. About 63% of last year's qualifiers entered. Assuming that the same proportion of qualifiers enters (again, highly unlikely given the location/distance), that leaves only 341 dogs (63% of 540). This would not be sufficient to meet the event's financial break-even point and would result in an event quite different in scope and celebration compared to previous years. Even if things could be scaled way back to adjust to a small entry, it seemed a shame to do so when folks eager to play are out there and willing to make the trip.

At 350 points, using the same proportions, 766 dogs would qualify. If 63% entered (again, very presumptive), that would be 483 dogs -- enough to break even if the same or a slightly smaller percentage entered.

In light of the numbers argument, combined with what many Directors were hearing from their constituents about the decision, the case against 400 points was becoming more compelling.

In an attempt to address the potential problems created by jumping to 400 points in the same year as the event was being held on the edge of the country, we considered a compromise that would have honoured the previous Board's desire to both "raise the bar" and shrink the number of competitors to a more manageable level compared to the last few years. This proposal involved guaranteeing a spot in the Nationals to everyone with more than 400 points, so that would still be the goal to shoot for (thereby covering the "raising the bar" part). However, everyone with more than 350 points would also be invited to enter. An "ideal" number of competitors would be identified prior to the opening date, and any difference between the number of entries with more than 400 points and this "ideal" would be filled by folks in the 400-350 point range, going down from the top (thereby covering the manageable-size part).

The catch, of course, is that folks in the 350-400 range would not know whether they had a spot at the Nationals until the closing date. This was felt to inject too much uncertainty into the mix for this group (even though it made the event itself more predictable), as travel and work plans would have to be made without a Nationals spot being guaranteed until closing.

Having heard and discussed all of the arguments against going to 400 points this year, and having determined that the proposed compromise had a sticking point that couldn't be unstuck, the Board, in consultation with the Nationals Steering Committee, opted to go straight to 350 as a qualifying score for everyone.

So there you have it!

Cheers,

Kathryn Harvey