

# Dog Sports Made Simple?

*He was a fitness icon on TV. Today he's flexing his muscles in AKC companion events.*

**T**here's a gesture John Basedow uses to tell his rally partner that she did well. He flexes his well-toned arm so his bicep bulges while whooping out words of praise, like *That's my girl! Look at this star! Freaking awesome*, and, if it's truly exceptional, *Boom!*

Flexed biceps are not often seen in dog sport competitions but it's uniquely fitting for Basedow. Starting in the late 1990s, if you had access to a television it was hard to escape Basedow's brain-child—*Fitness Made Simple*—or his impressive six-pack abs.

But there are other reasons why Basedow stands out in the rally ring. At 6-foot-3 he towers over his competitors, most of whom are women of a certain age.

Then there's his partner, a tiny black cloud bouncing around his ankle.

That's Storm, his 3-year-old Schipperke.

Schipperkes, although highly intelligent, are not known for prowess in events like rally, obedience, and agility. They have a strong independent streak, a trait needed for their traditional work



*Team Storm: The muscle maven and his "lil black teacup wolf" savor a victory.*

as exterminators and watchdogs on the barges that traveled along the canals in Belgium. The breed's name is Flemish for "little captain."

The breed was one reason why the tall, handsome newcomer raised eyebrows when he and his cheeky little Schipperke strode into Long Island's dog-sport mecca—[Doggie U K9](#)

[Academy](#), a state-of-the-art training and trialing facility in Bay Shore, New York.

Old-timers offered many opinions about his 12-pound sidekick's breed.

*Like herding cats.*

*A losing battle.*

*What you're dealing with is one step away from a wild animal.*

*Oh, honey, bless your heart.*



“Boom!” Basedow shows rally partner Storm a flexed bicep, his signature seal of approval for a well-executed move.

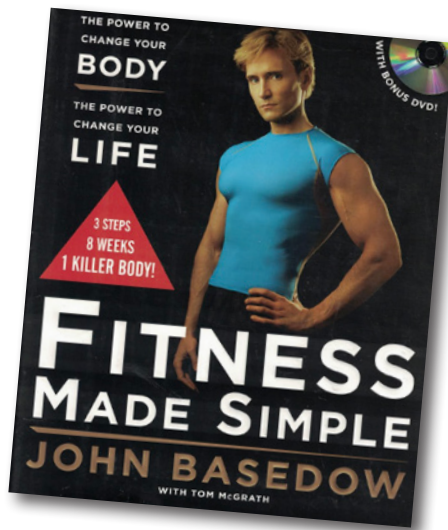
Despite inexperience and an unconventional partner, Basedow plowed ahead. The team started taking obedience and agility classes from DU owner Rolissa Nash, an elder statesman of the dog world. In a career of more than half a century, Nash has trained everything from Bullmastiffs to Biewer Terriers.

She was up for the challenge of a beginner and his Schipperke.

Recognizing the difficult task before him, Basedow reached back nearly 30 years to another seemingly unreachable goal—his transformation from plump to pumped.

### LEAN TIMES

*Fitness Made Simple* (FMS) grew out of Basedow’s frustrations with post-college life. In his 2007 book, he recalls living on little cash and a lot of carbs—a daily dose of double-digit fast-food



Basedow shared his fitness program through many forms of outreach, including books, videos, DVDs, public speaking, and a flood of commercials.

hamburgers, brownie cakes, and milk.

“I looked like a bowling pin on legs,” he recalls.

Attempts to whittle away the layer of fat that made him “smooth as a bar of soap” led him to try some weird crash diets, like a plan that had him eating

only tuna and pineapple every day, and grueling workouts.

Nothing helped.

So, Basedow devised his own program. It quickly gave him a lean shape and well-defined muscles. Then, following in the tradition of earlier exercise televangelists (see sidebar), he took to the airways to spread the word.

