Review:

Course Analysis for Agility Handlers

A book by Stuart Mah

By Angelica Steinker

You don't truly have a choice about reading Mah's new book. Some of us are new to agility, some of us have been addicted for many years, and those that are addicted have telltale signs of severe agility dependence. Either way, Mah's book is a must-read.

Mah's book is well organized, taking the reader from fundamentals of common jump patterns to common challenges. Topics are clearly explained in a way that would benefit both a student learning agility and an instructor (in terms of how the instructor explains course fundamentals).

Next, Mah dives into handling maneuvers by explaining the rear cross, the front cross, the blind cross, the counter-rotation, and the reverse flow pivot. He describes each move and provides visual diagrams showing both the path of the dog and of the handler. Mah takes the time to demonstrate to readers what can go wrong with these handling moves if they are performed late or out of position. And he discusses the V-set, lead-out advantage, and a hierarchy of cues. Clear descriptions and diagrams make the complex information presented an easy read.

Mah provides the reader with an entire chapter on directional cues. Both *Go On* and *Get Out* are clearly described and examples of where they would be used are given. Another chapter explains the concept of leads. A dog traveling at the canter will be either on the left or on the right lead. Generally, a dog turning left will be on the left lead and a dog turning right will be on the right lead. This idea is important to course analysis because your dog's lead leg can determine the need for a handling move. A dog that is on the left lead when the right lead is needed will require handler communication to change leads.

Another chapter is dedicated to concepts of course analysis. Mah explains how to study

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the course beforehand and how to look at the course from the dog's perspective. He also recommends drawing the handler's path ahead of time and thinking of the course as segments that form a whole, rather than one long chain of obstacles. Finally, he explains how to practice handling the course in the walk-through.
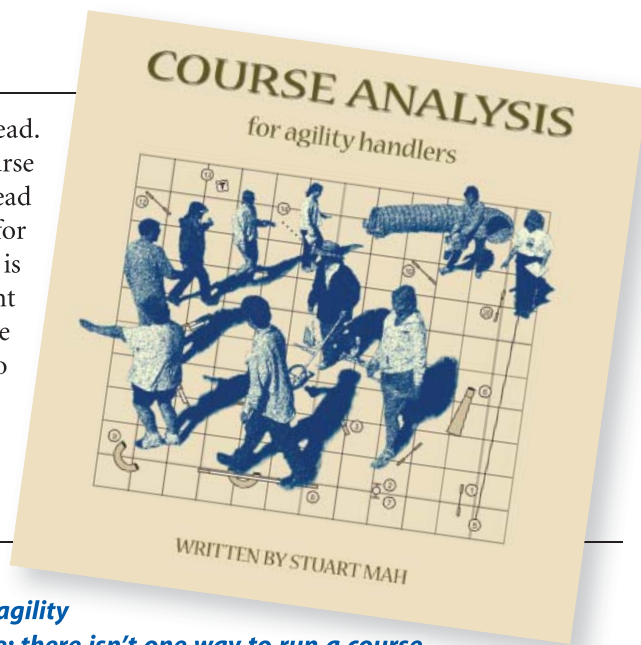
After giving readers an idea of how to go about looking at courses they are going to run, Mah provides a chapter of actual sequences to analyze. He evaluates and illustrates different ways of handling each sequence and goes over the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The final chapter focuses on a challenging Standard course. First, Mah guides the reader through each section of the course, exploring alternatives and encouraging the reader to find a solution that will be effective. The reader is then encouraged to put it all together: segments are combined, options are discussed, and a successful handling strategy is presented. Mah concludes with an adage that all experienced agility competitors know to be true: there isn't one way to run a course. It all depends on the speed of the dog, the speed of the handler, the competitive edge that each choice provides the team, and the risk associated with each handling option.

I think this truth is what captures us and shapes our addiction to this sport: It all depends. The options are always there; there isn't just one right answer. Stuart Mah's book simplifies the complex, yet allows readers to experience their own journey.

Course Analysis for Dog Agility as well as *Fundamentals of Course Design for Dog Agility,* the first book in Mah's series, are available from www.cleanrun.com.

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