

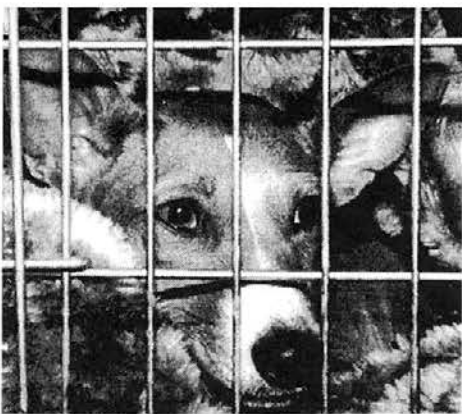


Izzy

A Breed First : Champion Flyball Basenji

by Kate Harward

Any time a Flyball demonstration or competition is included at a dog event, it's always a crowd favorite. How many times have you thought that looks like fun - but could my Basenji do that? Well, there IS a Basenji doing just that! Owned by Kate Harward, a member of the Houston Flyball Association, a red and white Basenji named Izzy is making Flyball history. But Kate & Izzy's story is not just about a first for Basenjis in the world of Flyball competition



In The Begining . . .

I made a mistake, but little did I know what a wonderful mistake it would be. It was September 1994 and I was at the Houston SPCA signing up to participate in their Whiskers Walk fund raiser. While I was there I decided to walk through the kennels and just look around. All you other multiple pet owners are now saying OH-OH and you would be right. Halfway down the aisle on the left there she was, a little female Basenji. She was right by the door glaring at me as if daring me to say hello. "O.K. remember you are just looking," I said to myself as I turned away.

At that time I already had a little 16 year old mix breed, 2 Greyhounds and an American Foxhound. I had thought about getting another small dog, but not yet. I had even been researching small breed dogs, and had decided to get a Basenji or a toy Fox Terrier. I wanted to wait though until I had more time. Looking back down the aisle, something in me said there is never enough time and this little girl needs someone now.

I filled out their adoption forms and spoke to the girl behind the desk. She informed me that I would need a statement from my landlord or a copy of my lease to adopt, and the bad news. Someone had already adopted the Basenji. O.K., I thought, I was just helping the little dog out. It really wasn't a good time for another dog anyway. The girl at the desk informed me they could keep me on file, in case the breed of dog I was looking for came in. So I thought, why not leave the papers since they were already filled out?

On my way home from work the next day, I decided to drop off my lease. A different girl at the desk took it, got out my paperwork and glanced over it. She looked up at me and said, "You know we have a Basenji back there now." "Yes" I said, "but she's already adopted." "No" the girl said, "The woman who wanted her tried to pick her up to take her home yesterday and she bit her. Would

you still be interested?" I hesitated briefly and thought, sure, why not. I had to go through a second interview, but, after assuring them I would not dump the dog at the first sign of trouble or use harsh training with her, they approved the adoption. She was already spayed so I could take her right home. They explained she had been left on the front steps one night in a fairly new looking Vari-Kennel. She had been OK with them, but was nippy. They handed me her leash and I petted her. She was fine accepting the petting, but not relishing it.

She was good in the car on the way home. Once we got home, I tried a few things. Picking her up was a definite NO and holding her face, head or neck was not acceptable either. No collars over the head, no sudden grabs, no controlling moves at all. She accepted my other dogs just fine and decided to claim a spot on the end of the sofa where I usually sit. I went to sit down and she would not move. "Scoot" I said, but again that defiant stare. I reached for her and she growled and bared her teeth. I threatened to sit on her and she nipped at my leg, so I wrapped a towel around my hands and picked her up, biting all the way, and moved her to the other side of the sofa. I sat down in my spot and she came and curled up next to me.

What is Flyball?

Flyball is a team sport for dogs that was invented in California in the late 70's. Legend has it that Herbert Wagner first showed it on the Johnny Carson Show to millions of Americans. Soon afterwards dog trainers and dog clubs were making and using Flyball Boxes. In the early 80's the sport became so popular that the North American Flyball Association or NAFA, was formed, the worldwide authority for Flyball.

One of the fastest growing dog events in the world, Flyball is considered by many to be the ultimate dog sport, where speed and precision teamwork is the name of the game. The dogs are highly trained to work closely with each other and keep focused on their task, amid great distractions. They are motivated to race fast because they are doing the things dogs love to do: play with their owner, run, jump and retrieve tennis balls. One of the attractive things about Flyball is that it is open to all dogs, mixed or pure bred.

Flyball is a relay race with 4 dogs on a team. The course consists of a starting line, 4 hurdles spaced 10 feet apart and a box. The first hurdle is 6 feet from the start line and the box is 15 feet from the last hurdle for a 51 foot overall length. The dogs jump the hurdles and steps on a spring loaded box that shoots out a tennis ball. The dog catches the tennis ball and then runs back over the 4 hurdles. When the dog crosses the starting line the next dog goes. The first team to have all 4 dogs run without errors wins the heat.

