

# COONHOUND ADVISOR

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Happy New Year! I hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday season. As I'm writing this, it's late November and I'm still feeling the effects of Thanksgiving. I've always loved this time of year and planning for Christmas and getting things for my daughters has just intensified that feeling. It sure puts things in perspective to see the joy they get from the little things. It's funny how a person's perspective can change over the years as they grow and their outlook changes. My hope is that everyone is feeling blessed, refreshed, and recharged for 2024.

If you haven't yet jumped on the band wagon and started listening to the UKC Hunting Ops Podcast, you have missed some good ones lately. Episode 77 that dropped on November 15th was a preview of the 2024 Coonhound Competition year where Allen and I discussed locations for major events in 2024, as well as announcing the Bench Show Judges for the major shows this year. While this publication remains pertinent for giving folks recognition and getting information to the masses, the ability the podcast platform gives us in spreading information in real time is a game changer. Hopefully you check it out if you haven't.

Having said that, Allen and I recently did a whole segment where we talked about the ins and outs of the off game rules in nite hunts. I scoured through 30+ years of Advisor Columns to find some unique situations and scenarios that people may not have known about. I'm going to share some of the more interesting ones I found with you today. Let's start out with a column from back in March of 2016 that was written by Allen and slightly modified by me to match some rule updates and wording.

## **Dog Catches Possum but Never Opened**

**Q:** The other night during a UKC nite hunt one of the dogs came back to the cast members carrying a possum in its mouth. It was obvious that the dog had caught and killed it. The dog in question that brought the possum back was not declared struck. Actually, none of the dogs in the cast had opened yet. This was a Registered cast, but (I) would like to know how to score in both Registered and Champion casts for future reference.

**A:** In Registered casts dogs are minused for running, treeing or molesting off game. In this case the dog obviously "caught" the possum. By UKC's definition "caught" falls in with "molesting". In accordance with Rule 4(k), as it applies to the Registered Division, this would result in minus strike points for those dog(s) involved. However, in this situation the dog was not declared struck, therefore, the dog has no strike points to minus. And there are no provisions to award strike points to a dog that has not opened.

The result would not be the same by the rules as they apply to the Champion Division. The penalty provided under Champion rules calls for dog(s) to be scratched for running, treeing, or molesting off game during hunting time including any time out periods prior to the expiration of the hunt time. Using the same scenario described above would result in the dog(s) involved to be scratched from the hunt because they have met the requirement of "molesting" (caught). The fact that the dog(s) had not opened, barked, and wasn't declared struck is irrelevant. I guess it's a good example of how a dog can "molest" off game without actually opening. By rule, a registered dog gets by without penalty but not so for Nite Champions or Grand Nite Champions.

Let's now move on to a column from the July 2015 issue of Coonhound Bloodlines that was also written by Allen.

## **Nite Champion Not Opened or Treeing with Possum in Tree**

**Q:** In a four dog Champion cast, Dogs A, B and C are declared struck and treed. Dog D has not opened. After the three is up we go in and find all four dogs at the tree. Dog D is seen raring up on the tree and smelling but does not bark and has not been heard opening any other time. How do you score Dog D?

**A:** Rule 6(F) applies to this situation which states; (dogs are scratched) In Champion Division casts; for running, treeing, or molesting off game (off game must be seen) during hunting time including any time out periods prior to the expiration of hunt time.

We must key in on three verbs in this rule when determining how to score Dog D. 1) running, 2) treeing and 3) molesting. For starters we can eliminate molesting for obvious reasons. The same is true for "running" because we have not heard or seen him involved in such activity. Finally, we can also eliminate "treeing" because raring up and smelling is not considered "treeing" by any standards of treeing. Therefore, no harm, no foul. Dog D is the only dog left in this cast and completes the remainder of the hunt by his lonesome. That's a unique scenario that doesn't happen very often and a good topic for this column.

This next topic covers a rare occurrence but it's something I've personally seen a few times, more so when I lived in southeast Tennessee and certain times of year, we had out feeder buckets to keep coons in a given area. Check out this article Allen wrote for the April 2016 issue of Coonhound Bloodlines.

## **Coon and Off Game in the Same Tree**

Though it doesn't happen very often, it happens on occasion that dogs will tree a coon and off game in the same tree. This poses the question regarding whether the rules call to penalize or reward the dogs when this happens. Although the Nite Hunt Honor Rules make no reference to this situation, UKC does have a policy for ruling on this matter.

