

WEIGHT PULLS

Judge John Podolak reviews the history of how modern weight pulls came to be.

Did You Know?

Weight pulling on wheels started in 1984.

Photograph of Raider competing at the 2010 AMCA Regionals in Denver, courtesy of Merv Turner.



25 Years and Counting

2009 was the “Silver Anniversary” of modern day weight pulling, yet very little is written about how the sport as we know it today began.

It was my privilege to interview Mark Johnson, one of the judges for the 2010 Alaskan Malamute Club of America National Specialty Working Dog Showcase. Mark is the founding president of the International Weight Pull Association (IWPA) and the author of “A Guide to Pull Your Dog.” I would like to thank Mark for his time and sharing his knowledge and insight on weight pulling. Mark gave the following account on the start of modern day weight pulling:

Prior to 1984, all organized pulling was done under the International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA), which is primarily a sledding organization, not a weight pulling organization.

Weight pulls were an adjunct (non-essential or secondary) event, held after the end of sled races. Most times the weight pulls would not start until late afternoon or early evening, with many weight pulls lasting four to six hours. There had been weight pulls with as many as seventy dogs participating. Sled racers, not weight pullers, determined where and when the pulls would take place. Under ISDRA, all weight pulls were on sleds – no wheeled events were allowed.

In the spring of 1984, weight pull enthusiasts were interested in forming an organization solely for weight pulling. Mark, along with Cindy Adams, Mike Sternberg and Walter Bennett, started the process and formed the IWPA. The original founders were mainly Alaskan malamute owners. The newly formed IWPA drafted weight pull rules for sleds and for wheeled carts. They started a newsletter and

About the Author

John Podolak and his wife Michelle bought their first Alaskan malamute Ivan in 1971 and have owned mals ever since! They competed in their first weight pull in 2003. While Michelle was pulling and earning lots of titles with mal Adak in both IWPA and AMCA events, John was busy working the weight pulls as a cart marshal, timer, score keeper, organizer and eventually a judge.

John served as the weight pull chair for the Gateway Sled Dog Club for five seasons before becoming the club president this year. He is an IWPA judge, and co-chaired the 2010 AMCA National Specialty weight pulls, serving as the chief judge for both events.

A recent appointee to the AMCA Working Dog Committee, John also plans to chair and be the chief judge for the 2011 AMCA National Specialty weight pulls in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A retired Saint Louis Police Lieutenant, John is a member of the Alaskan Malamute Club of Greater St. Louis, Gateway Sled Dog Club, AMCA, IWPA, and the Great Lakes Alaskan Malamute Club.

organized weight pull events. Their first weight pull event was held in the fall of 1984.

I asked Mark about the IWPA logo. Mark knew an artist from western Montana and provided the artist with several dozen photos of weight pulling dogs. The artist selected a photo of an Alaskan malamute from Pennsylvania and designed the logo from the photo. Mark stated that he still has the artist's original pencil drawing.

Later in the summer of 1984, the Alaskan Malamute Club of America (AMCA) adopted a set of weight pull rules. The AMCA rules

were very similar but not identical to the IWPA rules. Mark Johnson, Cindy Adams and Mike Sternberg earned eight of the first eleven Working Weight Pull Dog Excellent (WWPDX) titles awarded by AMCA.

AMCA Working Dog Committee co-chair Helen Schultz also provided some interesting weight pull history information. Following are excerpts from the weight pull rules (only sleds – no wheeled carts, at that time) of the Alaskan Malamute Club of Wisconsin, dated November 1971:

- open to any dog of the Arctic breeds
 - any harness commonly used in Alaska or Canada
 - (2) Classes:
 - a) 65#s and over, and
 - b) under 65#s
 - The distance pulled is ten feet in ninety seconds
- There were only eighteen rules, which covered about two-thirds of a sheet of paper.

Over the years, other clubs interested in weight pulling developed their own set of weight pull rules – most are similar to AMCA or IWPA rules. In addition to pulling on snow and wheeled carts, some organizations have added a third venue for pulling – on rails.

In September 2008, ISDRA amended their rules, which now include rules for wheeled cart weight pulls.

Weight Pull Organizations*



ISDRA

The International Sled Dog Racing Association pioneered weight pulling, holding all the pulls until 1984. Visit www.isdra.org.



IWPA

Formed in 1984 by weight pull enthusiasts, the International Weight Pull Association became the first organization to hold weight pulls on wheels as well as on sleds. Visit www.iwpa.net.



AMCA

The Alaskan Malamute Club of America drafted rules for weight pulling competitions on sleds or wheels in 1984. Visit www.alaskanmalamute.org.

