I was pleased with the enthusiasm she shows as she completes this obstacle and using her tug toys as motivators has sped up her footwork.

Contact Obstacles

One obstacle Max and I are having problems with is the teeter. When Max was under three months of age I would stand her on a table that rocked a bit and she seemed comfortable with that. At around six months she would play with Max following him up and down a moving table. Believing my teeter

Miko and I have always been plagued with weave pole issues. While he routinely hits his weave pole issues, Max tends to pop out around the tenth pole. Currently at the Novice level, Miko has only completed a set of six weave poles under competition conditions. However, I am pleased with the enthusiasm she shows as she completes this obstacle and using her tug toys as motivators has sped up her footwork.

Avoid Trial Anxiety

Another issue Max had at trials was separation anxiety. All of the sights, sounds and scents at a trial kept Max on high alert and it was difficult to get him to relax in his crate or on a leash. It is easier to have the excitement incited by this play for her run. The true test would be AKC trials; now, after several AKC agility competitions, I am convinced my decision to make agility a game for Miko was the right way to go. All of her AKC runs have been stress free, with no signs of the avoidance behaviors Max exhibited. Unlike Max, whose focus did not seem to kick in until he was over two years old, Miko is doing quite well focusing during her agility runs at a little over one year of age. The use of toys is a great way to enhance a dog’s play drive and when engaging in play, it brings the dog’s focus back to me. Recently, I’ve replaced some of Miko’s food rewards with a few tags on one of her favorite toys to get her focus on me; the excitement incited by this play usually gives Miko an extra burst of speed during her practice runs. I also play tug with Max prior to his runs to try and rile him up a bit and get his focus but Max has a very calm, laid back personality, and his focus is not as intense as Miko’s.

Once I have her focus, I need to keep it on me. My goal as a handler is to make sure I give Miko her cues early so as not to open up any opportunity for her to lose focus and wander. Right now, near crossers are a challenge because instead of seeing the direction I want her to go, she sees a variety of things to check out: score people, the judge, or incorrect obstacles. So focus is a work in progress.

Agility Drive

For every full second you are under Standard Course Time (SCT) you earn one point towards your Master Agility Championship (MACH) title. Avid lure coursers, masters of the indoor 300-yards, speed should not be an issue for our breed but it became a problem when Max and I moved into Excellent B. Max’s normal agility speed is a slow lope; he makes wide turns and takes his obstacles rather casually. While a qualifying leg is nice, earning MACH speed points is even nicer, therefore the play drive I am fostering in Miko is teaching her to drive towards each obstacle at full speed. To develop play drive, I use a toy Miko loves, such as a raccoon or foxtail tied to a lead. I toss the toy while holding Miko by her collar, then say “go” and we both race to the toy. If Miko gets to it first I let her run and play with it a little bit before I grab on so we can play tug. Once your dog understands this game you can incorporate a few agility obstacles to get him driving ahead of you toward the next obstacle.

Those Darn “Weave Poles”

Max and I have always been plagued with weave pole issues. While he routinely hits his weave pole issues, Max tends to pop out around the tenth pole. Currently at the Novice level, Miko has only completed a set of six weave poles under competition conditions. However, I am pleased with the enthusiasm she shows as she completes this obstacle and using her tug toys as motivators has sped up her footwork.

Thankfully, training weave poles was less daunting the second time around. I read up on several methods and ended up using a modified 2x2 method recommended by Miko’s agility class teacher vs. the Wearmac method Max learned on. Miko has learned quickly and is now actually using the two-step pattern and bouncing rhythmically through the poles. Currently at the Novice level, Miko has only completed a set of six weave poles under competition conditions. However, I am pleased with the enthusiasm she shows as she completes this obstacle and using her tug toys as motivators has sped up her footwork.

Contact Obstacles

One obstacle Miko and I are having problems with is the teeter. When Max was under three months of age I would stand her on a table that rocked a bit and she seemed comfortable with that. At around six months she would play with Max following him up and down a moving table. Believing my teeter...
Max, Miko, and Timu take a much needed break from agility practice.

training was done I put away the teeter and discontinued any movement training. When Miko first started her agility classes I discovered she was scared of the teeter movement and sound. This was completely new to me because although Max does slow down at the pivot point, he never had an issue with the movement and he loves to bang it to the ground. I was told that Miko, being 1/2 Native African Stock, may startle more easily than domestic Basenji; this may be part of the root issue but I’m sure it is not all of it.