Rule 3 says that the points assigned to your dog will be plus if that dog strikes and trees and a coon is seen. Simple enough. However, Rule 4 says that your dog is going to get minus points if off game is seen in that dog's tree. Rule 6 says to scratch Nite Champions and Grand Nites if they tree off game. Which rule prevails in this situation? Whenever coon and off game are seen in the same tree the benefit of the doubt goes to the dog and the points should be plussed.

For the next topic I'm going way back to December of 1993 to an article written by Todd Kellam. It's an interesting perspective on addressing the differences on livestock and off game that becomes important in a Registered cast when determining whether to minus or scratch a hound.

### Off Game vs Livestock

**Q:** In a Registered cast, if dogs bay a hog in the woods wouldn't they be scratched for molesting domestic livestock because pigs are domesticated animals?

**A:** Your question involves one of those situations that rarely happens. Here's how to judge your hog situation. If the hog is in a pen, it's livestock. If it's a wild hog in the woods, it's off game. In either case, a dog competing in the Champion Division would be scratched. In the case of the Registered dog, he gets minus points on a wild hog, scratched on a tame one. Common sense on the part of the Judge should be able to sort it out.

Let's fast forward to another column written by Todd in December of 1997 that inspired some deep thought by both Allen and I, that we discussed on Episode 80 of the UKC Hunting Ops Podcast.

### Off Game in a Previously Scored Tree

**Q:** A cast shines the tree for eight minutes and no coon or off game is seen but a coon could be there. The tree is circled. While walking away from the tree, someone shines back and finds an opossum. How should this situation be scored? Is it different for Registered dogs and Champion dogs?

**A:** If it is a Champion cast, the dog may be scratched for running, treeing, or molesting game, whether the dog is treed or not and whether the time is in or out. If this is a cast of Champions, the dogs are scratched. If they are Registered dogs, the tree remains circled. Let's fast forward to a February 1998 column for some further clarification Todd shared in response to some uncertain feedback on the interpretation.

Let's try this answer another way. In the registered cast, we shine for eight minutes and find no reason to plus or minus the dogs. Since the coon could be there, we circle the tree. While walking away, we look back and see an opossum. Since the opossum was not seen within the eight minutes and the tree has been scored, we can't go back and change the scoring of the tree for the same reason we don't score a coon as plus that is seen after the eight minutes of shining time has expired. We would have scored the dog minus in accordance with Rule 4(k) if the

off game had been found within the eight minutes shining time. We can't minus dogs after the eight minutes if we are not going to plus them after the eight minutes. Follow?

Champion Division casts are scored differently because Rule 6(f) says we must scratch the Champions for running, treeing or molesting off game during hunting time including any time out periods prior to the expiration of hunt time. I hope this clears the air.

On this question that came in recently, after a lot of digging, I was able to find the above scenario spelled out to give an interpretation that was previously set.

### Off Game in a Previously Scored Tree

**Q:** I was recently on a three dog Champion cast. All dogs strike and two of the dogs fall treed, we'll call them Dogs A and B. When we arrive at the closed tree, we find a possum on the first limb and scratch Dogs A and B for treeing off game. We ease back out and in short time, Dog C falls treed back in that general area. When we arrive at Dog C's tree, we find he is on the same tree with the same possum. How would you score Dog C?

**A:** Using the previous precedent that has been set, Dog C in the cast mentioned should be scratched in accordance with Rule 6(f) which we have mentioned in the article numerous times already. The fact that the dog meets the criteria outlined in the rule of running, treeing, or molesting off game takes precedence over Rule 5(h) which tells us that points will be deleted for dogs treeing on a previously scored treed.

If the cast outlined above would have been in reference to a Registered cast, the dog's points would have been deleted in accordance with Rule 5(h). The difference here is based on a minus point violation versus a scratching violation. What previous interpretation of the off game rule tells us is that the only time a dog competing under Champion rules can get away with actively treeing, running, or molesting off game is if the dog comes into a closed tree after the judge arrives and is protected by Rule 5(b) under the Circle points section which reads, No dog to receive minus points for coming into tree after Judge arrives unless a coon is seen and the dogs treeing are awarded plus points.



### ATTENTION!

The following person's Nite Hunt Director and Nite Hunt Judging privileges have been suspended until the date listed.

**Justin Crockett • Senatobia, MS • May 1, 2024**  
**Andrew Ratliff • Winchester, KY • January 1, 2025**  
**Cliff Monroe • Mooresboro, NC • Indefinitely**  
**Chris Simmons • Cramerton, NC • Indefinitely**

Violations to these privileges should be reported to the United Kennel Club.



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