* Not a complete list of all weight pull organizations

NEW AMCA Weight Pull Rules

Effective Immediately

Speaking of rule changes, the Working Dog Committee has revised the rules for weight pulling. We thank those of you who sent us comments and constructive suggestions that led to these improvements to our rules.

Changes to the weight pull rules are marked as follows: Deletions are marked by ~~strikeout~~, while additions are marked by underlining. Questions regarding the new rules may be directed to the Working Dog Committee co-chairs, Helen Schultz (wdc@AlaskanMalamute.org) and Leesa Thomas (Leesa@gotoadventure.com). The new rules are on AMCA's website, and they are also available for download in PDF format. Or you may request a copy from the co-chairs.

Outdoor and Indoor Weight Pull Rules

I. General

- A. The pulling area must be at least 10 feet wide and 20 feet long with an open end toward which the pull is made. If there is any perceptible slope to the chute, the direction of the pull shall be toward the higher end. There shall be a physical barrier separating the crowd from the pulling area.
- a. The outdoor area shall be as level and hard packed as conditions permit.
 - b. Indoors, the area shall be of dirt, sod, carpet or runner.
 - c. The dog does not need to achieve traction on the same surface as that on which the vehicle rides.
 - d. The pulling vehicle must achieve traction on the same surface for the entire 16 feet.

REASON FOR CHANGE

- I. General
- A.
- d. [New] Requested by various people due to unnecessary difficulty added when changing surfaces during the middle of a pull. Seen at a few pulls, where cart starts on concrete and has to be pulled onto carpet halfway through.

- B. Three officials will supervise the event. One will be designated Chief Judge. A majority ruling will be the deciding factor.
- C. All entrants are responsible for the conduct of their dogs and handlers before, during and after the contest. Unsportsmanlike conduct in the weight pull area or on the weight pull course will result in disqualification.
- D. All dogs shall be kept in a designated holding area behind the starting line while they are waiting to pull. No dog shall be allowed in the general area ahead of the starting line except for the dog that is pulling.
- E. All dogs must be under physical control, on lead, except when hooked to the weight pull vehicle.
- F. No female in season may be used in a weight pull or brought into the weight pull area. Other unentered dogs and family pets are also excluded.
- G. No pregnant females shall be allowed to compete in an AMCA weight pull.
- H. No dogs shall be brought from a kennel where Parvo, Brucellosis, Hepatitis, Distemper, Leptospirosis or any other contagious canine disease exists, nor shall equipment be brought from said kennel. In addition, all dogs brought to the event shall be accompanied by proof of Rabies vaccination and shall be vaccinated for canine infectious diseases, as advised by their veterinarian.
- I. ~~All persons or dogs capable of baiting the dog that is pulling must be no further forward among the spectators than the starting line. No "double handling" shall be allowed. "Double handling" is defined as, "The act of someone, other than the dog's handler, deliberately getting the dog's attention in the chute in order to facilitate the dog's pulling."~~ Any violation of this rule will result in the disqualification of the involved dog.
- J. No handling or bait is to be allowed once a dog enters the pull area (as defined in section I.A.) and is hooked to the load. Handling is to consist of anyone touching the dog, his harness, the pulling vehicle or any part of the equipment or load except chute officials who hook up the dog, hold the dog if requested by the handler, stop the load after completion of the pull, or aid in the event of a tangle. A handler may touch his dog to reset the dog in the event of a tangle. Baiting consists of the use of anything to influence the dog other than hand signals or voice commands. Dogs may be rewarded once they have left the pull area and have returned to their crate or vehicle.
- K. During the pull, the use of whips, noisemakers, leashes, muzzles or any form of baiting is prohibited.
- L. This event is open to any Alaskan malamute that is at least one year old. Weight pulls held at an AKC event might be limited to Alaskan malamutes or open to ~~all~~ other breeds. Events not sanctioned by AKC may be open to ~~all~~ other breeds.
- M. Entries close no less than ½ hour before the pull starts.
- N. No medication to stimulate the dog's pulling ability shall be used.
- O. The sponsoring club or judge may reject any entry for due cause.
- P. Cruel and inhumane treatment of a dog is strictly prohibited and will be cause for disqualification.
- Q. The Chief Judge shall forward a complete copy of the weight pull results to the Working Dog Committee. For weight pull events held in conjunction with the National Specialty and/or the Regional Specialty held in conjunction with the National Specialty, the Chief Judge shall also forward a copy of the complete results to the AMCA Archivist. In addition to the complete pull results, the report shall include the type of pulling vehicle, type of surface, whether held indoors or outdoors, weather conditions and temperature if outdoors, type of tires, and air pressure of tires if pneumatic.

