

## Animals as Performance Athletes—Part 2 of 3



## Animals as Olympians

By John J. Haburjak, DVM, Diplomate ACVS

What an athletic potpourri of color, strategy, technique and competitiveness! Those are my thoughts as I watch the Olympic festival occurring in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. What is most remarkable to me is the seemingly endless array of athletic events that only draw into focus every four years. Of course, and it is evident in

the skill and sacrifice exhibited by the athletes that these events are going on throughout the year, every year, but only get on the television during the Olympics. It is so exciting and entertaining, I can't get enough!

*Tireless, energetic, committed, focused, disciplined and truly in love with the sport for its own sake.*

Also airing during the Olympics are the just as enjoyable exposés on the athletes. I find these pieces both fascinating, and in a way, humbling. The rather meager origins of many of these Olympians somehow makes their dedication, skill, persistence and discipline so much richer, less likely, and therefore so much more worthy of applause! Over the past few days,

as these pieces would fill the time between sporting events, I found myself completely enthralled with the fullness of these anecdotes and genuinely trying to root for these athletes as they competed. In particular, the athletes that I found the most charismatic were of two types: 1) those athletes from seemingly improbable circumstances and backgrounds, and 2) those athletes whose passion for their discipline was from a deep and unwavering love of their sport. Somehow, their personal journeys seemed destined and more complete if they were to stand on the podium with a medal in hand.

Somewhat interesting to me is the fact that during the games, every so often an athlete

that had been featured would falter, or limp, cramp or bend at precisely the wrong moment, or fall ever so slightly short of a medal. Some of these athletes were understandably and visibly crushed, falling, hands to face, tears on cheeks into the arms of a coach or loved one. And every so often, one of these crestfallen athletes would, when interviewed, say graciously how much it meant for them to be there in Rio, to compete for their country and to participate in the games. Wow! Noble, humbling, gracious and the ultimate in sportsmanship!

You know? It somehow struck me, as I've watched these games closely that our own pets are much like these athletes! Tireless, energetic, committed, focused, disciplined and truly in love with the participation in the sport for its own sake. Sure, chasing a tennis ball is really only fun if you get it, but what does a dog do once they do retrieve it? They bring it back for more! Mud, water, cold, other dogs, other people, it all seems to matter not to an uber focused retriever (or border collie!) during any one of these marathon ball toss sessions. What's fairly unique as I think about our pets as athletes is that there never seem to be tears, broken hearts or dreams — there is only joy, exuberance and passion. Whether it's a slow walk on a paved trail, an expert training run on single track fire-roads, tracking and retrieving a dummy, tennis ball or Frisbee (or chasing the red-dot laser pointer!) — there is never an end to a pet's willingness to compete. For me, this is as exciting and as interesting as nearly anything I've seen on the television during the Olympics! Perhaps that's your experience too?

Enjoy these fleeting days of Summer of 2016, and look for our Autumn installment soon.

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## Featured Medical Case

# Feline Thymoma – A Personal Story

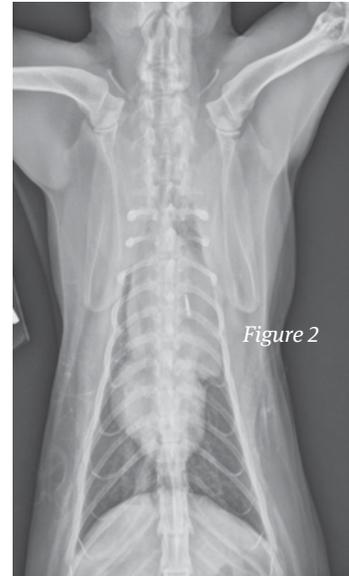
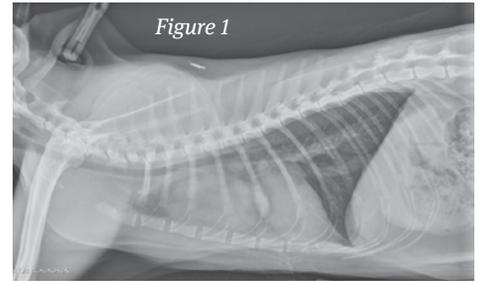
By Andrew Grange BSc BVetMed Diplomate ACVS



