

IPO, Mondio or French Ring? The challenges of cross-over

Historically, Mondio Ring Sport is described to have evolved as a combination of French Ring Sport, Belgian Ring Sport, Dutch KNPV, and the German Schutzhund discipline. It is therefore not surprising that it attracts handlers and trainers of many different dog sports. As an active competitor in IPO, French Ring and Mondio Ring Sport, I have always questioned: What are the most significant challenges of each discipline? Is one really harder than the other?

Plain and simple, each sport has its specific difficulty. The precision and work ethic required for IPO, the clarity, mental stability and intelligence needed for Mondio Ring and the dog's tenacity to succeed in French Ring are among the most challenging. I do believe that we can learn from aspects of each discipline in order to improve our training and success in Mondio Ring Sport. For example, although focus based obedience is not required for either of the ring sports, it may allow for better control and a strong connection between the dog and its handler. Team work is an essential foundation for any discipline, no matter which direction we take.

IPO is associated with a high level of obedience in all three phases of the sport (tracking, obedience, protection). It requires precision and a positive working attitude from the dog, which is expected to remain attentive and spirited throughout the exercise routines. A dog can be successfully pattern trained for IPO, as the order of exercises never changes. The IPO "blind search" is a specific example of "pattern training", as it requires the dog to investigate 6 blinds by diagonally crossing the field from one to another. This routine is considered an obedience exercise and the dog is rated according to the accuracy, tightness and speed of the search as well as the power and consistency while guarding the decoy. Although not required, I personally prefer seeing a strong, consistent alert during the "bark and hold" phase of the ring sport search, as well. The search exercise of Mondio Ring may pose a significant challenge for the "cross trained dog", as it now has to deviate from the imprinted "pattern training" of both IPO and French Ring. For the first 4 ½ years of his life, my personal dog was imprinted to search blinds diagonally across the field for IPO and perform a perimeter search for French Ring. Technically, both of these routines were mere obedience exercises and occasionally performed with the decoy in direct sight, while the dog was still expected to run a "pattern". I therefore had to revert to the concept of a true search (scent based) of Mondio Ring by introducing my dog to building searches.



FIG 2: Similar behavior during IPO vs. Mondio Ring guarding (photo on right by Anna Kasho)

Technique and tenacity appear to be two of the most important traits of the successful French Ring dog. The protection phase of French Ring is known for strong stick work and a high athletic ability of the decoy who attempts to evade or counter the dog's entry to bite. Strong drive, excellent biting technique and targeting are therefore needed for the dog to overcome these challenges. Some trainers would argue that the highest pressure phase for the French Ring dog occurs while on the bite, while the Mondio Ring dog is most challenged just prior biting, based on the environmental challenges and the need to problem solve.



FIG 3: Pressure phases during IPO and Mondio Ring Sport (Philouska Photography – 2012 Mondio Ring World Championships: right)

The routine of French Ring is more complex than IPO and may require the highest level of agility. The maximum length of the long jump is set at 4.5 meters for level 3 (4 meters for Mondio Ring 3) and the palisade consists of a straight 2.3 meter wall (without a ramp) that requires a return jump. The physical demand on the dog therefore seems highest under these conditions.

Although not immediately apparent, the scent discrimination exercise of Mondio Ring may also pose a challenge for the "cross trained dog". This exercise requires the dog to identify the handler's scent on one of multiple small wooden dowels. However, many IPO trainers will use a dowel to imprint a calm hold and fast retrieve. If the basis of this imprinting involves a form of "forced retrieve", the dog's desire to quickly retrieve any one of the offered dowels may be stronger than his desire to discriminate scent on the object.

All three sports include a "send out" exercise, but the level of difficulty increases from IPO to French Ring to Mondio Ring. The direction of the "send out" is always known to the IPO handler while the French Ring "send out" can occur into either direction along the length of the field. The "send out" is commonly taught by placing a target or reward at the end of the field for IPO or French Ring dogs during training. However, Mondio Ring sport incorporates a true "directed send out" towards any of the field boundaries and therefore requires significant practice and retraining for the "cross trained dog".

Only minor conceptual differences exist between the "object guard" of French and Mondio Ring, although these can still pose a challenge to cross-trained dogs. First and foremost, the type of object the dog is expected to guard will vary for Mondio Ring dogs, while a basket is always used during French Ring trials. Therefore, if the

French Ring dog is not accustomed to maintaining contact to variably shaped objects, cannot secure a moving object or counter distractions (accessories), he may be less effective in the prevention of the decoys' attempts to steal the article. On the contrary, it has been my experience that the spectrum of techniques used by French Ring decoys to distract or evade the dog's bite is greatest in the latter discipline.



FIG 5: French Ring object guard

A "stopped attack" is required for both level 3 Mondio and French Ring dogs. The former requires the dog to be called back within 3 meters, the latter within 2 meters of reaching the decoy, in order to obtain full points. Since the 'stopped attack' for Mondio Ring is performed during a flee of the decoy rather than during a frontal attack as seen in French Ring, both exercises have to be trained independently.

This being said, if I had to choose the most difficult exercise of Mondio Ring sport, especially for IPO and French Ring trained dogs, it would be the defense of handler. Although a similar routine (in name) exists in French Ring, the concepts of the exercise are very distinct. In French Ring, a single decoy is present on the field, will greet the dog and handler and subsequently walk in the opposite direction before turning back to approach the team from the rear to pursue a single handed "hit" of the handler. The decoy's goal is to evade the bite or draw the dog away from the handler. However, the pattern of the exercise is highly predictable and conceptually less difficult to train than the related Mondio Ring problem set. The true challenge of the latter exercise lies in the necessity for the dog to switch over focus between two or more attending decoys, amidst a plethora of environmental distractions. Both dog and handler have to problem solve throughout the exercise and make correct decisions based on the foundation of their training. All in all, the level of distraction and environmental challenges imposed on the dog necessitate a high level of training, control, adaptability and basic intelligence of the dog in order to adequately problem solve the ever changing test scenarios on the trial field.



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FIG 6: Mondio Ring "defense of handler"

I would like to clarify that I am merely presenting a personal perspective. I have been fortunate to work with several great groups of trainers and handlers over the years that have taught me all that I practice today. My current competition dog, a five year old Belgian Malinois, is titled at level 3 in IPO, Schutzhund, French Ring and Mondio Ring and still actively competes at the national level in all sports concurrently. Our latest endeavors have involved a plunge into the Mondio Ring world, with a recent trip to France for the 2012 Mondio Ring World Championships.

Hope to see you all on the trial field again soon.

Yours in the sport,
Daniela Bedenice