I.[Clarified] Received several complaints about certain pull judges interpreting this rule too strictly and disqualifying dogs if a neighbor or anyone who had met the dog was at or near the end to take photos, etc. Added definition of "double handling" to clarify the rule.

J.[Clarified] A strict interpretation of this rule disallows anyone from holding the dog or the cart until the handler gets across the line, even if the handler requests that it be done. Standard practice has always been to allow the person who hooks up the dog to also hold the dog or the cart until the handler gives the ok or calls the dog. Many handlers were encouraged to allow someone to hold the dog to prevent it from following the handler before the handler could cross the line. This clarification makes that practice legal.

L. [Modified] We changed "all" to "other" to allow for limited-breed pulls vs. all-breed pulls. Now, pulls may be held for malamute only, all breed, or limited breed.

Q. [New] Requested by the WDX Certification Chair and the AMCA Archivist. Without this requirement, there was no guarantee that the results would be sent to the Committee. Without the complete results, no WWPD X legs earned at that pull would be accepted. The rules require complete results be submitted with WWPD X title applications. By sending them to the WDX Certification Chair, it guarantees that all participants earning X legs at that pull will get to use them toward an X title. At least once in the past, the NS Weight Pull Chair discarded the results and all those who earned X titles at that NS could not use those legs. X legs are not easy to come by.

<p>II. Weight Pulling Divisions</p> <p>A. There shall be five divisions in the contest.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dogs weighing 60 lbs. or less. b. Dogs weighing 61 lbs. up to and including 80 lbs. c. Dogs weighing 81 lbs. up to and including 100 lbs. d. Dogs weighing 101 lbs. up to and including 120 lbs. e. Dogs weighing 121 lbs. and over. <p>All weights shall be rounded down to the lowest whole pound. Example: A dog weighing 80-3/4 lbs. would be recorded as 80 lbs. The 101-120 lbs. class and the 121 lbs. and over class may be combined, but each dog's weight must be recorded on the final report.</p> <p>B. The dog that wins its weight class shall not be allowed to compete in the next weight class. However, the winning dog shall be allowed to continue pulling in order to compete for top percentage pulled or top weight pulled. These pulls shall be at the established increment or more.</p>	<p>No changes.</p>
<p>III. Equipment</p> <p>A. The dog must be fitted with an adequate freighting or weight pull harness. The judge will determine whether or not the harness is safe for the dog. Dogs should wear a buckle or martingale-type collar during competition. Prong/pinch collars or electric shock collars are not permitted. If any part of the harness or other equipment breaks, the contestant will have another chance at the same increment after repairs are made.</p> <p>B. Carrying capacity of weight pull vehicles.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sleds should be capable of safely carrying a load of 2,700 lbs. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Sleds should have runners 2 to 4 inches wide and 7 to 10 feet long, curving at the front end in a reasonable manner for a sled. ii. Report of the pull should indicate whether the runners were shod with steel or plastic. b. A wheeled vehicle must be capable of safely carrying a load of 3,000 lbs. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Wheeled vehicles can be three or four wheel design, with wheels in a fixed position so they track in a straight line. ii. Report of the pull should indicate whether the vehicle was equipped with solid or pneumatic tires. iii. The use of a car as the pulling vehicle will result in invalidation of the contest. <p>C. Tugline</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shall not exceed 6 feet in length when a sled is used, with a minimum of 3 feet. b. Shall not exceed 16 feet in length for a wheeled vehicle, with a minimum of 6 feet. c. No shockline is to be used as part of the tugline in weight pulling events. <p>D. An adequate supply of pre-weighed, inert material suitable for safe, stable stacking shall be provided.</p> <p>E. Provision should be made for attachment of a 16-foot rope to the rear of the pulling vehicle for stopping the pulling vehicle at the end of the pull and preventing injury to the pulling dog. The rope is then used to pull back the vehicle to the starting point and can serve as an accurate measure of distance traveled by the vehicle.</p>	<p>No changes.</p>
<p>IV. The Contest</p> <p>A. All dogs shall be weighed prior to each AMCA weight pull event (multiple or consecutive day pulls by the same organization require only one weigh-in unless the dog is within 2 pounds of a class division). All recorded dog weights shall be rounded to the lowest whole pound. Dogs should be weighed with nothing on except a</p>	<p>IV. The Contest</p>

standard collar.

