

## Ensuring Safe Racing Practices and Dog Readiness

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Dear Members,

As part of our ongoing commitment to maintaining the highest standards of safety and sportsmanship in Flyball, we would like to remind all participants of the importance of racing responsibly and adhering to the **Australian Flyball Association (AFA) Rules, and Policies**, particularly **Rule 4.5: Dog Health, Fitness, and Capability** and **Rule 6.23: Signal Cards**.

### Racing Dogs Before They Are Ready

Racing a dog that is not adequately prepared can result in stress, injury, or negative associations that can hinder future performance. Rule 4.5 mandates that all dogs must be in good health, fit for the demands of Flyball, and fully capable of participating safely. Handlers are responsible for ensuring their dogs are physically and mentally ready before competing, this includes handlers being responsible for their own safety and of participants and officials in the ring.

Pushing an unprepared dog into racing can compromise not only the dog's well-being but also the safety of the team and other competitors, and officials. This can lead to incidents that are preventable with proper preparation and consideration.

### Running non comp

In cases where a dog is unable to race due to injury, safety concerns, or other limitations, it is important to prioritise the dog's well-being by withdrawing them from the race meeting. If a team is unable to field the required four dogs for a race, they may continue to participate, but they will be classified as non-competitive for that heat or event. This is not frowned upon—ensuring the safety and health of dogs is the highest priority in flyball. While we all hope that our dogs will perform to their potential, the reality is that sometimes things don't work out on the day, and that's okay. The Australian Flyball Association encourages teams to make these decisions responsibly, knowing that safeguarding the welfare of our canine athletes is a shared value in our community.

### Safe Racing Practices

Rule 6.23 outlines the use of Signal Cards, which, amongst other things, are issued in response to unsafe behaviour, including situations where a dog's readiness is questionable. To support safe practices:

- **Yellow Cards** are issued as a warning.
- **Red Cards** signify more serious or repeated breaches of safety protocols.
- **Black Cards** signifying a much more serious or repeated breach.

In addition, any steward has the ability and the responsibility to raise their flag if they observe a safety issue or infringement of the rules during a race. For example, a box or line steward may notice a potential hazard in the runback area and signal to bring it to the judge's attention. This ensures that safety concerns are addressed promptly, minimising risks to both dogs and handlers. The collaborative vigilance of all officials contributes to a safer and smoother competition environment.

The **Dog Incident Subcommittee** will now monitor all Signal Cards issued at race meetings. Repeated incidents will be reviewed, and feedback will be provided to judges, AFA representatives, club co-ordinators and handlers. This aims to identify patterns and promote corrective actions to prevent recurrence.

### **Strategies to Minimise Incidents**

To ensure all dogs and teams race safely, consider the following strategies:

1. **Progressive Training:** Gradually expose dogs to the demands of racing. Ensure they have mastered the basics before competing.
2. **Health Assessments:** Regularly check your dog's health and fitness with your veterinarian, particularly before competitions.
3. **Pre-Race Evaluations:** Assess your dog's readiness on race day, considering factors such as stress levels, energy, and focus.
4. **Education Sessions:** Attend or organize workshops to improve handling and preparation techniques.
5. **Team Support:** Collaborate with teammates to identify and address potential concerns early.
6. **Post-Race Reviews:** After races, review performance and incidents with your team to identify areas for improvement.

### **Your Role in Flyball Safety**

We encourage all members to actively engage in promoting a culture of safety and responsibility. If you observe unsafe practices or have concerns about a dog's readiness, approach the handler with empathy or notify an official discreetly. The AFA Official will consider the matter and may request you to complete a witness statement.

By working together, we can ensure that Flyball remains a safe, enjoyable, and competitive sport for all participants. Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to the well-being of our canine athletes.

### **Application of interference rule**

The **interference rule** in Flyball ensures that all teams compete fairly and without undue disruption from opposing teams. Interference occurs when a dog, handler, or team action obstructs another team's ability to complete their race safely and effectively. Examples can include a dog crossing into the opposing team's racing lane, physical contact between dogs, or actions that distract a competing dog. The interference rule applies from the commencement of the warm up period until the race is concluded. If interference is observed, the race may be stopped, and the offending team may forfeit that heat. Judges are responsible for identifying and ruling on interference, guided by the **Australian Flyball Association (AFA) Rules and Policies**.

This rule protects the welfare of the dogs, ensures a level playing field, and maintains the integrity of the competition. Teams are encouraged to train their dogs to remain focused and stay within their lane to avoid incidents of interference.

## Protests

Teams in Flyball have the right to question or protest a judge's decision if they believe an error has been made or if a ruling contravenes the **Australian Flyball Association (AFA) Rules and Policies**. Protests must be lodged respectfully and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the AFA Rules. Typically, a protest can occur during or immediately following the incident in question, allowing it to be addressed in real-time. Protests should be made prior to the commencement of the next heat, failing this, the protest needs to be made in writing to the AFA Secretary. Refer **Rule 5.12**. The protesting team, via the Team Captain, must approach the Judge promptly and provide a clear explanation of their concern. It is essential that protests are raised in good faith, supported by evidence or witness accounts, and pertain to matters directly impacting the race outcome or safety. The Judge will review the protest, consult relevant rules, and may confer with other officials or participants before rendering a decision. The Team Captain can escalate the protest to the AFA representative if they consider it appropriate. This process ensures fairness while maintaining the integrity and flow of competition.

Should you have any questions or require support, please do not hesitate to contact the AFA committee.

David Strong  
Secretary  
on behalf of the Committee of the  
Australian Flyball Association Inc.

