



# Episode 16: Unpacking Your Mental Backpack

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

agility, akc, surfboard, backpack, mental, tryouts, event, podcast, dog, episode, isc, thoughts, coach, negative emotion, ioc, point, american kennel club, fall, pretty, comment

This is the agility challenge podcast with Daisy peel. You're listening to Episode 16 Welcome to the agility challenge podcast. I'm your host, Daisy peel. Join me as I talk about everything related to the mental side of the sport of dog agility. If you've ever felt overwhelmed by negative self talk or lack of confidence, or if your dog training to do list seems so long that you don't even know where to get started, then this podcast is for you. For more podcast episodes, training, content and coaching from me, head to [www dot the agility challenge.com](http://www.theagilitychallenge.com) where members get access to monthly training and handling challenges in addition to league play, and a whole lot more. Let's dive in with today's episode.

Hey there listener How are you doing? I feel like I've been going nonstop for the past few weeks. It's been amazing, but also kind of exhausting. If you've been following me on Facebook, you know I have two young dogs who just turned two and yes, their litter mates. And yes, it's pretty much nonstop crazy. But also amazing to have littermates Well anyway, both of them dude and savvy have now qualified for the European Open Team USA tryouts for 2024 tryouts will be in December in Pennsylvania, which now that I've moved from Oregon to Ohio is just a few hours of driving for me. And I'm just super excited to have that event on my calendar with these two youngsters. One of the cool things that has developed in the time that dude and savvy have come of age is something called the I s c program. I s c stands for International sweepstakes class. And it's a class that's been offered for a long time by the American Kennel Club for as long as I've been doing agility. For those wanting to go to tryouts for team USA for the agility World Championships.

Several years ago, I got to talking with the director of AKC agility, and we brainstormed how I could have AKC shows at my property in Oregon. Since my contact equipment my dogwalk my a frame my seesaw, they weren't legal for AKC, I had 36 inch contact zones which are legal for international competition as well as UK AI and USDA here in the United States. But AKC requires 42 inch contact zones, and also my contacts aren't yellow, they're blue and red. So her idea was that maybe we could have an isc only



show at the property as a special event. So we worked with a local trial secretary and a local club and made it happen. And now fast forward to 2023 ISC only events are happening all over the country, including at the property here in Ohio. So for tryouts historically, you basically had to qualify by getting clean rounds in what's called the masters level in AKC, which meant moving up through the ranks of novice open, excellent. And then masters. Slightly different for European Open versus agility, World Championship tryouts. But that's kind of the idea. You can also get a golden ticket sort of, by to the agility World Championship trials if you want a high combined IOC event. And that's been true for years and years. But for a long time, there were like four of those events around the country. So for a long time, people traveled for those particular events, because there just weren't that many of them. Anyway, in the past couple of years, a few folks like myself really took the idea of IOC only and really ran with it to the point that a few really motivated folks worked with AKC directly, and took that ISC Program off the shelf, metaphorically dusted it off, and really made it into something pretty cool. And now I'm super excited to say that dude and savvy qualified for European Open tryouts with only ISC score. So they're not in masters, they've not completed those titles. They've just done it through ISC. And that's pretty tough, because clean rounds on an isc course, which are typically designed by European judges are pretty challenging. And what this means is that I really get to focus on developing teamwork with them, only on the types of courses that they're likely to see at tryouts, and hopefully, eventually overseas at a big event.

It's really cool that the American Kennel Club has found room to accommodate so many different interests in agility. If you want an agility champion title, you can do that. If you want to go to a big, huge cool breed showcase for agility. There's the Invitational and you can do that. If you want to go to a big national event, the National agility championship, you can do that. If you want to go to Westminster and compete in dog agility, you can do that. And if you want to go to tryouts, you can do that. And that's my jam. And it's been for Man, I hate to even admit it almost 20 years, ex. I've been around a while.