- B. The starting weight in each division shall be at least 300 lbs. including the pulling vehicle. There shall be approximately 100 lb. increments. This increment can be reduced or raised if the majority of handlers agree.
- C. During each pulling effort, the handler must be in one of two positions.
 - a. No further forward than the front of the pulling vehicle when the dog is driven from the rear.
 - b. No closer than the ~~dog's finishing handler's~~ line if the dog is being called. The handler's line will be located 10 feet past the end of the tugline, but in no event closer than the pulling vehicle's finishing line. As the dog approaches, the handler must back up, remaining in front of the dog, to avoid touching the dog until the pull is considered complete.
- D. The pulling vehicle's finishing line is measured 16 feet from the front of the vehicle starting line, and the pull is completed when the front of the vehicle reaches this line vehicle is pulled the entire length. During the pulls, the Chief Judge will specify what part of the pulling vehicle will be lined up with the starting line; that same part of the pulling vehicle must then touch the finishing line before the pull is considered complete. For example, most clubs start with the front tires (for carts) centered on the starting line, and the pull is complete when the front tires are centered on the finishing line.
- E. The timer starts the pull 1) when the handler crosses the handler's line and calls his dog or commands him to start, or 2) when the dog begins to move the pulling vehicle. If the handler elects not to have his dog or the pulling vehicle held until he is in position and commands the dog to pull, and the dog begins to pull the vehicle before the handler crosses the handler's line, then the timer shall start the clock. The handler must make every effort to cross the handler's line before the dog starts to pull.
- F. The dog has 60 seconds to pull the weight 16 feet. If the weight is in motion when the time expires, the dog will be allowed to complete the pull without disqualification, providing the weight has been in continuous motion. Unless the weight is pulled the full 16 feet, the dog will not be credited for that pull.
- G. The judges must make sure that the pulling vehicle is properly lined up before each pull and that the runners or wheels are not frozen or wedged.
- H. If a dog becomes entangled in his harness or lines, the judges may declare a re-pull. The pulling vehicle will be returned to its original start position and the clock reset. One re-pull only will be allowed at a particular weight.
- I. Contestants may pass no more than two consecutive turns at a time. They may not request that the load be lightened at any time.
- J. The judges may stop the pull at any time if it appears that the dog may injure itself.
- K. The maximum load, including the vehicle's weight, pulled by each dog the entire distance of 16 feet, together with the time required for the pull, will be recorded and reported. *If two or more dogs pull the same maximum load, then the fastest time determines the winner. [Italicized portion passed by motion at 2008 annual meeting.]*
- L. Weather conditions will be reported and should include the following:
 - a. Temperatures at the start and end of contest.
 - b. Snow conditions, if applicable.
 - c. Rain, sleet or freezing rain, if applicable.
- M. Type of surface on which the pull is made should be recorded.
- N. For any infraction of these rules, the judge will impose a warning or disqualification.
- O. Any person wishing to protest any violation of these rules must do so immediately. The protest may be verbal but must also be followed by a written statement, citing the circumstances and particular rule or rules involved, within 20 minutes of the end of the contest. The individual against whom the protest is lodged shall be entitled to notification and a hearing before a decision is rendered.
- P. The judge's decisions are final.

C.
b. [Clarified] The original rule referred to the "dog's finishing line"; however, that term was never defined. Some clubs defined it as 16' in front of the finish line, but this didn't take into consideration the length of the dog and its harness. If using a 16' tugline, the dog would end up 3' +/- beyond that 16' line. So some clubs defined it as 20'+ in front of the finish line. Other clubs decided that it really meant the cart's finish line, so the handler was allowed to stand at the cart's finish line, possibly inches away from the dog. And still other clubs decided to make a handler's line 2-3' beyond the cart's finish line because that's what IWPA did. The rule was interpreted differently all across the country. So we attempted to reach a compromise and put the line 10' from the end of the tug line. This way, regardless of the length of each individual dog and its harness, or the length of the tugline, the distance would be the same regardless of where you pulled. The handler starts out 6-7' in front of their dog, depending on its size and the length of its harness, and is required to back up as the dog approaches to stay in front of the dog. The handler is also restricted from touching the dog until the pull is complete.

D. [Clarified] Clarified that the pulling vehicle's finishing line is measured 16' from the start line. Also clarified that the Chief Judge decides which part of the vehicle is being used to measure the distance, and that part of the vehicle must touch/cross the finish line for the pull to be complete. As written, the rule required the use of the "front" of the vehicle; however, most people use the tires (for carts) instead.

E. [Clarified] The previous rule specified that the timer starts the clock when the handler calls or commands his dog to pull; however, some handlers don't give their dogs any commands. They simply turn around and their dog knows to start pulling. Other handlers don't want their dogs held and the dogs start pulling almost as soon as the handler leaves them. If the timer doesn't start the clock until the handler crosses the line, it gives an unfair time advantage to that dog.