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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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We have a workload problem that seems to be getting worse.

And it may be our own fault!

The most experienced judges are getting up in years and the judging workload is increasing. As the owner-handled groups continue to expand representing an increasing number of breeds, and clubs look to enhance their bottom line via special attractions such as puppy and bred-by groups, the total amount of group judging that takes place at many shows has more than doubled.

The AKC maximum number that a judge may adjudicate in breed competition is still 175 dogs. However, as you know, when there is owner-handled, puppy or bred-by competition, the normal pace of judging can be slowed down as additional decisions must be made and the dogs to be judged are rarely standing ready at ringside. Add to this a ring steward that is often less than knowledgeable or experienced and the judge's day becomes a struggle to stay on time.

Of course, the major burden these extra groups create for the senior judge comes when one finds that the club has assigned a full load of 175 in breed competition and then four, six or more groups. There was a time when, once you signed your contract, you knew the breeds and groups you would be judging on the day of the show. That has changed with the proliferation of non-regular groups. It seems most clubs feel free to assign as many non-regular groups to judges as they wish without any prior agreement, the actual contract notwithstanding.

We really can't ask the AKC to make a hard and fast rule limiting the number of groups that may be assigned to a single judge for the simple reason that some judges would like to do as many groups as possible. They may be working toward their next few groups or they want as much experience and exposure as possible, or for whatever reason they would like to stay busy judging from 7:30 am to 6:30 pm. I admire such energy. More power to them. However, for some of us, seven hours of breed judging and a couple of groups are quite enough, thank you.

So, what to do?

Don't look to the AKC to solve the problem of overworked senior judges. Don't look to the clubs either. Some clubs schedule in such a way as to give every judge a full load so as to get the most judging for their dollar. Then, on top of a full load, they will assign groups with the clock as the only limiting factor. No, neither the AKC nor the clubs are to blame. We ourselves are responsible for limiting the amount of work we may be assigned. Realizing this, more and more judges are adding to their contracts statements like, "No non-regular groups may be added to my assignment without prior approval." Or "Please do not assign non-regular groups." Another possibility is charging a premium over your contracted fee since these groups are typically added on top of your agreed upon contract (eg. \$X per dog for judging non-regular groups). I believe such statements as these will underscore the fact that non-regular group assignments are not a required part of the standard judging contract and should be negotiated separately. When there were only a handful of dogs in each of these groups, judges did them as a favor to the club and for good will. With nearly full non-regular groups, we now have a very different situation in which judges may have to say, "Enough". Since the change has been gradual, I think many clubs are unaware of the physical burden placed on senior judges when non-regular groups add an additional hour or more of judging at the end of a long day.

Some judges have limited their maximum number of dogs in breed competition to 150. The AKC can and will help with this. Just contact Inez Maldonado at the Judges Department (judgingops@akc.org) and she will see that the clubs and superintendents get the information if you choose this option. If you don't want to take a blanket approach you can just negotiate a maximum on an assignment-by-assignment basis. You may wish to limit an outside, mid-summer show, and not limit an indoor, air conditioned show with supported entries. In other words, as you well know, not all judging assignments are the same. This realization was part of the rationale for raising the limit to 200 dogs at specialty shows. It seems clear to everyone that concentrating on one breed at a specialty, with excellent stewards readying the next class, makes it easier for a judge to do more than 175 dogs. It should be equally clear that under somewhat lesser circumstances, 175 dogs may be too many, especially if hours of group judging are added to the end of the day.

I realize that as soon as one thinks about limiting oneself a concern arises regarding the recent influx of new group judges. Yes, some of them may get assignments that you may have had if you were only willing to judge for as many hours. Be happy for them. Be happier that you did not get stuck with a miserable assignment. So you lost a judging fee? It is a pittance at best and only covers part of the many expenses that you can't list on your judge's invoice. If you make your living judging dogs, and professional handlers pay attention here, after deducting all allowable, legitimate expenses related to your judging assignments, you probably qualify for food stamps and other such government subsidies.

Loosing a judging fee should be the least of your concerns, unless judging is your livelihood. But, if this is your hobby, enjoying your judging experiences should be your primary objective. Doing a good, honest, competent job, undistracted by discomforts, will lead to the greatest personal satisfaction when judging dogs. You owe it to the sport and, above all to yourself, to exercise some control over your own workload, and working conditions. Happy judges doing a good job will necessarily contribute to the good of the sport.*