

# Agility

## Agility games in New Zealand...

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In New Zealand, as in many Agility organisations overseas, we can participate in three flavours of agility: standard Agility, Jumpers and Games. This article is about the Games classes.

There are four types of Games currently approved for championship events in NZ: Jumpers Pairs, Gamblers, Snooker and Blackjack. They all offer slightly different challenges. In standard Agility and Jumpers, the judge defines the course that everyone must run by laying out numbers from 1-18 (1-25 at the top level). In Games, the handlers largely choose the obstacles and the path they follow, with the degree depending on the game.

Over the years I have enjoyed playing Agility Games with my dogs (with Snooker being my favourite, as I like a real challenge!) and as a judge I find designing Games courses to be enjoyable and challenging as well.

### The benefits of playing Games & having them at Agility events:

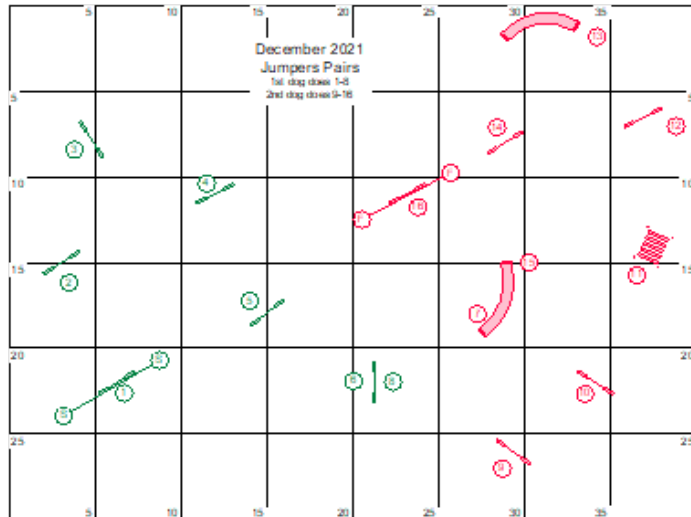
1. Some Games, such as Snooker, require few obstacles and therefore make lighter work for club helpers.
2. Some Games can be easily adapted from an existing course (especially BlackJack.) All you need is to change the start and finish and you have a Black-Jack course.
3. Jumpers pairs adds a more social feel to an agility event. People love doing agility with a partner whether the result be good or bad.
4. Games add some variety to an agility event and have their own graduation system and awards that people can collect so they give people additional reasons to stay in the sport of agility.
5. In most of the Games the handler can choose the obstacles their dog performs best, and avoid the ones they are not so

good at. Whilst the start and finish are defined, in some of the Games handlers can choose courses to suit their own dog and so maximise their result. This gives handlers more confidence.

6. Games (especially Gamblers) are more encouraging for newer dogs and handlers because a mistake does not mean the whole run is lost. In some games, even with one or two errors, you may still be able to gain a qualifying score.
7. Games encourage handlers to train independent contacts and weaves. These are a great advantage in Games, even more so than standard agility, as it means the handler can leave the dog and race to the next part of the course.
8. Games encourage handlers to improve their connection with their dog, as avoiding obstacles is a common requirement in some games, especially the higher levels of Snooker.
9. Even more so than standard agility or jumpers, having a terrific lead-out can be a huge advantage in games as the handler can call the dog to another part of the course (eg to the hardest red jump in Snooker) and so gain an advantage.
10. Going the wrong way in some games isn't a problem of standard agility or jumpers – it just means you collect different points!
11. Games can help make a handler react faster to their dog especially in Snooker. Thinking on your feet has always been an asset for agility handlers!

### Explaining the Games classes:

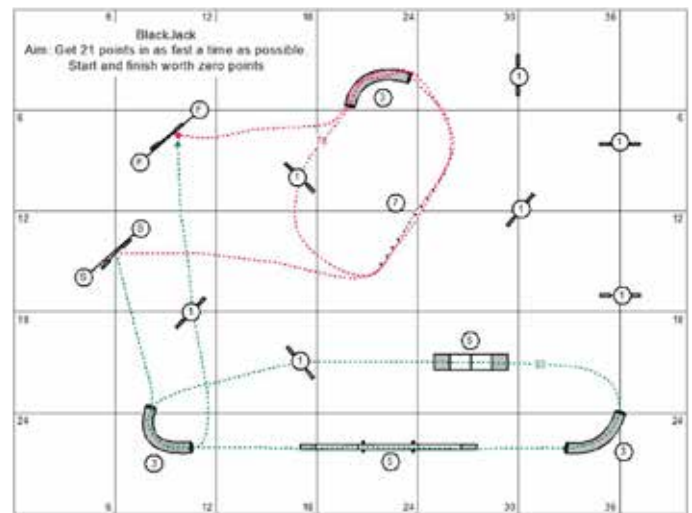
**Jumpers Pairs** is much like a standard Jumpers class, except there are two people and two dogs, and they run half the course each. This means each dog negotiates between 8 to ten obstacles depending on the level. It is a very fast game! The two dogs can be different heights, with tunnels being shared (see diagram one). The total number of faults for both dogs is added together as is the total time taken. This gives a team score.