One of my many cats, Blackjack, had been previously diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy at the age of 3 years old. He has been doing great since that time (currently 8 years old) and sees his cardiologist every 12 months for a check-up. At his most recent echocardiogram however a large cranial mediastinal mass was identified which came as a great surprise since had not shown any clinical signs associated with

this. Of course, in my own cat I panicked, drove him straight to PETS and had a full work up performed within the hour. Three-view thoracic radiographs (Figures 1 & 2) identified a large cranial mediastinal mass and an otherwise unremarkable thorax. CBC/chemistry was within normal limits and Blackjack was sedated for an ultrasound guided FNA of the lesion. Cytology identified “lymphoid proliferation with mild mastocytosis and hemorrhage” consistent with thymoma. I took Blackjack to surgery and performed a medial sternotomy for thoracic exploration. At surgery I identified a large cystic soft tissue mass occupying the entire cranial mediastinum. The mass was fairly well encapsulated although adherent to the cranial vena cava in some regions. Fortunately I was able to remove the mass en-bloc and Blackjack recovered well from the surgery despite my poor attempt at enforcing use of the e-collar and activity restriction. The histopathology confirmed a diagnosis of thymoma and Blackjack continues to do well almost 5 months post-op.

Of thymic masses in cats, lymphoma is most common. The average age at presentation for feline thymoma is 12 years and clinical signs include anorexia, lethargy, dyspnea, and weightloss. Other sequelae to thymoma can include cranial vena cava syndrome and paraneoplastic syndromes such as myasthenia gravis and hypercalcemia. Pre-operative imaging invariably includes thoracic radiography and usually some form of advanced imaging such as ultrasound or computed tomography. While these imaging techniques can be beneficial for determining the size and extent of a mediastinal mass, neither is 100% accurate for determining the degree of vascular/local structure invasion and surgical explore is warranted for definitive determination of



this. Pre-operative diagnosis is critical in cats with mediastinal masses since lymphoma is treated with chemotherapy, and thymoma with surgical excision. Diagnosis based on cytology can sometimes be challenging but is frequently successful. In cases where cytology results are ambiguous, flow cytometry is the test of choice to differentiate these two differentials (submitted to Colorado State University). Cats with thymic lymphoma will also usually test positive for Feline Leukemia Virus. Depending on the size and invasiveness of the thymoma excision is performed via either thoracoscopy or open surgical procedure (median sternotomy). Median survival time of cats undergoing surgery for thymoma is 1825 days, with 1 and 3 year survival rates of 89% and 74% respectively. Survival is significantly adversely affected by the concurrent presence of megaesophagus, aspiration pneumonia, or an invasive mass. In non-operable cases radiation therapy can be beneficial in improving clinical signs and providing a median survival time of 720 days in cats.

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## THE SURGEONS OF VSC



John J.  
Haburjak



Tracy N.  
Frey



Andrew M.  
Grange



Mark L.  
Dosch

VSC is proud to introduce the newest team members!

**DONNETTA**



Donnetta attended Western Career College (Carrington College) and received her Associate of Science in Veterinary Technology in 2007. She worked in General Practice for 11 years prior to joining the VSCB team in March, and is enjoying the

opportunity to expand her horizons by branching off into specialty surgery.

Donnetta has always had a strong affinity for animals. Some of her most cherished memories growing up are with her German Shepherd “Daisy” and Orange Tabby “Kizzy,” as well as the many small and large pets that have been part of the family throughout the years. She doesn’t currently have any pets, so she sees every pet she cares for as a chance to treat them like her own for the time they are in her presence.

Donnetta was born and raised in San Francisco and now resides in San Leandro with her three fun loving kids. In her spare time, she loves outdoor activities, music, and being around her family.