Flyball jumps are 24" wide, with the height varying from 8 to 16 inches. Each team's jump height is determined by the shortest dog running in that heat. The jumps are set 4" lower than the shortest dog height at the withers (shoulder). Racing lanes are 10 to 20 feet apart.

Flyball is governed by rules that reward clean running



Izzy in April of 1999

dogs. For example, if the dog crosses the start line before the green light, the heat will be restarted (first time only). The second time the dog must run again, after the other dogs have run. Also, if the dog fails to bring the ball back, misses a jump, crosses the start/finish line before the preceding dog returns or is assisted, the dog must run again. And, if the dog interferes with the opposing team or fouls in the ring, the heat will be forfeited.

Flyball Tournaments are usually organized in either a double elimination or round robin format. Double elimination is usually best of 3 or best of 5. Round robin is usually best 3 out of 5 and the first team to win 3 heats receives 1 point towards their standing in the tournament.

Before a dog can race at a competition, it must have a Competition Racing Number (CRN) which is assigned by the NAFA. There is a form to apply for this number which is available from NAFA. It must be completed and submitted with a \$15.00 application fee. Once assigned, this number will be used to identify a dog throughout its racing career. Points for a title are credited to dogs at tournaments by the flyball judges. NAFA recognizes each breed & keeps track of points on each dog competing. There are 147 breeds represented and currently 6,855 dogs registered as competitors.

Second Chance . . .

The next few months were constant retraining sessions. I named her Izzy, short for Izuzu, because they are practically amazing. My Foxhound's name is Amazing, so I have amazing & practically amazing girls. She always wore a short lead around the house so I could control her without grabbing her.

I quickly learned a lot about her. First of all, she loves treats and people food, and would steal it if given a chance, even right out of your hand. Second, she hated being left in a Vari-Kennel and would proceed to chew her way out probably because she was dumped in one. So I bought a wire crate which kept her in, but she shredded the bedding, so old towels were used. Third, she could not be left loose in the car if I was in sight because she would gnaw on the seats and seat belts.

Izzy learned quickly too. I believe her previous owners had tried to control her with aggressive training and punishment so she fought back. Izzy was quickly realizing that people were nice and usually had food. She was also learning if she

followed my simple rules she would get love and rewards, and most important, I never hit her or raised my hand to her. I even changed words for her. I never say "Good." I say "Yes" or "Very Pretty" and I never say "bad girl"; I say she is "Evil."

We enrolled in a friends' obedience class so Izzy would learn to accept training and control. We went through obedience class and lots of socialization work. But Izzy did not have any interest in obedience work. A stay for her was a battle of wills, no fun for me or her. I took her to Flyball to socialize her with lots of people and dogs, and work on crate training. I had read about the difficulties in training Basenjis, but I am an addicted Flyball enthusiast and had already received the first Championship for an American Foxhound in the world, so why not another first?

A New Start . . .

Izzy liked to play tug with toys and when I got it away, I would throw it and she would bring it back to continue the game. I got a ball with a

rope attached and we played exclusively with it. The tug of war retrieval made learning straight retrieval for a reward easy. Izzy had learned "get the ball" and "bring it" from the tug game, so we just went to rewarding for a retrieval of a tennis ball. We also started learning jumps for the Flyball pattern starting by calling her over 1 jump, then 2, and so on.

Izzy's first problem was the box. Unless she hit it from a run with some force, it would not trigger. The large ball was hard for her to get off the box. She would let it roll to the ground and then pick it up, or put one foot on the trigger and the other foot up on the ball to trap it. This slowed her down, but she could manage it.

She was running the whole pattern in about 9 months and went to her first tournament with a green team in Austin, Texas. Her time for running the pattern was 8-9 seconds, not great but O.K. She was great and ran the pattern many times that weekend and only had minor problems when the ball would get away and roll out of

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The Road to Becoming a Flyball Champion

Dogs earn points towards flyball titles based on the team's time:



Less than 32 secs Each dog receives 1 point
 Less than 28 secs Each dog receives 5 points
 Less than 24 secs Each dog receives 25 points

The titles the dogs can earn are:

Abbr	Title	Points	Award
FD	Flyball Dog	20	Certificate
FDX	Flyball Dog Excellent	100	Certificate
FDCh	Flyball Dog Champion	500	Certificate
FM	Flyball Master	5000	Pin
FMX	Flyball Master Excellent	10000	Pin
FMCh	Flyball Master Champion	15000	Pin
ONYX	ONYX Award	20000	Plaque
FGDCh	Flyball Grand Champion	30000	Plaque