**Blackjack** is another fast game. The aim is to collect 21 points in as fast a time as possible. The course is determined by the handler, with the judge defining only the start and finish obstacles (which are not worth any points). For many teams this means negotiating as few as seven obstacles. The obstacles are given different points: a 12-pole weave is worth seven points; contact obstacles (A-frame, dogwalk, seesaw, crossover) are worth five points; the tunnels, hoop and long jump are worth three points; and jumps are worth one point. The best tactic is to choose the lowest number of obstacles possible with the least number of corners and the shortest distance. The obstacles a handler chooses may depend on how well their dog can perform them — don't choose jumps if your dog tends to tip the bar off, and don't choose weaves if he or she is slow through the poles. The hard part happens if the dog misses a contact or knocks

a pole: the handler then has to think fast on the spot and decide what they need to do to get 21!

Blackjack Diagram:



The red course is 78m long, and has only five obstacles, but it also has two 12-pole weaves. The green course is much longer, at 93m, and has seven obstacles: two contacts, two jumps and three tunnels. Which would you choose? If your dog is quick over the contacts you might decide to choose the green course, especially if your dog weaves slowly or often makes mistakes in the weave. There are other routes that will give you 21 points. Can you find them? You can choose the best one for you, based on what your dog's strengths are, and avoid the route where you may have weaknesses.

**Gamblers** is a two-part game. For the first 30 seconds, you direct your dog to collect as many points as possible. This is similar to Blackjack, where the handler guides their dog over the obstacles they think will score the most points. For most people this will be 12-15 obstacles.

The second part of Gamblers is a distance gamble. The judge marks a line on the ground which the handler is not allowed to cross. However the dog has to cross the line and do the numbered obstacles without the handler. The difficulty of the gamble depends on the level of the class. It can be up to five obstacles (including weaves or contacts) with the handler seven metres away!

It can be really entertaining to see the wonderful bond between the handlers and dogs as they negotiate the sequence.

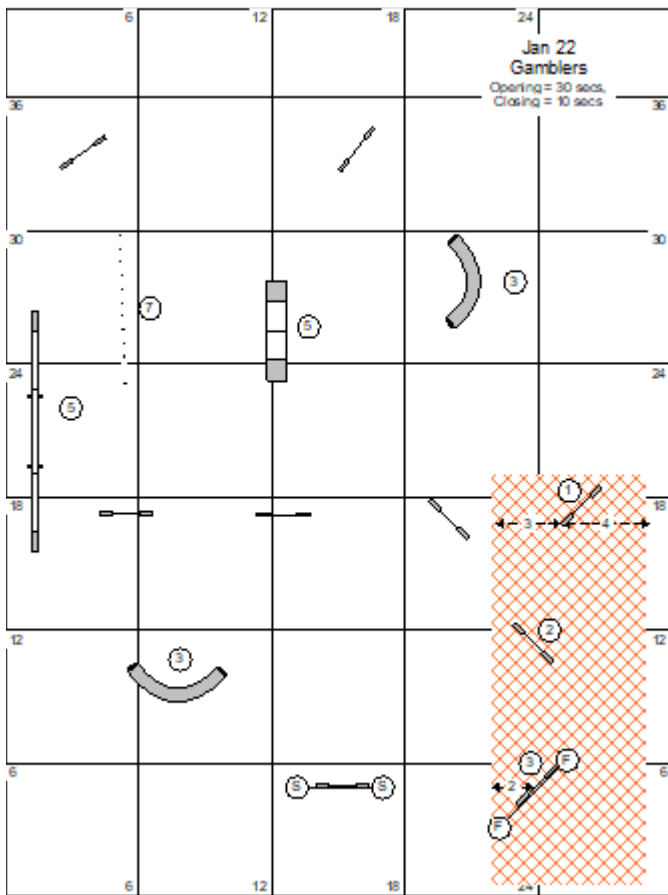
Horns are used to indicate the end of the first part of the game and the end of the second part. Hearing two horns is a bad sign, it means you didn't complete the gamble within the defined time.

