

Thunder Paws Flyball Training – The Fundamentals

(Based on <http://www.flyballblog.com>)

The most important thing in flyball training is laying a good foundation from which to build upon. Spend the time playing and motivating your dog. Making it fun for them. If they know that you are having fun it is very likely that they will sense this and this game will be fun for them too. No matter what type of dog you have if they are having fun they will give you 110%. Speed is a bi-product of having fun.

Many people just entering the sport want to see results too fast and when they don't see them they get discouraged and quit.

Much of the things you were taught in obedience training you don't use when training a flyball dog. Flyball training is not obedience training and some things taught in obedience training have no place in flyball training.

Flyball is an intensely physical sport and an overweight out of shape dog will get hurt. Before you start Flyball training with your dog make sure they are physically fit. If they are overweight, put them on a diet. If they are couch potatoes, get them off the couch. Conditioning should be something that you work on with your dog year round.

Foundations to Teach your Dog at Home

(Puppies can and should be taught these foundations. They are too young to do jumps until around 1 years old.)

1. **Establish a good motivator.** A tug or Frisbee is the preferred motivator, but whatever you pick you should stay with. Play with your dog daily with it and make it a fun game for him. Much of this is teaching the dog that it is fun to play with you and the motivator. This will help the dog's focus and keep him on task. If the dog is focused on you and the motivator he will be less likely to get in trouble.

When starting with a new motivator, a good game to play is the **keep away game**. You can start this game being excited about the motivator. Hold the motivator high enough so the dog can't get it or run around with it because the dog will almost always want what they can't have. Show your dog how much fun the motivator is. If you are starting with a puppy you may have to start having him follow your hand or food and slowly work toward transitioning to the motivator. Tugging is a natural behavior for most dogs so this should not be a problem.

Sometimes the dog may not want to play and this is okay. If this is the case put your motivator up and don't play. Your dog must want to play rather than being aggravated to play. Only play with the dog when the dog is giving 110%. At the first sign of fatigue or disinterest the play should end.

Keep your motivator out of sight when you are not playing with your dog. As soon as your dog sees the motivator they should react and know that this is playtime.

Keep your play sessions short. I cannot stress this enough. Longer sessions are not better. Keeping your play sessions short insures that the energy level of the dog will be high. Try to always end your play sessions with the dog wanting more.

2. **Increase drive** and coordination, by playing **chase games** with your dog. Run away from them and then change directions and run the other way. Let them catch you and then play with them with your hands or motivator. Let them win by giving them the motivator for a few seconds.

3. **Restrained recalls:** Have someone hold your dog and then start running away from them calling their name. The person holding your dog should release them when you are about 20 feet away. When they catch you, play with them with the motivator. If they miss the motivator turn and run that other way until they catch you. Get excited and make a big deal of it. Let them win by giving them the motivator for a few seconds. In order to prepare your dog for passing, **keep your motivator in your left hand.** Your dog should catch you early on your left side when beginning to play this game. If the dog comes around on the right they were probably released too late or you are too far away from them when they were released.

4. **Ball work:** Now that your dog loves their motivator it's time for them to start loving a ball as well. Put your motivator away. Use the ball in place of the motivator. If your dog doesn't like balls you will have to build love of the ball. Repeat #1 to get the ball to be a motivator as well. Roll the ball away from you and have them go after it. When they are bringing the ball back to you, run away and make sure they continue to hold it. When they catch you, play tug with the ball in their mouth. Do not move on to the next game until your dog is driving back to you with the ball. The dog is solid when you cannot pull the ball out of their mouth.

5. **Ball to motivator transition:** You should now have a dog that loves their motivator and ball. Continue to play as before but when the dog catches you, instead of tugging with the ball in the dog's mouth, use your motivator as a reward. When running away from them don't show them the motivator too soon. Hide it under your arm until they catch you. You should not move on to the next game until your dog is consistently bringing the ball back to you and taking the motivator as a reward.

Once this is solid, you will want to increase the distance of the ball. Start by holding your dog like you would if you were starting them during a race and then throw the ball away from you and have your dog go after it. Wait a second or two until the ball stops rolling before sending them. When they are bringing the ball back to you, run away and when they catch you play with

them with the motivator. Make a big deal of it. Get excited. This is one of the most important games to play with your dog because this game will build drive back to you with a ball.

6. Determine Natural Turn: Over several sessions, throw a ball and send the dog and take note of which way the dog turns. It is good to be in an open area so that the dog has nothing on either side of them to hinder or force their turn one way or the other.