

COONHOUND ADVISOR

Trevor Wade

It is October first, the weather is perfect, and hunting season just came in. And since we wrapped up the 2022 World Championship a week ago, my travel schedule for coonhound events is clear until January when Grand American rolls back around. I'm looking forward to a fun hunting season with a couple young dogs and hoping my daughter gets to come out with me a couple times a month to enjoy it, as well. Even though she is only four years old she sure enjoys being around the hounds. It's always good to hit reset and get back to the basics of coon hunting which is enjoying the outdoors with your family, friends and hounds.

In last month's column, I gave a quick rundown of which rule proposals passed and which ones didn't at the Autumn Oaks Rules Meeting. Also, on September 28, a podcast dropped on the UKC Hunting Ops Podcast, where Allen and I discussed the results of the rules meeting, as well. Using that platform is such a good way to be able to discuss the rule changes in depth which we plan on doing in the coming weeks. If you haven't gave it a chance yet, go over and give it a listen. You can find it anywhere you listen to podcasts, or on the United Kennel Club YouTube page. With that being said, lets dig into a few of the rule proposals that passed and will be in effect for the 2023 competition year. We will discuss the other few passed proposals in next month's column.

Thermal Imaging Devices

Let's start out with the hot topic of the last few years, thermal imaging devices. Allowing the use of thermal imaging devices as a scoring aid passed unanimously at the Rules Meeting at Autumn Oaks. I know I've had conversations about thermals at every event I've been to for the past couple of years and it turns out that your breed associations heard you loud and clear. Hence the seven voting for, and the zero voting against. So, what does this mean?

Basically, this passing will allow the use of thermal imaging devices as a scoring aid. When the new rulebook comes out, thermal imaging devices will be listed with other allowed scoring aids in Rule 6(r), along with lights and mechanical squallers. Notice I say aid. When you look up the definition of aid, you will see words and phrases like to help, to assist, or to support. This means that the thermal imaging device becomes an aid to help you pinpoint where in the tree to focus your search. Even when seeing heat in a tree, you still have to find the coon with your eyes. This tool will be no different than a light or squaller in that it will help the handler and cast find where in the tree the coon is, and to have the best shot at scoring it. In all honesty, when you're in a competition to find out who has the best coonhound, why not utilize the tools you

have available to help you figure that out?

With that being said, the use of cell phone cameras and mirrors as scoring aids was not passed. There was an amendment from one of the associations to remove those from the wording of the proposal and the breed associations agreed unanimously to support that change. So, the use of cell phone cameras or mirrors as a scoring aid on a cast will still result on being scratched, per Rule 6(r).

I've had a couple calls from folks asking about resulting rules regarding the use of thermals on a cast, and possible limitations that may be placed on handlers using them. Some of the questions I've fielded were, "What if only one person on the cast has a thermal? Does that handler have to let the rest of the cast use it?" There are no plans to place any limitations on handlers in the cast from using their thermal when others in the cast may not have one. Thermal imaging devices are going to be treated like any other piece of equipment you may see in a hunt. Some have squallers, some don't. Some have telemetry systems, some don't. Just like you often see with handlers helping shine and squall at each other's tree, I would say we will see a lot of people helping one another with their thermals.

Striking Dog On or Before the Third Bark – Remove Warning

Adding a first offense warning to the rulebook for handlers who failed to strike or tree their dog on or before the third bark seemed like a good idea in theory when it was passed in the Rules Meeting in 2018. As is the case with the next proposal that passed, that is listed under this one, it is one that has been more an advantage to those experienced handlers, than it has been a learning tool for novice handlers. That is why the breed associations voted six to one in favor of removing the first offense warning for handlers failing to strike their dog on or before the third bark, in Rule 2(a).

This means that on the first offense of a handler failing to strike their dog on or before the third bark, they will be minused the next available strike position on the scorecard. On the second offense, the dog will be scratched from the hunt.

This is another proposal that passed with an amendment. In the amendment the breed associations brought to the table, it was decided to allow a first offense warning to handlers failing to strike their dog on or before the third bark in youth-only casts. So, while in a standard, licensed event the warning is gone, in Youth Championships or YEP events, the first offense warning will continue. This will help the rule get the desired effect, which is to help young, inexperienced handlers compete in a cast, while also giving them the opportunity to learn along the way.

Calling the Wrong Dog – Remove Warning

Like the rule we just discussed, this was another first

