



# BAGPIPES *EXTRA Edition*

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## **...AND THE BEARDIE WINS!**

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Who uses the Cynosport World Games as a warm-up event? Apparently, my bearded collie, Razzles, does!

At the end of October Razzles and I travelled to TN to compete in the USDAA Cynosport World Games. It was our first ever national USDAA event and we entered it starry-eyed due to all the famous dogs and handlers in our height class. We only entered a single event, Biathlon, which consisted of two runs. It turned out that our runs were respectable, but I let the moment get to me and handler error led to off courses that eliminated Razzles and I from competition. However, it was a valuable learning experience. I watched many of the world-class dogs intently and realized that we really were not as far away as I may have imagined. In terms of speed, some were obviously much faster than us, but many of those experienced difficulty reining in the speed on the technical elements. After watching and enjoying many runs of the 22" class, I was absolutely convinced that Razzles easily had the right combination of speed and precision to place in the Top 10 someday -- if only her handler could get his head on straight.

Fast forward to the UKI US Open, another national event held in mid-November. UKI is a newer agility organization in the USA. The acronym stands for United Kingdom Agility International. The organization features courses similar to those seen in England. They offer a greater international flavor and in some cases more technical challenges than other agility organizations in the USA.

UKI happens to be my favorite agility organization. I love it because at most trials UKI courses test a broad spectrum of skills. Some courses are wide open/large and built to reward speed while others are much tighter and highly technical where advanced obstacle discrimination and independence skills pay dividends. The course analysis skills, dog training skills as well as the handling skills are all put to the test and that is what makes UKI so much fun!



The local UKI trials are also super friendly to those just starting agility by offering the opportunity to run "Not For Competition" and train in the ring with toys, if you so desire. Even the UKI US Open offers one event where NFC runs are available for training in a super exciting environment. The UKI US Open represents the best of all the UKI goodness and attracts handlers and dogs of all levels. UKI is for EVERYONE. The 2015 UKI US Open was expertly organized and efficiently run. It was tons of fun with world-class handlers and dogs present and competing for win-on spots for the WAO (World Agility Organization) international team.

Arriving at UKI, I felt much more comfortable and confident than I did at Cynosport. I was calmer, more relaxed and ready to have some fun! In my mind UKI-style courses are the best for Razzles and I in terms of allowing us to be competitive. Beardies are really much faster than many people realize, yet in courses where dogs can really open up in extension, there is little doubt that border collies have a bit of an advantage. However, when courses call for a nice combination of collection and extension, the playing field is much more level for the bearded collies. Unfortunately, Razzles and I were the only bearded collie team attending this trial. I wish more beardies would compete in the UKI events because they are so much fun. Bearded Collies possess the skills and attributes to be successful in UKI and one day I hope to see many beardies enjoying and thriving in UKI agility competitions.

*The mission of the Bearded Collie Club of America is to protect the long-term welfare of the breed by providing a variety of opportunities for Bearded Collie owners, breeders, and the general public to learn, connect, and compete, while supporting research into breed-specific health issues and rescuing Beardies in need.*

One of the unique challenges of a national competition is the course walking arrangements. At the UKI US Open we started each morning by walking 3 – 4 courses in succession and then not running them until sometimes much later. This presents a different sort of mental challenge however, I stepped to the line of course #1 brimming with confidence. We failed to qualify but I walked away proud of our effort. Razzles handled all of the technical challenges with precision and speed, but I did not signal a tunnel properly and we were eliminated. Still, it was a very nice run and we were ready for the next challenge.

Course #2 was the BIG ONE--The Clean Run US OPEN National Championship. Only the top 50% would advance to next round. The opening did not go as planned. Razzles knocked a bar, but in this event those are just time penalties and we were still on course. She remained fast, smooth and confident until the second to last jump where I hesitated and my brave little beardie responded as best as she could to my tardy cue. She made it, but she took out a wing and a bar in the process. She did stay on course, but two time penalties made it doubtful we would advance. However, within minutes, I realized advancing was the least of my worries. The wing had hung up on Razzles's rear hip and she began showing signs of lameness during our cool-down period. Our day was over. We pulled out of all events and sought immediate medical attention.