**TRISH**



Trish became interested in veterinary medicine early in her career. She had been running her own smoothie shop when she made the decision to pursue a career she truly loved. Veterinary medicine was a perfect fit, as she grew up riding

horses, and has a 35 year old mare name Cricket, who Trish has had since she was ten years old. Trish initially thought she would end up in large animal medicine, but small animal medicine stole her heart while she was in tech school. She graduated from Western Career College in 2009, feeling truly inspired by the science, sense of compassion, and critical thinking.

Trish and her husband share their home with their two canine “fur children.” Charlotte, is a seven year old rescue from San Francisco Animal Care & Control, and has been in the family since three months old. Lilikoi or “Lee Lee” for short is the couples’ “honeymoon pup,” as they adopted her after taking a field trip to the humane society in Kauai during their honeymoon.



**dogtrekker.com**

Your guide to California’s favorite dog-friendly hikes, beaches, hotels, restaurants and more.



**petuniversity.com**

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**FEATURED BROCHURE**

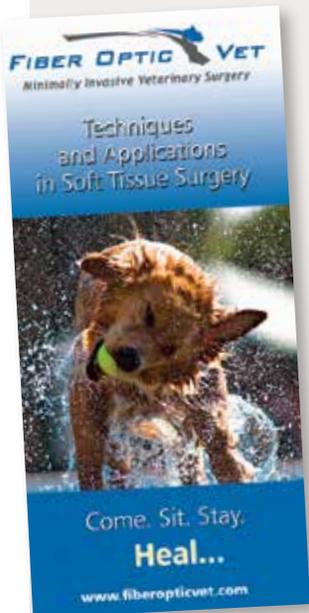
**Minimally Invasive Surgery**

This summer’s highlighted pamphlet features information about minimally invasive veterinary surgery. Learn about some of the benefits, equipment, applications, and cost expectations of minimally invasive veterinary surgery.

This is an excellent tool, in conjunction with a doctor’s specific recommendations to help supplement an owner’s understanding of their pets different surgical options. The simple language and format of this particular pamphlet also make it a valuable resource for any staff and clientele who want to develop a foundational understanding about minimally invasive veterinary surgery.

You can find more information about our minimally invasive veterinary surgical services on our companion website [www.fiberopticvet.com](http://www.fiberopticvet.com).

This and other brochures can be found on our website at [www.vscdsurgerycenters.com](http://www.vscdsurgerycenters.com) or [www.fiberopticvet.com](http://www.fiberopticvet.com) under the “Resources” tab. For complimentary copies of any of our brochures or business cards email us any time at [contact@vscdsurgerycenters.com](mailto:contact@vscdsurgerycenters.com).



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This newsletter is dedicated to Kamron Terry-Walker. Kamron is the newest addition to the family of the company's longest standing surgery technician Amanda Terry and Mandrell Walker. Kamron is her 2nd son. Kamron was born at 3:59pm on 2/24/16, weighing in at 7 lbs 6 oz, and measuring 20.47". Mom and baby are happy and healthy, and Amanda has recently returned to work after enjoying some quality time on maternity leave with her baby boy. Veterinary Surgical Centers wishes Kamron and his parents a long life full of happiness, health, and service to those causes they find worthy.

## Save the Date!

October 19, 2016

...for a special evening of continuing education from the 2016 Clinical Instructor of the Year for the Western Veterinary Conference: Dr. Brook Niemiec

Dr. Niemiec is an American and European Board Certified veterinary dentist and will present on...

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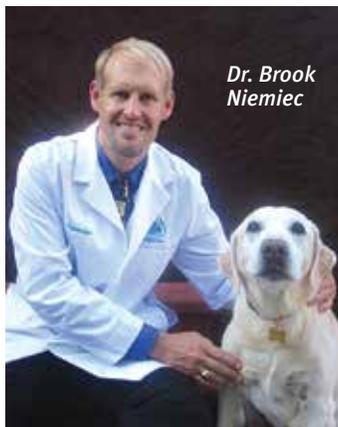
Space is limited at this RSVP event, and entry will initially be offered to DVMs only, and opened up to staff as space allows. Please plan to join us for this wonderful opportunity to see an internationally recognized speaker in our own backyard!

**October 19, 2016 • 7pm**  
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