

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

Recently I was asked again for my thoughts regarding AKC judges officiating for competing registries. My position is the same as it has been in the past, namely, that AKC should allow its judges to judge for competing registries in breeds they are not approved to judge at AKC shows.

The rationale for this view is simply that our judges benefit from this kind of hands-on judging experience as they prepare to become approved for additional breeds. This type of judging experience was once abundantly available at match shows across the country. The match show experience for dogs, their owners, club members and aspiring judges was invaluable.

I recall competing as an owner and handler with one of my Scotty pups and marveling at what a great training ground this match show was. While I was learning to present a dog, my young Scot was discovering dog shows and what was expected of her. At the same time, the young man in the center of the ring was learning about judging the Scottish Terrier and the newer club members were learning how to run a show. It was an impressive example of learning by doing. Perhaps best of all, there were interested people from the community watching the classes and asking many questions about the various breeds and the sport itself.

When my youngster was ready for the "big time" she knew how to handle herself in a show ring and had a very successful show career. The young man judging the match show class went on to be an all-breed judge, and the folks who got their feet wet running the match show spent many years organizing and producing AKC point shows. It is fair to assume that a number of spectators at that match became owners of AKC registered dogs and some may have even become participants in the dog show world.

These days we hear that the AKC is in trouble due to declining registrations, competition from other registries, PETA and dwindling public support. How often have you heard that a particular club has trouble putting on a show because there are only a few core members and they are getting up in years. How many times have you wondered why, at the cost of entries today, we find exhibitors trying to show dogs that are not even leash broken let alone trained to stand for examination. How many times have you had to correct someone by telling them that labradoodles and cockapoos are not purebred dogs and not new AKC breeds.

Surely we can see the connection between the demise of match shows and the current challenges to the sport of purebred dogs. I have advised some in upper management at AKC to use the existing structure and lines of communication in our sport to combat the threats we currently face. Here then, is one concrete example of how to do just that. Require every AKC club to hold one match show per year with adequate publicity. This would be the single most important community outreach program the AKC could undertake. I believe it would be a powerful asset in advancing the cause of AKC.

Getting back to the question of judges officiating for competing registries, if the AKC did insist on match shows across the country, then my position on judging for other registries would be dramatically altered.

While my main interest in this issue has been the educational aspects of judging practice, I would certainly prefer that such practice be gained at an event that is supportive of the AKC. However, until there is a widespread return to match shows, if AKC judges can get the experience they need to be approved for new breeds, by judging wherever they can, I see no reason to prohibit such practice. There is, however, a legitimate cause for concern regarding AKC judges assisting organizations that seek to undermine the AKC. Judging one's AKC approved breeds at competing shows provides that kind of assistance. We need to seriously consider the ramifications of accepting such assignments.

Now, I realize that there are judges who were first approved by another registry and later approved for the same breed by the AKC, and this may be a different matter altogether. However, don't be surprised if the AKC someday approaches this as they did with AKC judges who were also approved by a foreign registry (i.e. telling the judge to choose).

As AKC judges, I believe we owe some degree of loyalty to the AKC. Of course, this does not extend to all individuals on the AKC Board or Staff. We may think that some of these folks are at times self-serving, or worse, foster views that we find damaging to the sport of purebred dogs. Nonetheless, no matter how misguided some of their "brain storms" may be, we must separate these judgements from our commitment to furthering the AKC and its central mission.

To be sure, the AKC is involved in a long term struggle for its standing in our society, if not for its very survival. Although many mistakes have been and will be made, in this struggle we AKC judges should do what we can to support the cause.