

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

Finally the veil has been lifted and the suspense has ended. I will not take space here to repeat my criticisms of the rather closed process which resulted in the Smith Committee Report. You all know my dismay upon learning that the representatives of the judging community would not be consulted or invited to participate in the process. As Dr. Smith told the ADSJ Board in February, this was not an oversight but rather by design. Nonetheless, we should thank the members of the Committee for devoting their time and effort in an attempt to improve upon our current judges approval process.

By the time you read this everyone will know and have had a chance to react to the contents of the Smith Committee Proposal, which was presented to the AKC Board on September 13. So, there is no need for me to reiterate the main points of the proposed process here.

After reviewing the new proposal, I find that, at the level of principle, it has aspects upon which most judges will agree. Specifically, it clearly recognizes the importance of educational preparation and performance evaluation as the two fundamental prerequisites for advancement. Indeed, the system currently in place recognizes these prerequisites as well. It would seem then that if we can agree on these two principles of preparation and evaluation, the rest of our discussion should be a collective search for the best ways to accomplish each of these.

As to the first prerequisite, the acquisition of adequate preparation to judge a new breed, there is little substantive difference between the existing components and the contents of a good synopsis as described in the Smith Committee Proposal. When one reads the list of what must be included in a synopsis apparently the synopsis is simply a different way of formatting the experiences represented by the current components. Just as with the current system, "All experiences should include dates and be verifiable." It may be claimed that this proposal is more open ended, however, the current format invites one to add any experiences which may strengthen one's application. In short, it is not clear just how this proposed method of demonstrating one's preparation is an improvement over the current method. Of course, if one has a box-checking phobia, this proposal may ameliorate this psychological problem. Nonetheless, it does underscore the need for substantial and varied educational experiences.

I would have preferred more specificity with a review of the many possible educational experiences

available. This may have led to a prioritization of the available experiences or perhaps some guidance by weighing the various educational options. For example, a seminar which conforms to the AKC guidelines for educational credit, given by a qualified presenter using an excellent example of the breed, is more valuable to an aspiring judge of that breed than watching a couple of field dogs perform the breed's function. That is not to say the latter is not of value to a judge, but simply a reference to their relative worth as preparation to judge the breed. In the same way, having owned, bred, handled and successfully competed in a breed, is clearly more valuable to a potential judge than any seminar on the breed could ever be.

It is the second prerequisite, that of performance evaluation, where the Committee missed the chance to recommend that the AKC put a bit more time and effort into training the field reps as judging evaluators. Since both the current process and the proposed process rely on the reps to evaluate judging, they are both equally vulnerable to the same valid criticism. That is, that the current system implies all reps are capable of competently evaluating judging in all breeds, which of course they are not. Except where the rep has legitimate expertise, too often the judge has had more training in the breed being observed the rep doing the observing. This should not be the case as it defeats the purpose of the observation and puts the rep in a very uncomfortable position, to say nothing of where it puts the judge. Furthermore, it is not a satisfactory solution to this problem to rely on a by-standing exhibitor or handler to do the rep's job. This becomes an opportunity for a sore loser to secretly take out their disappointment on the judge being observed. Nonetheless, it is understandable that reps, when put in this position, would ask others for this kind of help. The failing here is in the system.

In-service preparation of field reps as judging evaluators is long over due. In a paper submitted to the AKC in 2003, I recommended some ways in which the AKC could help to prepare reps as judging evaluators. I also recommended that reps, so qualified, would be more valuable to the AKC and should be compensated accordingly. In this period of belt-tightening, when reps are declining in number, that aspect of my proposal is not likely to be embraced by the AKC, yet it seems they did accept the attendant suggestion of giving such reps a group when they retire from the AKC. They just skipped over the training part.

Regarding evaluating judging performance and relating this evaluation to the rate at which a judge may acquire new breeds, again the Committee did not provide the specifics. A clear, easy to understand

process, that is objective is necessary if we will ever have a credible evaluation process. Simply saying in effect, the AKC will decide, is not going to elevate the process in the mind of most judges. The perception will be that friends will be rewarded and others may have tough sledding. True or not, the AKC should at least try to avoid creating this impression. This new proposal does not avoid it.

The makeup of the Judges Review Committee seems to reflect the AKC need to have complete control over every aspect of the process. The Judges Review Committee, without an objective standard for guidance, will appear, like the judging czar of bygone days, to make rather subjective allocations of breeds based on hearsay, political connections and personal relationships. It is a step backwards. It smacks of who you know rather than what you know.

Why is a Judges Review Committee needed at all? If an applicant for additional breeds has done all the preparation that is expected, and demonstrated an ability to judge through a sound performance evaluation process, then it does not require a committee to determine the appropriate outcome. What would the committee add? Whether they know the applicant? How they feel about the applicant? Comments about the applicant's personal history? This kind of subjectivity is exactly what concerns most judges when it is part of an evaluation process.

If the AKC believes a Judges Review Committee is necessary, then I suggest that the Committee makeup at least be based on judging experience and expertise rather than the office one holds in the AKC organizational structure. On the other hand, if there is a system in place that weighs preparatory and evaluative experiences in a clear, fair and relevant manner, the AKC could assign the job of the Judges Review Committee to an entry level clerk. The task would be that of looking up the corresponding number of breeds called for by the weighted score and notifying the applicant.

I have devoted this space to the two central issues of preparation and evaluation. Much more can, and should, be said about each. There are a number of other recommendations in the Smith Committee Proposal which deserve full discussion and all sides should be heard on each of these. I think the Proposal includes some good ideas and is a very good starting point for a thoughtful upgrading of our judge approval process. However, more work needs to be done to flesh out a detailed system. If we rush the task we are more likely to be left with an approval process that will require more changes in a fairly short time. The Smith Committee, through their reaffirmation of some foundational principles, has provided us with a solid starting point for this important undertaking.*