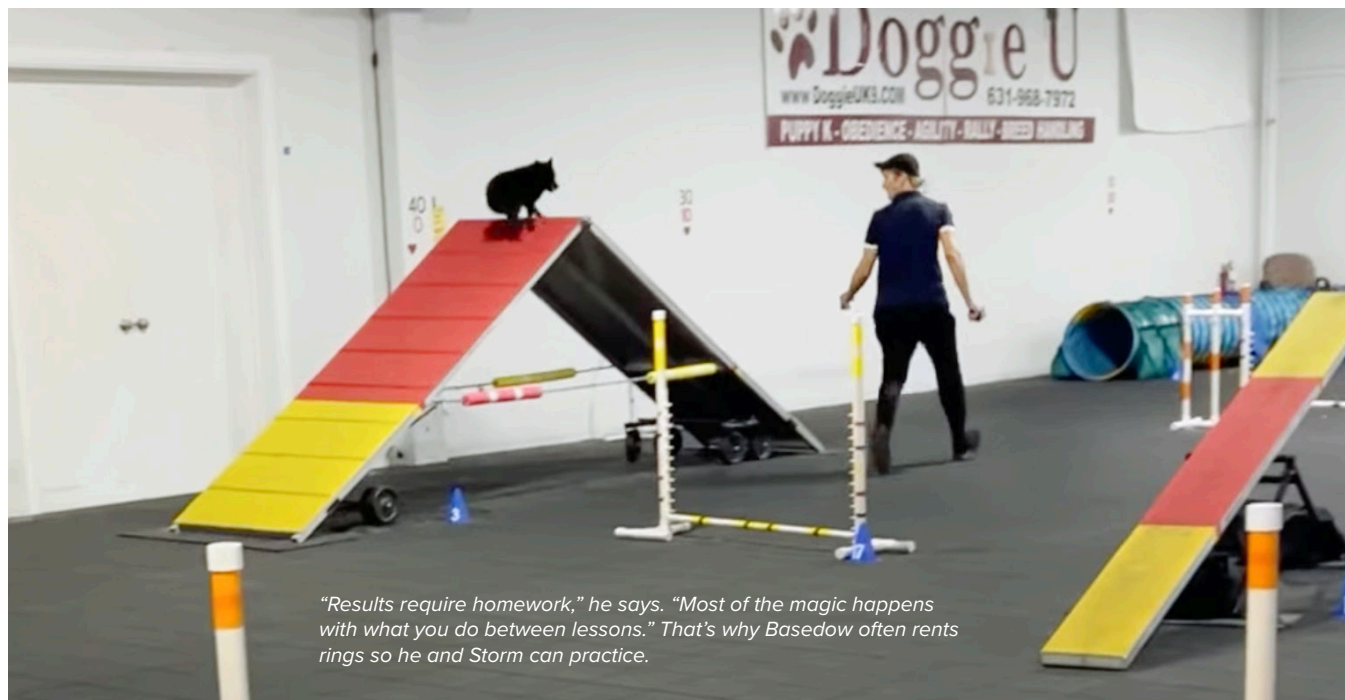
### THE STORM BLOWS IN

Life became a whirlwind as he launched a career creating FMS videos, DVDs, direct response TV ads, and infomercials. In 2005, an infomercial executive told the Los Angeles Times that Basedow had three different commercials on dozens of stations. His ads ran morning, noon, and night, all over the country, rendering his six-pack perhaps the most widely viewed chiseled abs since Michelangelo’s David.

It was exciting but lonely, so Basedow decided to get a dog. Schipperkes—small, intelligent, and saucy—appealed to him. Midnight, his first, came from a rescue in 2006.



Happy Birthday! Storm poses with an impressive array of ribbons and accolades, all earned before she turned 3 on June 23. Behind her are items from Basedow’s latest venture—[JB’s Fantastic Finds](#). It’s a Facebook-based auction show for myth and fantasy-based jewelry and art, supported by multiple national TV commercials. Storm is a major presence. “Keep your darling dog in your ads,” one fan recently wrote. “VERY smart advertising.”



*“Results require homework,” he says. “Most of the magic happens with what you do between lessons.” That’s why Basedow often rents rings so he and Storm can practice.*

Midnight appeared frequently on Basedow’s social media and, when she died at around 15, the Facebook tribute to her drew the attention of Schipperke breeders. Online chats with a Russian breeder led him to Charlene Gunville, of Mystik Schipperkes, in Wisconsin. Storm came from one of Gunville’s litters.