What to do? I went back to the basics with Miko. Once she was comfortable with the movement on the inflatable disc, I moved to the rocking disc. After one or two sessions on the rocking disc she was still hesitating and walking slowly onto the disc and would only assume the 2o2o position.

The two on, two off (2o2o) method teaches the dog to stop on cue with his rear legs on the contact zone and when the dog is cued he will assume the 2o2o position.

The goal is to have Miko run straight to the teeter’s contact zone and get into her 2o2o position without hesitation. With patience, desensitizing her to the movement and sound of the teeter will pay off.

Max was taught 2o2o position for all contact obstacles. He was taught to touch his nose to the ground at the end of the contact when stepping onto the teeter and was slowing down at the pivot point. Since the class is held in an indoor warehouse with rubber matting, the noise of the teeter hitting the ground is much louder than on grass. We have just recently moved up to a full size teeter but we are still holding the end and slowing the descent. What we have found is that if there is an obstacle before and after the teeter she is less concerned about the teeter itself.

The two on, two off (2o2o) method teaches the dog to stop on cue with his rear legs on a mat. That mat is then placed on the contact zones and when the dog is cued he will assume the 2o2o position.

The goal is to have Miko run straight to the teeter’s contact zone and get into her 2o2o position without hesitation. With patience, desensitizing her to the movement and sound of the teeter will pay off.

Max was taught 2o2o position for all contact obstacles. He was taught to touch his nose to the ground at the end of the contact when he was in the 2o2o position. I found this method was not really conducive to the desired position since it is not a dog’s normal stance to touch his nose to the ground at the end of the A-frame. Max had no problems offering this “nose to the ground” position on the dog-walk or the teeter but when he tried on the A-frame his back legs would actually lift off the obstacle since, compared to his rear, Max was chest heavy at such a steep angle. In order to avoid this continuing problem, I switched Max to a running A-frame contact. I don’t recall using any specific method other than making sure I waited long enough to cue the contact zone so he didn’t jump off the side to follow me.

Videos of Max’s runs show he takes two strides up the A-frame, one over the apex and then he walked, kind of shuffles, down until he touches the contact before jumping off upon my moving away. Not a very quick descent but my training for this was non-existent or at best, non-directional. For Miko’s A-frame contacts I am using the box method. The box method is a more natural way of training the dog to adjust the length of his strides so they hit certain spots on the A-frame, with the final stride in the contact zone. Ideally I am looking for two strides up the A-frame, one over the apex and two strides coming down, the last stride of course in the contact zone. Miko has been hitting her contact zones consistently with this method and at this point in her training she is keeping her footwork and speed while going up and down the A-frame.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

After writing articles for The Basenji and now for the Bulletin, I have come to the conclusion it is not the learning curve of the dog that makes the difference (though it definitely helps to start training a puppy vs. an established adult). It is about setting a goal, with the expectation of the performance I want from Miko—and having a training plan in place to meet that goal.

Much of my training with Max was trial and error, just plain perseverance and hard headedness. With Miko, I know what I want, I researched the different training methods, I then selected those I believed were best suited to meet my goals with her and I train for that performance.

Fast forward six years and Max no longer displays avoidance behaviors during his agility runs. While it was difficult to know he was so stressed his first year of competing that he did not enjoy agility, the payoff of working through his struggles is the ability to apply all of that knowledge to Miko, creating a happy, go lucky, tail wagging, agility Basenji! I look forward to many, many unbearably happy years and exuberant runs with her.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn's Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.

My agility dogs:

FC, MBOC, AAK, MJSX, MJSX/BD Max II & FC, Chyn’s Native Invincible SC Miko

A special thank you to Miko’s agility class teacher, Lisa Mikanluk of Wags and Wiggles. Lisa has been instrumental in Miko’s training and has always made sure Miko was engaged and happy. And many thanks as well to Linda Welker for helping me get my words in shape.