After massage, laser treatment, ice, meds and lots of prayer, Razzles was doing much better the next day. However, the on-site vet, was hesitant to give us the all-clear. I decided to scratch Razzles from morning runs and see how she was in the afternoon. After some stretching and practice jump work, Razzles convinced me she was sound to run in the afternoon session. Due to so many 20" dogs going off course in the opening round, we had barely qualified for the second round of the US Open National Championship, but we were in! The course looked fun and if we were going to be limited why not just try our best in the biggest event? Only the top 8 would advance to the finals, but running in finals was our dream so we gave it our best effort.

Razzles was spectacular! Fast, smooth, no signs of pain and no knocked bars. She put down a perfectly clean run. It was a special moment. The kind of moment that brought tears of joy to my eyes. She overcame the injury and ran her heart out for me. I did not know if it was fast enough to be top 8, with so many talented other dogs and handlers, but it did not really matter because she was healthy, happy and we did our best. We anxiously awaited all groups to finish to see how we fared and she made it!!! Not only made it, but her time was good enough for the #4 seed in finals. I pulled her from all the other events and used all day Saturday for more treatments and to prepare for the Sunday afternoon finals!

On Sunday morning I could scarcely contain my anticipation waiting to see the course map. I picked it up and my heart sank. Given the courses thus far, I expected the most technically challenging course I'd ever seen. The finals course definitely possessed technical challenges, but there was plenty of extension running, more than I had wanted to see. This was going to challenge both technical ability AND speed. Razzles would have to be in top form and run faster than ever to be able to move up and snatch a spot on the podium in a group consisting of 7 border collies, 1 Australian shepherd, and 1 beardie.

That afternoon the course was built in the center of the arena and it was HUGE. The biggest course we had ever seen. Well over 210 yards with giant spacing between some obstacles. As I walked the course I was absolutely confident we could do it. Okay, I worried a bit about our wonky see-saw behavior and how to handle the jump to tunnel sequence after DW, but other than that I was confident. And I was not the only one! In warm-up Razzles had a special sparkle in her eyes. Looking into them, I just knew she had something spectacular planned.

With the crowd cheering, the energy as we walked to start line was the most charged we had ever experienced. I took one last deep breath and off we went. Over the A-Frame with a perfect hit and then she nailed a challenging weave entry followed by a scorching jump sequence that included a fast threadle entrance to her running Dogwalk. She rocked the Dogwalk contact!!! I could tell by the roar of the crowd...but then she went way wide after the next jump, (due to a poor handling choice on my part,) and I barely got her head in time to keep her from going off course. We lost some pretty big time in that ugly wide turn, but she was as fast as ever, loving the wide open course and sprinting in full beardie extension doing her very best to lay down a competitive time. We flew through the wide open ending with her slowing down just enough to nail the see-saw. She raced over the finish line completely clean and having set the time to beat with the 3 higher seeded dogs left to run. Would it be enough for a podium spot? I had no idea. I did know that I had one amazingly jubilant and proud beardie who wanted her jackpot treat and that we had achieved our all-time objective of running fast and having fun and as a bonus we did it on a national stage in the finals of a National Championship Event. How exciting!!!

I did not see the final 3 dogs as I was back in our crating area giving Razzles her jackpot treat and preparing for cool-down. However, I could hear the ring announcer saying that Razzles was still in 1st place with just 2 dogs left to run. I got goose bumps, because I knew this meant she made the podium! Then the announcer said Razzles was still in first place with the #1 seed handled by agility legend Linda Mecklenberg coming to the line. The announcer said, "It will either be a beardie or a border collie" and the next thing I knew the play-by-play announcer exclaimed that Razzles, the bearded collie, was the new UKI US Open National Champion for 20" dogs.

To be brutally honest, the rest is kind of blurry as I was stunned and completely overwhelmed. As we stood on the top step of that podium I felt great pride, not only for us, but for our breed. Razzles had accomplished what many doubted even possible. She proved to the agility world that bearded collies can indeed compete with the very best agility dogs! I am bursting with pride in my brave little girl who gives her heart and soul with each run. Don't ever tell Razzles what is impossible; she only knows what is possible. No dream is too big if you truly believe and work at it. As always...run fast, have fun and see what happens. Dreams do come true!

Link to video summary of our UKI US Open experience.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hynhtgpwngM>