

Dealing with Misconduct and Dog Aggression in Barn Hunt®

A guide for Competitors, Club Admins, and Judges



Misconduct

Like all dog sports, Barn Hunt has a basic Code of Conduct that it expects all people to follow at Barn Hunt events, including competitors, spectators, Club Admins, and Judges.

The Code of Good Sportsmanship is found in the **Barn Hunt Competitor Rulebook**, and states:

All participants and spectators attending Barn Hunt Events are required to operate as good sportsmen and sportswomen. Good sportsmanship includes honesty, courtesy, respect, and graciousness toward all in both victory and defeat. No harsh, punitive or corrective training is allowed on Trial grounds. Any handler who displays poor sportsmanship and/or who verbally or physically abuses his or her dog either in or out of the ring can face discipline ranging from a verbal warning, dismissal from class, dismissal from show grounds and up to expulsion from future Events, depending on the severity of the infraction. Handlers and spectators must show good sportsmanship toward the Judge, show committee, stewards and competitors. The BHA empowers the Trial Chair and Committee to make disciplinary decisions on behalf of the BHA, and all decisions made at a Trial are considered official BHA rulings for that Event. The BHA reviews all rulings. Parties may appeal permanent bans to the BHA who will make a final decision on whether or not the person(s) involved will be able to return to any Barn Hunt Event.

Barn Hunt is a family-friendly sport. Actions which would cause a family with young children to conclude the sport is inappropriate will result in disciplinary action.

Breaking Down the Meaning of the Code

There are several key sections to the Code of Good Sportsmanship, but in general the important thing to remember is that the Code sets expectations of an atmosphere of respect, kindness, and courtesy towards people and our canine (and rodent) partners. Key provisions are:

- Graciousness in both victory and defeat
- No harsh, punitive, or corrective training
- No physical or verbal abuse of a dog either in or out of the ring
- Treating the judge, trial committee, and fellow competitors with courtesy and respect
- Setting a good example for our many newcomers

The code will not cover every incident which will result in a Misconduct hearing. For instance, cheating is not specifically mentioned in the code, but would result in a hearing.

How do I Determine if it is Misconduct?

On the surface, this is an easy question to answer; it's misconduct when it violates the Code of Good Sportsmanship. But in reality, there will always be some question about when a Misconduct Hearing should be held. In some cases an issue between people can be quickly and peacefully resolved without having to have a hearing.

Judges and Club Admins who witness Misconduct are to be especially alert to the consequences of not acting. They must also take very seriously any competitor's complaint against another competitor. All competitors reporting incidents should be respectfully heard. Sometimes just being able to talk out the issue helps resolve it. If not, a hearing must be held.

Attempting to ignore and not report an issue of Misconduct never works. Information on the incident inevitably makes its way to the Barn Hunt office, and clubs who have deliberately decided not to act even when misconduct is clear may be sanctioned. Clubs should not take that to mean that every tiny incident must have a hearing. However, if the incident clearly meets the criteria of misconduct, a hearing must be held.

Notes on the Trial Summary Report

A note on the TSR does not replace a hearing. In order to take permanent action, the BHA must have results from a hearing plus relevant paperwork. More information about those paperwork needs are noted elsewhere in this document.

Dog Aggression

Dog aggression in Barn Hunt can be either dog on dog, or dog on person. While Barn Hunt is a place where many dogs can play, our sport does not make special accommodations for dogs with aggression issues. ***If a dog is not capable of being in the blind and in the ring without being dog or human aggressive, that dog is not ready to be in the sport at this time.*** All dogs must be able to work in a ring with the Judge, handler, and one or more Rat Wranglers. ***Aggression is determined by the action on the day, not on how the dog behaved in the past or an expectation of how the dog may behave in the future.*** There are a few very important things to know about Dog aggression:

