

Field and Feather

The Retrieving Game

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We are off on an adventure. We are heading to Thomasville, Georgia for a five-day retriever training workshop with Mike Lardy. For those of you who do not know about Mike's accomplishments, dogs trained by Mike have won twenty national retriever championships. Seven of the national championships and one Canadian national championship were dogs handled by Mike; his clients handling their own dogs have won one National Championship, nine National Amateur Championships and two Canadian National Amateur Championships.

Mike trained and handled the three-time National Field Champion (3xNFC) Candlewood's Tanks a Lot (Lotty) among other famous Labradors. I have had two opportunities to watch Mike work and learn from his guidance—once several years ago when we took a female to be bred to a Field Champion (FC) in training with Mike, and eight years ago when I attended a beginner workshop.

Even though I attended the workshop with a dog who did not have the trainability or drive needed to be a successful field dog, I still learned so much from watching him, listening to him explain his philosophy and techniques and watching him coach the other participants. In fact, that's where I first met Bob Self Sr.! Bob was participating with his Golden, Jubie.

Needless to say, the experience was very inspiring and Mike helped remove some of the awe and "magic" about retriever training. In fact, it was possible for someone like me to train my own dog to be successful as a hunting dog, hunt test dog and beyond.

So this time I am attending with a young dog out of my Master Hunter, Scarlett. My husband is also attending with his dog, Raven, who is out of my Senior Hunter, Stella (daughter of Scarlett). So it is a family affair for all of us!

Raven has been through all the yard work but is not a polished handling dog yet. He has done some "cold" blinds and is doing simple doubles. My husband is also fairly new to the sport, although he has been watching me for years. It will be an excellent experience for him to be coached by Mike, so he can learn how to improve himself as a handler and Raven as his partner. My dog, Ruby, is ready for collar-conditioning and that will set the stage for the yard work and handling exercises.

The workshop is limited so there are only eight to 10 handlers with their dogs. We get to watch and learn from each dog/handler team and have one-on-one time with Mike. The dogs will be at different levels--from beginners where the dog has been through force-fetch but is just starting out, to dogs that are through the yard work and are transitioning to cold blinds. I am really looking forward to participating this time with dogs that are up to the task! I am sure it will be more instructional and it will certainly be more fun. Of course, being in Southern Georgia in mid-March isn't a bad thing either! It will help with the winter doldrums and give us a little taste of spring.

My next article will be on the workshop and our road trip.

Happy training!

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