As Susan Garrett once said "being a runner that isn't as fast as my dogs, it is important that my dogs have great independent obstacle skills as well as a brilliant understanding of directionals. Both of

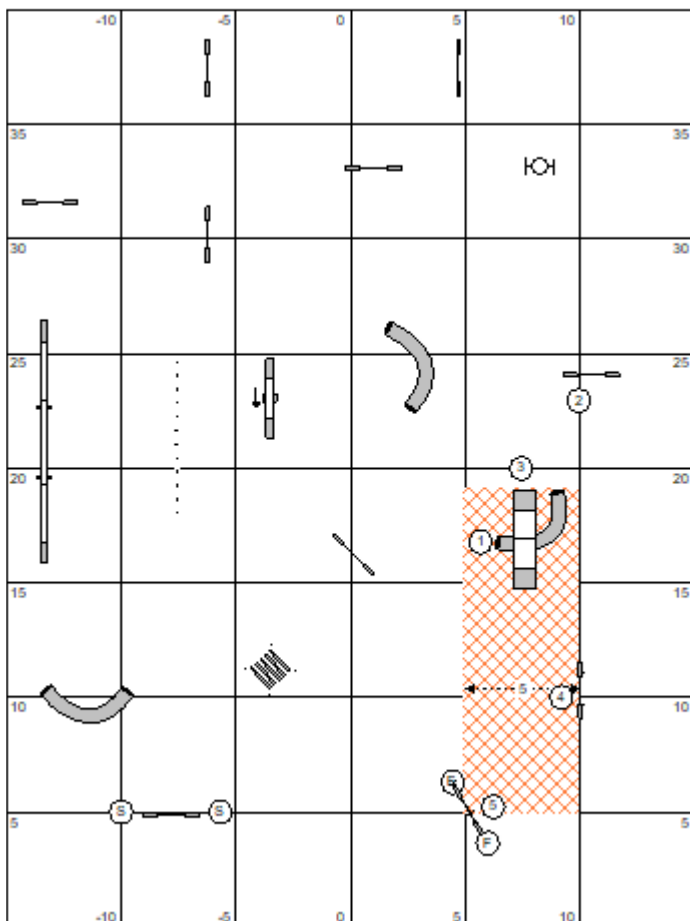


those give your dog the ability to do well at Gamblers.”

Two Gamblers courses. First, a simple gamble.



And second, a Grade A Gamblers

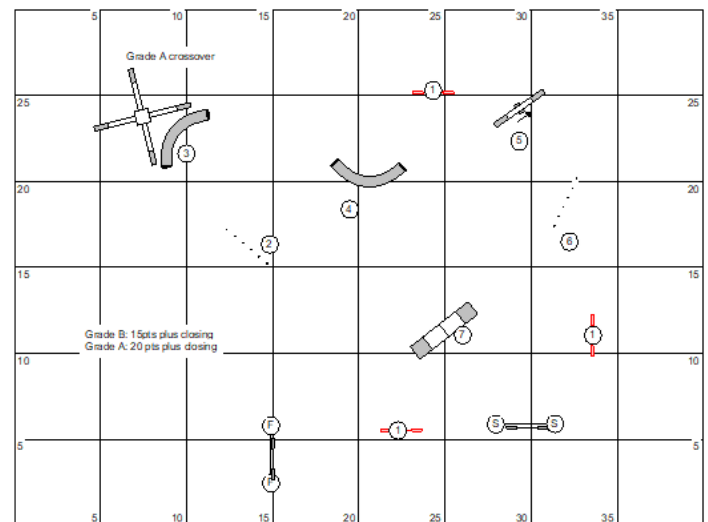


than the other Games. There are fewer jumps in Snooker so it can be a great game for dogs that knock hurdles. Snooker can require handlers to have fast reactions: if your dog knocks the first hurdle it doesn't count and you have to find the second hurdle. If you do you can still qualify, so its worth the fast reaction.

The judge defines the end of the Snooker course 2 to 7, and the handler has choices for the first part of the game. They have to do a jump followed by another piece of equipment then a different jump, and other piece of equipment, then the third jump and other piece of equipment then the closing sequence (2-7).

The real challenge in Snooker for many people is to go for maximum points — 24 in the opening and 27 in the closing. This means they have to do three of the 7 scoring obstacles. The judge usually makes this hard to achieve by making the 7 hard to get to, or a more difficult obstacle like a 12-pole weave, or a jumps sequence.

In the Snooker diagram (Grade B and A), you can see how a really good lead-out could get you to the jump near the seesaw, and be better positioned to get the three 7s!



### Games Awards

**GD Award** For graduating from Grade C, you can be awarded the GD award. This is gained by getting three wins in Grade C Games classes. (with at least one qualifying certificate in each of Gamblers and Snooker), or gained an award or title at Senior agility, or gained 25 qualifying certificates including at least five Snooker and five Gamblers.

**GDX award** To qualify GDX, dogs must graduate out of Championship Grade B Games classes by gaining three wins in Grade B Games classes. They must gain at least one qualifying certificates in each of Gamblers and Snooker.

**GDM Award** This is the highest award currently available in NZ. To qualify GDM dogs must obtain 25 championship qualifying certificates in Grade A Games (including at least five Snooker and five Gamblers).

Games classes are not offered by all clubs, or at all events, but it is well worth the effort. Any club or individual who is interested in adding Games to their agility programme can get in touch with me and I would be happy to help. Email [kp Dewit@xtra.co.nz](mailto:kp Dewit@xtra.co.nz) 🐾

by Karen de Wit

**Snooker** is probably the hardest game, since it is more defined