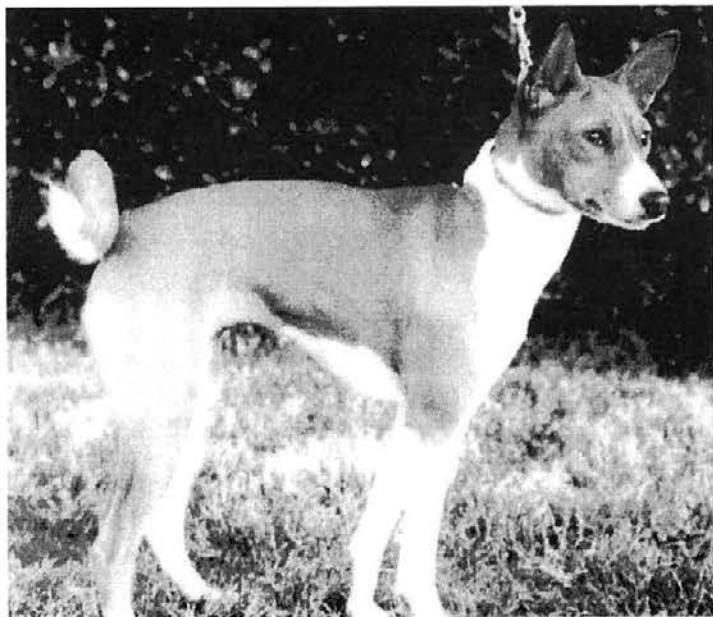
line with the jumps.

I want to say here that I learned some important pieces of information about training Basenjjs. Patience is your key. If you don't have this, do not try to train a Basenji. You must also be prepared for them to change the game on a whim. Izzy decided at the next tournament that Flyball really was a chasing game and at the tournament, proceeded to play chase instead of running the pattern. Lastly, you must have the ability to be embarrassed in front of a crowd, because the minute you say my Basenji can, is the minute they decide not to.

This was proven in Las Vegas. A small group of us went down to compete there and everyone was amazed that a Basenji would run Flyball. Word is out that they can't be trained. I assured everyone that yes, she could run flyball and surprise, Izzy did everything she could think of except run the pattern, including running across the spectators line, jumping up on the judge's table and stealing a cupcake.

Well so much for our great start. Back to training. Sit/stays by the box while the fast team practiced, calling her back with me as the dog took the ball from the box and ran the other way. Izzy getting correction from a long line if she chased. We also tried to bait her by placing treats along the lanes and correcting her. Extra people would stand in the lanes and yell at her or squirt her with water if she chased. And of course the ultimate trainer - no food reward if she chased.

Time and patience were the key here. Izzy is smart and she likes flyball. All I have to say is *Flyball* and she is at the door, ready to go. She slowly



realized it also had to be played my way. Occasionally, when she was corrected, Izzy would take off and play what I call run amok. She would not come when I called. I decided rather than chase her around, since the area was fenced, I would ignore her and go get my Foxhound and practice with her. Jealousy works wonders with Izzy. She would see Amazing getting attention and run back over and sit and stare at me. Then it would be a bit of praise and back to her kennel to think for awhile. Then back out to try again.

She started running well consistently and at some point, she realized it was a race and started *really* running. Our team improved some things too by buying new Flyball boxes that were easier to trigger. At a tournament in Corpus Cristi, I saw a Jack Russell on another team using a small tennis

ball. I convinced our team to buy some and it was an instant success for Izzy. The small ball can be taken with her mouth from the box and it does not have to roll to the ground first.

Izzy has been running successfully now for over a year. Her times have improved to 6-7 seconds and we are having great fun traveling all over the country competing and showing Basenjjs to the world. She is still learning some things that will improve her times, like always getting the ball from the box, not off the ground and to single step between the jumps, not take 2 steps. This means she needs to learn to stretch out her jumping style. We are happy though and really having a great time.

Izzy has her CGC and her Flyball Dog Excellent title (FDX). She also loves people petting her and will shake hands with anyone, even children. She never tries to bite people any more. She loves to perform her tricks and also plays agility, but I don't have time to compete.

I have donated money to the SPCA in her honor and can't imagine life without her around. She is definitely a little devil sometimes, but I love her anyway. To the people out there who push and punish their dogs to train them, I say be careful. Kindness gets you so much more. Just look at Izzy. She's practically amazing.

P.S. To Izzy's previous owners, if you read this and recognize her, thank you so much. You gave away more love than you could ever realize.

On March 28, 1999 in Austin Texas, Izzy became the first Champion Flyball Basenji in the world. She is now officially Izzy FDCh CGC.



Izzy earned her CGC, FD, FDX & FDCh titles in the 5 years after Kate adopted her. Kate is pictured on the Houston Flyball Association Web site with the Blur of Fur team at <http://www.flyball.com/hfa/pix.html>. In addition to Izzy, Kate also competes with her American Foxhound named Amazing, and her Blue Tick Coon Hound named Fargo. A picture of Izzy, Amazing and Kate can be found at <http://www.flyball.com/hfa/kate.html>.

Anne Graves adds: Kate is our rescue chair here with the Austin Basenji Club. She's quite good with diagnosing and curing problems.