1. Dog Aggression is an overt threat from a dog against another dog or a person and/or an attack with contact against another dog or a person with the intent to harm. ***Overt threat is the judgment that if a person or dog was not very quickly removed from the immediate vicinity a bite or attack would certainly have taken place.***
2. Injury does not have to occur for a dog to be deemed aggressive, but if there is an injury to dog or human the dog is deemed aggressive. The only possible exception being a dog defending itself from another attacking dog (see prey drive nips below).
3. Dogs who rumble, hackle, posture, growl, or bark from a distance are not necessarily deemed aggressive.
4. Dogs jumping on or bumping into a Judge or Rat Wrangler with no mouth contact or intent to harm are not deemed aggressive (but see Lack of Control rules in the **Competitor Rulebook**).
 - a) A dog accidentally nipping hands while the handler or Rat Wrangler attempts to remove the tube (prey drive nip) receives a non-qualifying (NQ) score and is dismissed from the course but is not considered aggressive or overtly threatening in most cases. Nipping is defined as teeth coming in contact with and/or closing on skin or clothing with a quick release. ***Prey drive nip exemptions apply only for in-ring behaviors with little to no injury. Nips that tear skin and nips outside the ring may be deemed dog aggression.***
 - b) A displacement bite (not an accidental nip directed toward the tube, but rather a deliberate nip or grip to the handler/judge/RW on another area of their body/clothing through frustration) is dog aggression.
5. Dogs gripping (grabbing and not letting go with mouth/teeth) other dogs or people are deemed aggressive.
6. Dogs who have a written record of aggression from an outside source or another dog sport organization, where proof of damage to a person or to another dog can be substantiated beyond a reasonable doubt (i.e. police report, photographic and/or video evidence, admittance of guilt by owner, written report findings) may be pro-actively barred from Barn Hunt at the discretion of the BHA administration, and are not guaranteed a right to compete or to be present on Barn Hunt grounds.
7. All dog sizes, breeds and types are to be judged equally in terms of dog aggression. Bias is not allowed.
 - A dog can't be DQ'd just because it's a large intimidating working breed.
 - Small dogs with little bite power can still be deemed aggressive if they meet the definition of dog aggression.
 - Deciding to not make a judgment or hold a hearing against a dog because the Trial Committee and/or judge knows the dog and does not think the dog to be aggressive is also bias.

The Hearing Process

First, it must be determined if a hearing must be held. If no hearing is held, the Barn Hunt office can take no official action or sanctions against any person or dog except in extraordinary circumstances. In order to determine if a hearing should be held, the following questions must be answered.

1. Did the incident happen?
2. Did the incident happen on trial grounds? (note that some clubs include hotels as trial grounds)
3. Did the incident meet the definition/criteria to be called dog aggression and/or misconduct?
4. Is the incident too serious to handle with a verbal discussion/warning (e.g., will the person/dog definitely be dismissed from the Event if found guilty)?

If the answers to all of those questions are YES, then a hearing must be held. Detailing the incident on a Trial Summary Report without supporting records and documentation from a hearing will result in no permanent action being taken.

If the Committee knows ahead of time that they will just verbally speak to or warn the competitor and allow them/their dog to compete the rest of the weekend, then a hearing is not really warranted. If the committee is unsure or divided on whether the incident rises to dismissal, they should hold a hearing.

Conducting a Misconduct or Dog Aggression Hearing at the Event

Once it has been determined that a misconduct and/or dog aggression hearing must be held, there are some rules that must be followed.

- All clubs must have an Event Committee, and at least 4 Event Committee members must be on trial grounds at all times to serve in case of a need for a hearing. While it is not a rule, it is of great advantage to not have the Trial Secretary as one of the three mandatory committee members (they can be a committee member but if so, should be a fourth). This will allow the trial to proceed even if there is a hearing.
- The hearing must be held on the same day of the incident OR, if that is impossible, must be scheduled at a period within 7 days of the event, at a time and place convenient for the trial committee and all witnesses including the accused to attend. Though it takes time, holding the hearing on the day of the incident is strongly preferred to any delay. The hearing can be held immediately or deferred to just after the end of classes. Testimony can be in person, via zoom, or by email. Accused persons who do not submit testimony by the deadline set by the Club waive all of their rights to speak on their own behalf.
- The accused (or owner of the dog accused) must be given proper time and opportunity to defend themselves and tell their side of the incident. At no time can the accused be denied that opportunity. Every effort must be made to contact the accused as soon as possible to let them know there will be a hearing and the time of the hearing. If the person accused knows of the hearing and chooses to leave trial grounds, the hearing may be held without their testimony. Alternately, they may provide written testimony. Clubs cannot deliberately schedule a hearing at a time when it would be impossible for the accused to attend (i.e., 10 am on a Tuesday when the club knows the accused works from 8 to 5). Otherwise they have the right to know of the hearing and testify.