Okay. So last time, I talked about how to deal with a weekend where things just go off the rails, where you just lose your mental game, and you just have the hardest time getting it back. I sort of imagine that it's like a surfer, falling off a surfboard and struggling to get back on that surfboard and ride the wave, again, just spluttering and drowning and gasping for air. Knowing full well, if you could just get back on that surfboard, you'd be up surfing that wave again. For me, the mental aspect of agility and life is very much like that. It's usually not effortless for me. But if I'm up there riding the wave, making all those small adjustments, I need to stay up and on that surfboard, life is pretty good. But then, and this is inevitable,



at least for me, and I'm guessing for you, most of you anyways, something happens and I fall off that surfboard, and then I'm just flailing around in the water, just working to keep breathing, and feeling like there's just no room for a solid mental game, because I'm just trying to keep from drowning. Usually, this happens when I'm tired, or after several weekend events in a row, or after I've spent a lot of time in service to others. And when it happens, bam, I fall right off the board. And it affects me in just about every aspect of life, not just agility. In the middle of a competition, or right before a run, might not be the appropriate time to really sit back and investigate why you're having negative responses or feelings about something. In those moments, when you have some action that you need to be taking, like handling your dog around a course, you just don't have the time. And even when you do have the time, say some downtime in the middle of a competition weekend, you might not be ready to feel a more positive emotion or to turn a loss into a lesson, you might not be in a space where you can adopt more of an observer or watcher role and look at your thoughts from some distance, and coach yourself out of a negative emotion. In the last podcast episode, Episode 15, I talked about the concept of a mental backpack, something that you can put those negative thoughts and emotions in and carry around for a while, until you can appropriately deal with them.

You're not trying to get rid of the negative thoughts or feelings because they're still with you. And they might feel really heavy to carry around. But because of your immediate situation, whatever it is, it's better at that moment to carry them around, even if they feel heavy, because for whatever reason, you just have to carry on with your day, you can't, for whatever reason, take the time to have a good cry, or a good scream or a good thought dump. So you carry that stuff around in that mental backpack. Now, you can't just convince yourself that everything is fine and move on. Because all that stuff that you put in the backpack, those emotions, and those thoughts, they will need to be felt and processed and ultimately resolved at some point. That's just the way it goes. It's a natural human process.

But the thing is all that stuff that you put in the backpack, that is stuff that happened in the past, and your whole entire past, from the day you were born up until a second ago, is now all a series of thoughts. Your whole entire past is 100% made up of thoughts because the past only lives in your brain. Same for the future, really. But the past for sure. It's all in your head. It's already happened. And it's over now. And what's more, once the past has happened, and it's in your head, it can get pretty subjective. I mean, it's all subjective, right? Think about eyewitnesses to a crime, multiple people can witness the same crime



taking place, and tell wildly different stories about that event to the police who are trying to sort through all the stories to decide what actually happened, and what the objective neutral facts are.

Now, there's some good news in this and I'll explain why. Most of us think that what happens to us in life is just what happens to us. There's no room for interpretation in there because we don't spend time exploring how we get to interpret what happened before we file it away in our memories. We go with the first story we make up about what happens in our lives without much thought.

I want to give you an example, something that happened to me several years ago. I can't recall how it all started but at some point I engaged in a social media He had discussion and made a comment that was really neither necessary or appropriate. And I can pretty well guarantee that it was a comment that I made impulsively, without taking just even a few moments to consider if that comment was necessary or appropriate. Because if I had taken a moment, I would have realized that it was neither necessary or appropriate. And because of that, the whole thing escalated to the point where people were making threats because of the comment that I'd made. I was confused and shaken. And I felt pretty horrified, and pretty ashamed and also scared. And I ended up on the phone with the world team coach, as well as the director of AKC agility because at the time, I was on the World Championship team with one of my dogs. I wrote a letter of apology to the person that I had directed that inappropriate and unnecessary comment to and I was coached by the coach and the director of AKC agility to put out a public statement of apology, which I did. Both the team coach and the director of agility were patient, and kind and gentle with me. And I really learned some super powerful lessons. And while it was a horrible situation, and a really heavy couple of days, for me, in terms of that mental backpack, I'm really grateful, at the end of all of it for the lessons that I did learn, and for the guidance of two amazing women who have done, and who continue to do a lot for the sport of dog agility.

