



PHOTO: ADDIE JARAMILLO

Freshman Becky Abner poses with her black lab, Quincy. She used to train Quincy as a competitive dock dog.

By Jayme Hoy

SPORTS EDITOR

When people think of athletes, they usually think of basketball players, runners, swimmers, skiers, skateboarders... and dock dog handlers?

Dock dogs, dogs that run off of a dock and try to jump as far out into the water as they can, compete in many events nationwide every year.

Freshman Becky Abner was recently named the National Junior Handler of the Year for 2005 for dock dogs.

Out of 4000 handlers nation-

wide, Abner was chosen from the 100 junior handlers as the best. The judging was based on rankings from competitions.

She competes with her year-old yellow lab, Miss Matches. She also has a two-year-old black lab, Quincy, that used to compete.

Abner has been involved with dock dogs for two years. She learned about it from her brother, junior Greg Abner.

"My brother saw the great outdoor games in Rancho three years ago, before we even had Quincy," she said. "He knew as soon as we got Quincy that he was going to be a dock dog."

Freshman awarded for work with dock dogs

Before dogs can compete, they must be trained, which has proven to be more difficult than Abner thought.

"Matches started out six months ago," said said. "She'd stop at the edge of the dock and bark."

To train Matches, Abner used Matches' favorite toy, a headless duck decoy, to lure her into the water.

"Now she's jumping 19-plus feet," said Abner. "It just takes patience and practice."

Once a dog will go into the water, there are other factors that must be considered.

"You have to get them used to the water," she said. "Sometimes different dogs have issues with different pools or lakes."

Because of this, Abner trains her dogs in a setting they don't like as much so that they will be able to compete in any situation.

"Matches has always trained in lakes," said Abner, "but she likes the pool better than the lakes. You just have to get them used to the dock and the water. You just have to work with them."

Now, every Saturday and Sunday morning, Abner can be found with her dogs training for three hours and the Sparks Marina with a local dock dogs

club, the High Desert Dock Dogs (H3D).

Despite all of their training, many dogs still don't perform during competition. Oftentimes, the dogs will go to the edge of the dock and stop.

"That's how Matches was six months ago," said Abner. "Quincy's first even was a Splash Dogs event. He stood on the bridge, and people were pointing and laughing at him because he wouldn't go get his football."

Now, Abner and Matches compete several times a year. Recently, they competed in Oregon, where Matches jumper her personal best- 19.5 feet.

Only a few weeks after, Abner found

out about her award.

"I had no idea I was even up for it," she said.

"My parents wanted to completely surprise me, so they took me out to dinner and had the waiter bring me a candy basket with a

card that said 'Congratulations Becky Abner for winning National Junior Handler of the

PHOTO: ADDIE JARAMILLA
Freshman Becky Abner works with her dog, Miss Matches, on Oct. 22. Abner was named Junior Handler of the Year for her work success in dock dog competitions.



Year."

Abner was so surprised she was almost speechless.

"I was in complete shock because I had no idea," she said. "I had no idea I was even up for it. It was something I never worried about. I never thought in a million years I'd get it. I knew the dogs would always jump well, but I never thought it would come to me."