Collecting statements and interviews

- All witnesses should provide written statements. If hand written, a photo of the statement (writing legible) is admissible.
- The accused any accusers/witnesses should be interviewed separately
- The accused may bring their own witnesses if they request

Event Committee Meets

After statements have been taken and collected, the Event committee meets and reaches a consensus by vote of any action(s) taken. Actions could include no action at all, NQ but not DQ, dog and/or handler dismissed from grounds, etc. The accused is advised of the committee's findings and that all information will be forwarded to the Barn Hunt Administration for a final decision. Regardless of the BHA's final decision on the incident, the Event committee may rule that the person and/or dog may not enter their events in the future.

A member of the Event Committee informs the Barn Hunt office via email (info@barnhunt.com) as soon as possible that there has been a hearing held. The Misconduct Form and/or Dog Aggression Form(s) are filled out in full and uploaded to the Results, as well as sent to info@barnhunt.com. The committee's recommendation for a permanent action by the BHA is included on the form.

All parties are advised that a final decision from the BHA may take as long as 4-6 weeks and may either be less severe, the same as, or more severe than the Committee findings based on overall evidence and adherence to Barn Hunt Rules.

If the Misconduct/Dog Abuse is substantiated

1. Persons accused of Lack of Sportsmanship/Misconduct will be allowed to speak at a Trial Hearing, usually the same day as the event but occasionally after the event at a mutually agreed time. Judge and/or Trial Committee decisions on misconduct are considered final for that Event.
2. Persons who are dismissed due to misconduct/lack of sportsmanship are required to leave the Trial grounds immediately after the Trial hearing (if present). The person and any/all dogs owned or co-owned by the person and living in residence with the person at the time of the misconduct are not allowed to attend, compete (Judge/serve on committees) at any future Events. The BHA office will make a final decision on the person's ability to return to Barn Hunt.
3. Dogs who are dismissed after the Trial hearing due to dog aggression are required to leave the Trial grounds immediately and are not allowed to return to any Trial grounds at any Barn Hunt Trial or Barn Hunt Fun Test without express written permission of the BHA office.
4. The appeals process is outlined [“Appeals Process” on page 9](#) of the [Competitor Rulebook](#).

Misconduct involving a Club Owner/Admin or a Judge

Sometimes it will be very difficult or impossible to hold a misconduct hearing at an Event. Something happens that directly involves the TS, TC, another key Club member, and/or a Judge of Record or a direct family member of someone holding one of those positions. It's not feasible to hold a hearing at the event, because the principal parties are compromised. A Trial Chair who also owns the venue is not likely to hold a misconduct hearing against themselves. If the person is the only Judge of Record, dismissing the Judge ends the event prematurely. In those cases, parties can appeal directly to the Barn Hunt Association. The BHA will determine if a formal hearing needs to be held, or if this is an issue which may be solved through less formal means. In order for the BHA to consider a formal misconduct hearing, the following steps must be taken:

- The complaint must involve an essential/primary member of the event, otherwise the Trial Hearing should be held as otherwise outlined earlier in this document.
- The complaint/issue must be formal/in writing (email). No complaints will be acceptable submitted by phone, text, or message. Video/photos are strongly encouraged. Rule violations must be clearly stated.
- Witness statements, if available, must also be submitted via email. Note that while witness statements are not required, a lack of impartial corroboration may hamper the ability of the Advisory Committee to substantiate the charges.
- The complainant has 5 business days to submit a formal misconduct charge for a hearing, including all materials and witness statements.

After receiving a formal complaint, the Robin Nuttall and the Advisory Committee (see About on the Barn Hunt website at www.barnhunt.com for committee member information) will decide if the issue needs a formal hearing or can be dealt with in a more informal way. If a formal hearing must be held:

- The AC will inform the person who is being charged, discuss internally, perform due diligence to fact find, then reach out to all parties for written witness statements, videos, etc. A final determination will be made from information received and the person will be informed of the final decision by a member of the Advisory Committee.