

COONHOUND ADVISOR

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Legislating Tree Style

Q: What constitutes a dog leaving the tree? I've seen judges minus dogs for dropping off the tree and daring to put their nose on the ground for a few seconds. Handlers will want it minused immediately for leaving the tree even though the dog got right back on the tree and continued treeing. My thoughts are as long they continue treeing and don't take a track and leave, there should be no minus. Is this the judge's call or is there a standard to go by?

A: You are right, this is a judgement call and one that can vary depending on who the judge is on a given night. The only reference you will find in our current rulebook talking about a dog's tree style is in Rule 11(b) where it reads, *"Dog should not be minused tree points if he comes back a short distance to meet handler if dog goes back in and trees satisfactorily."* Otherwise, it leaves it up to human interpretation. In conversations I have on the phone with people, I often tell them that a houndsman knows if a dog has left a tree or not. Let your experience be the guide. I dug up this old article that Todd Kellam wrote in 1999 that I thought you may like to look over.

"I guess according to the UKC rules, the bare minimum requirement a dog must meet to be considered treed is to bark at least once every two minutes and not leave the tree.

Everyone applies the rules differently in regard to dogs leaving the tree. Many refer to the dog's nose being on the ground (implying that the dog is trailing). Some refer to being outside the "umbrella" of the tree. Rule 4(i) says that dogs will be minused when they have been declared treed and dog leaves tree. This is a judgement call but a dog that puts his nose to the ground at the base of the tree and then goes back to treeing will not be minused if I am judging the cast.

Whether a dog's nose is high on the bark, or on the ground has nothing to do with whether or not he has left the tree. It seems reasonable by very basic definitions that a dog can either be considered to be at the tree treeing, at the tree and not treeing, or to have left the tree altogether.

You can't put a time and a distance on every aspect of judging a cast. You could make this so impossible to judge that it couldn't be done. For example, how close (in feet) does a dog have to come to the cast and how many seconds must he stop before he can be minused for quitting a track? How many rods must dogs be away from the cast or how many decibels must their voices be down to before you can call time out for trailing out of hearing in different directions? Just two examples of the many issues that cannot be clarified with measurements.

I'm afraid that with some individuals, the desire to own a 130 bark per minute tree dog has caused them to place too much of an emphasis on tree style when judging a cast. The Nite Hunt rules do not legislate tree style.

Dog Shut Out of Strike

Q: Here is a good question for your advisor column. I pulled my dog off of a tree after scoring it and recast it toward the other dogs in the cast. Shortly after I cut loose, another dog in the cast was treed, before I was able to strike my dog. My dog got struck and covered the treeing hound after the tree was closed. While the cast was en route to the tree, we heard a commotion at the tree. After arriving, we realized the hounds had pulled a coon out of a hole at the base of the tree. I know the declared treed hound will now receive plus strike points and have its tree points deleted. I am under the impression that since I was shut out on the tree, with the coon being caught I could get my strike points plussed now. Is that correct?

A: This was a good question, and similar to our discussion about holes back in the May 2023 issue, a situation that gets lost in the shuffle with these tree hounds we hunt. Honestly, if you look in the rulebook, so much of the verbiage is centered on the words tree and treed. It can leave a little bit of confusion in a situation like this where the dogs are not on a tree.

Again, I am going to reference our discussion in the May 2023 Advisor column about holes. In that article, it was reaffirmed that dogs can still be shut out in instances other than at the tree. They can be shut out wherever the dog that shut them out ends their track. That most frequently is a tree, but it could be a hole, brush pile, barn, tile, etc. The same can be true on a caught coon. Considering the dog that shut your hound out ended its track on a caught coon, that means your dog is shut out on that caught coon as well, resulting in your strike points being deleted.

Let's look into the rulebook to find some rule numbers to reference. Rule 5(i) under the Delete Points section reads, *when dog that is shut out comes into tree shut out on.* Again, the word tree is used and that's just commonplace when talking tree hounds, but that should expand further like mentioned in the paragraph above. Let's shift to Rule 3(e) under the Plus Points section which reads, *dog(s) that are shut out must still be declared struck. They are eligible for tree points if they are declared treed within the three minutes. If they are at tree shut out on when judge arrives, strike points are deleted. For all other situations they are accountable for their strike points.* I have the same stance here as the rule listed prior: wording is directed toward treeing but, should also include other places the dog could have finished their track that you were shut out on. The "other situation" this rule is describing would be situations where the dog was on a tree/place of refuge either by itself or with a dog that didn't shut out its strike. Again, an interpretation is

needed there.

Finally, let's look at Rule 16 at the definition of shut out. It reads, *When a dog has not been declared struck before the first dog has been declared treed. Dog is shut out only if it trees on tree it was shut out on. Otherwise, strike points remain live.* The explanation is becoming redundant, but again, tree here should expand to cover other places of refuge a hound can finish a track at. And I'm glad it mentions that it emphasizes the fact that a dog must be declared treed to shut you out, because if you head to a place of refuge without first treeing a dog assuming it's in a hole, or you happen upon a caught coon the dogs are on, your strike points will still be live, and you will receive credit.

Delaying a One-Dog Cast?

Q: Earlier this year I was on a cast where two dogs were scratched early on which left just me and the judge. Later, the judge withdrew but stayed to judge the cast since he was the guide as well. At one point, my hound got into a place where it was felt by the judge, we needed to call timeout and wrangle him up. After calling the timeout, it proved difficult to handle the dog, and I was ultimately scratched for returning to the judge after the hour had expired. With it being a one-dog cast at this point and since I wasn't technically delaying anyone else, should I have been scratched in this circumstance?

A: This was another good question where I can

completely understand where the writer comes from. Unfortunately for him, Rule 6(e) under the scratched section doesn't have any exceptions or caveats listed which would lead us to determine that the dog would indeed be scratched, even in situations where there is only one dog remaining in the cast. Rule 6(e) reads dog would be scratched, *for delaying completion of cast for one hour after time out is called during the hunt in accordance with Rule 7.*

One key phrase that stands out in the rule that we could expound on is "delaying the completion". More than just the handler is affected by extending the time to retrieve a hound and get back to the meeting spot. Your guide, judge, the event officials, and especially the folks in other casts who are having to abide by the rule and gathering dogs in the time frame specified in the rulebook. Just a few extra things to think about.



ATTENTION!

The following person's Nite Hunt Director and Nite Hunt Judging privileges have been suspended until the date listed.

Justin Crockett • Senatobia, MS • May 1, 2024

Andrew Ratliff • Winchester, KY • January 1, 2025

Violations to these privileges should be reported to the United Kennel Club.



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