Basedow admits he did not spend much time training Midnight. She

“was pulling on the leash til the day she passed.”

Hoping to do better with Storm, he signed up immediately for a Petco manners class. Storm showed promise, so the next stop was Martial Arfs, in Carle Place, New York, which offers canine fitness and fun agility classes.

Storm learned quickly—zipping through tunnels, taking the teeter, and

soaring over jumps with speed, grace, and glee.

**GETTING SERIOUS**

Basedow believed that his canine tornado might do well in competition, so he started training at Doggie U in July 2022, taking classes and renting time to practice there as well as in several local training facilities.

## A Fitness Pioneer’s Canine Co-Stars

The big white shepherd’s name was Happy, and he shared top billing with his human pal, fitness guru Jack LaLanne. In fact, in some promotional materials, the “Godfather of Fitness” sometimes appeared as a supporting player. Declared one poster, “Happy—Star of the Jack LaLanne Show.”

The pioneering exercise program premiered in 1951 in San Francisco, about four years after television started to invade American living rooms. Happy joined the cast in 1959.

LaLanne credits Happy with some of the show’s success. He had been given morning time slots that were the province of kid’s programming. LaLanne used Happy’s impressive repertoire of tricks to lure young eyes. Then he urged the children to drag their moms, dads and siblings to the television, and have them join in. Happy’s tricks “kept the ratings up,” he said in a 2006 *Newsweek* interview.

*Jack LaLanne and his co-stars Happy and Walter, who joined the show later in its run.*



Inset: Everett Collection Historical / Alamy Stock Photo



*Winning Combo: A first-place blue ribbon, applause from a friendly competitor, and a look of happy surprise. Basedow recently had another unexpected boost when he learned that Team Storm has earned the required high scores to qualify for the 2025 AKC Rally National Championship.*

His first competitive experiences were disappointing. Team Storm failed to capture a single qualifying score. “I’m like, *I spent all this time and money doing this thing, and we can’t get a freaking Q in Beginner Novice?*” he says.

But he told himself, “You never fail until you quit.” Setbacks just made him try harder.

He started taking more classes, reading everything he could, in print and on the web, and listening to voices of experience, in person and on social media.

“Just like with *Fitness Made Simple*, glean things from different programs and then using my own brain to put it together,” he says.

Along the way, he learned about rally and it appealed to him immediately. Unlike classic obedience, in rally the handler can offer abundant praise as well as guidance through both physical gestures and voice. He liked how it allowed him to stay connected to his partner.

“It’s so cool when you’re bonded with your dog, and you’re in sync,” Basedow says. “Her head is up, she’s engaged, she’s looking at me. It’s almost like you’re doing a little dance together, and that I really like about it.”

Working with printouts of the signs, videos, classes, and lots of practice, Team Storm started to take shape. Soon they had their first green qualifying ribbon. Then the blue ribbons started coming.

“Fitness begins in the mind, as does dog training, as does everything else. I got motivated because of that win with rally,” he recalls.

Around March, Basedow set a goal for himself—three AKC titles by Storm’s third birthday, June 23. They ended up with six, a combination of rally, tricks, and FIT DOG, more than two dozen qualifying scores, multiple placements, and high scores, some 99s out of 100.

So which does he find more challenging—reshaping and maintaining

muscles or dog sports?

“Oh, dog sports, a hundred percent,” he says. Why? “Any time you’re dealing with some other being, human or canine, success will no longer be determined by your efforts. That variable makes it extremely more challenging.”

Team Storm is now facing a considerable challenge—the move from Intermediate, in which they have titled, to Advanced. All exercises in Advanced are performed off-leash, which will be difficult given Storm’s tendency to react to stress with zoomies or by examining every hair, shadow, and piece of lint on the floor. Achieving a title will take hard work and stick-to-itiveness.

But consider this: That six-pack Basedow created decades ago is still ripped, maintained year after year by regular wee-hour workouts in a 24-hour gym.

So stay tuned. There’s more to come. **FD**

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