So that's the story that I have about that incident now. But it's definitely not the story that I had going in my head when it was all happening. In the moment, there was a lot of righteous indignation, on my part, shame, guilt, playing the victim, again, on my part, blame, you name it. But the thing is, once that event happened, and then it was resolved, I got to choose whether or not to keep carrying it all around in my mental backpack, or to unpack it and really learn from the situation, I got to choose whether or not to foster anger, resentment, bitterness, shame and guilt, or to be grateful for the lessons that I learned for some humility, for empathy, and compassion, shown to me by people with a genuine interest in helping



me be better and for the opportunity for me to step up and be better. Even if it meant doing the uncomfortable work of admitting being wrong, admitting being insensitive, and recognizing being inappropriate.

Now, that's a pretty big example. And most of the time, the stuff I put in my mental backpack isn't quite so heavy, but heavier, not that stuff does accumulate until our confidence is so shaken that we can hardly function until we second guess ourselves so much that the negative experiences steal away the joyful parts of the sport for us, we can continually punish ourselves for mistakes we make by constantly thinking the same way, and creating all of that negative emotion for ourselves. Or we can do our best to learn from these kinds of experiences. So when you're ready, you take those negative emotions out of your mental backpack, and decide that you're done beating yourself up over a mistake that you made, whether it was your handling, or your training, or your execution of a run, or a social interaction in person, or online or whatever. And you squeeze that experience instead for all of the learning and insight it can provide to you in terms of doing things differently.

Moving forward, the weight of your mental backpack will only grow to the point where it feels like you can't move if you let it. We have to learn to process negative emotion so that we don't end up living our lives dragged down by our past sorrows, frustrations, failures, and so on. For a lot of people, myself included, the stuff that we have to work through motivates us to help others work through similar stuff, so that we can turn our own negative experiences into something good, something useful, and something helpful for ourselves and for others.

Now, of course, this is a dog sports podcast about your mental game, and I'm not a mental health professional. So it may be that you need help from a mental health professional or a professional coach, when it comes to unpacking that mental backpack.

But for now, I'd like to challenge you to think about your past. Maybe about the last time you were in the middle of a competition weekend where you fell off that surfboard that I mentioned at the beginning of the episode. owed. And think about. Does your story about that experience serve you? How do you tell that story to yourself? And what kinds of emotions does it create for you? What actions do those emotions drive? And what are the results of those actions, you can decide to tell the story of past events to yourself in any way you want to. But it benefits nobody, especially you to just keep adding more and more



heaviness to that mental backpack. So choose wisely. Do the work to process the emotions of the past and lighten that load for yourself.

All right, fellow dog sport enthusiast, I want to thank you so much for listening to this episode. These episodes can be kind of tough for me to articulate to you. And based on the feedback I get from you, sometimes they're tough to digest as well, I can tell you that I always benefit from having taken the time to put together these podcast episodes for you. Because it's a constant reminder to me to do the work on all of this mental stuff. But like I mentioned earlier, I absolutely know how it feels to fall off that surfboard. And I just, I absolutely love helping others who have fallen off, get back on and surf the wave of that mental game. And we can all pay it forward by helping ourselves so that we can help others and just sharing the love when it comes to this stuff. So let me know what your thoughts are about this podcast episode over on the show notes page, which is at [podcast dot the agility challenge.com forward slash 16](http://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com/16). And I hope you'll tune in to the next episode. Bye bye.

If you enjoyed today's podcast, and you've got somebody in mind who you're pretty sure could benefit from discussing the things we talked about today, head to the web page for today's episode, [podcast dot the agility challenge.com forward slash 16](http://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com/16). And scroll to the bottom you'll see a section that says Share the love that has some instructions and links for how to subscribe to and share this podcast and also how to leave a rating and review in Apple podcasts. I'm a pretty tech savvy person but even for me it was a little tricky. So I've included a how to link for you at the bottom of the page. So go ahead and head on over to [podcast dot the agility challenge.com forward slash 16](http://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com/16). subscribe to the podcast, leave a review and share it with a friend. Also, you can leave a comment below the episode and let me know your thoughts about what we discussed today. I'd love to hear from you, and maybe discuss your thoughts on a future episode.