How do I stop my dog from demand barking or "talking back"?

In some ways dogs can act very much like children. The child that whines and pitches a fit in the candy aisle of the grocery store often gets the candy that he wants, just so he'll stop making a racket and embarrassing his parent. The dog that barks and acts obnoxious when you stop throwing the tennis ball often gets the ball thrown again, just so he'll stop being such a pest. In both cases, being bad gets the desired result, so it is something that will be tried again and again, usually with great success.

In dogs, this is called demand barking or nuisance barking and it is simply rude, pushy behavior. The dog may bark when he thinks it's time to eat, if he wants you to throw his toy, if you're not petting him, if he wants to come in the house, get out of his crate, or any other time when the dog isn't getting his way. It is not at all acceptable behavior and taking a zero tolerance stand will make it go away.

The key to getting your dog to stop demand barking is to completely ignore him (provided the dog is in a safe situation). No matter what he does, don't give in. Unfortunately all creatures going through what's called an extinction burst. That means that your dog will try just a little harder, doing what always worked in other situations, before giving up. It's like a human with a remote control. You aim it at the TV and nothing happens. Instead of just getting up to change the channel right away, you point the remote more definitely and press the button several more times, each time more determined than before. Finally you give up and try something else to change the channel. The next time you may try the remote again, go through the same routine but remember what happened so it doesn't go on as long. Basically when you ignore your dog, he will start to bark and get more and more obnoxious, but then he'll just give up. The key is that you ***don't give in before the dog does***. At first this will take awhile. You'll have to out-stubborn your dog, which can be a challenge if you're dealing with a lab. Just remember if you give in when he's at his worst, that's the point he'll start at the next time you work with him.

I tend to get very dramatic when I encounter a demand barker. I turn my back on the dog, cross my arms, and turn my head away and up. In dog language this signals that you are unwilling to interact with the dog. I may also say, "I don't play with RUDE dogs!!" This is more for my benefit from the dogs since it makes me feel better. As soon as the dog stops barking, even if it's just to catch a breath, I give him what he wants. You want your dog to learn that barking gets him nothing, but being quiet just might get him what his little heart desires.

If you find your dog is barking when you end play, you can work on teaching your dog "last one" or "all done". Decide when you're done playing and just before the last toss say your command and stick with it. If you told your dog that this was the last one, then do NOT throw the ball again. Completely ignore any attempt from your dog to get you to play again. You'll want to teach this after you've had repeated success at getting your dog to stop barking, since the reward for his silence in that case is to throw the ball again.