

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

We are expected to discuss matters pertaining to judging with the AKC Judges Department. However, the AKC Judges Department has told us on at least two occasions recently that any discussion of the soon-to-be-terminated in-ring observer program is pointless since the AKC board has approved this change, and this and other changes are now in the implementation stage. Also, it seems that our questions and concerns about the implementation of the new ringside observation program are being viewed as obstructionist in nature and not worthy of discussion. Since this effectively blocks our normal channel of communication with AKC's upper management and board, and since this newsletter is mailed to these folks, perhaps this is a good place to express our views and make constructive suggestions.

With this in mind I am using this space to suggest some revisions to the in-ring observer program which I believe will preserve and enhance the educational value of the in-ring experience while eliminating most of the abuses and concerns that have been enumerated elsewhere in connection with the present program. These reported abuses include; observers who have not read the standard, observers approaching judges on the day of the show asking to observe, improper attire, inattentive observers, observers who do nothing but stand in the ring with no follow up, observers who repeat the judge's comments to others and judges who speak to observers within earshot of exhibitors. Some other concerns are the lack of incentives for club approval and participation, and finding judges who are willing to accept in-ring observers.

Essentially, all that is being suggested here is a clarification of what is expected when one participates in the program, a few disciplinary consequences of abusing the program and some program enhancements. A valuable program should not be discarded before a serious effort is made to eliminate its shortcomings. Also, there can be little sympathy for a judge who is disciplined for behavior which jeopardizes a worthwhile program for all judges.

This proposal is offered as a starting point for further discussion. If something like what is outlined below is to be successful it will take the cooperation of participating judges, observers, kennel clubs and AKC Field Reps.

IN-RING OBSERVER PROGRAM: A PROPOSED REVISION

- I. A careful review of the breed standard must precede in-ring observations.
 - A. The applicant must declare the breeds for which he or she wishes to apply and pay \$2.00 for each breed standard test. (we have been told that giving the tests first would be too expensive. This small fee should more than offset any additional costs.)
 - B. Tests must be completed, returned and passed before doing an in-ring observation
 - C. A failed test may be taken again with the payment of an additional fee
 - D. The applicant must also view the AKC video on the breed before doing an in-ring observation.
- II. Qualifications must be determined and arrangements made, prior to the show date.
 - A. The breed judge must have been approved to judge the breed for at least five years or be a breeder judge who has been in the breed for ten years.
 - B. E-mail acceptance of an in-ring observer by the breed judge must be received at least one week prior to the show. This e-mail documentation of prior consent to be included with the in-ring observation form when it is submitted to AKC. If the applicant or the judge does not have e-mail, a signed statement of the date of the request may be made by the breed judge.
 - C. Prior verbal approval of the show chair must be obtained and the contact date noted.
- III. In the ring:
 - A. The observer must dress as he or she would for a judging assignment.
 - B. The positioning of the in-ring observer is important. The observer should try to stand behind and to the left of the judge, yet close enough to clearly see bite, eyes, expression, etc. during the individual examination. A position behind and to either side of the judge works well for the down and back and side gait evaluations.
 - C. Always watch the judge's hands during individual examinations, especially on coated breeds.
 - D. Try to stay out of the judge's line of sight to the dogs.
 - E. The observer may not touch a dog in

- the ring.
- F. Any questions or comments between judge and observer must be out of hearing range of any exhibitor.
- G. The observer must at all times be paying attention to the judge and the dogs in the ring. The observer must not communicate with any person other than the judge while in the ring. Cell phones must be turned off.
- H. The in-ring observation must last throughout the breed or two hours, whichever comes first.
- I. Both the judge and the observer must remain cognizant of the schedule.
- IV. After the judging and outside the ring:
- A. The observer should ask permission of the exhibitors to go over the winners.
- B. The observer should privately discuss the entry with the judge.
- C. Judge and observer complete the in-ring observation form. (the form needs to be revised, and a copy of the completed form should be sent to the AKC by the adjudicating judge).
- D. Comments between the judge and the observer concerning specific dogs are strictly confidential.
- V. Discipline
- A. Violating the above on the part of the observer may result in discipline up to, and including, the loss of both the current and future opportunity to participate in the in-ring observer program.
- B. Violations on the part of the judge (e.g. critiquing a dog within earshot of an exhibitor) may result in a reprimand. A second occurrence may result in stronger discipline as determined by the Judges Department.
- VI. The number of in-ring observations required to satisfy this educational component shall be:
- A. One, if there is a 4 or 5 point major in at least one sex.
- B. Two, if the largest entry is a 3 point major in at least one sex.
- C. Three, if all are at least 2 points in at least one sex.
- D. No more than three observations are to be submitted. Observations of one point entries will not be

counted.

VII. Club participation:

- A. Club participation is voluntary.
- B. Clubs who allow in-ring observers at their shows may announce this policy on their premium lists and may then count the implementation of this policy as one of their required educational credits.

VIII. Judge participation:

- A. Not all judges feel comfortable with an observer in the ring, therefore participation must be voluntary.
- B. Judges may elect to accept observers in a limited number of the breeds for which they are qualified.
- C. Participating judges may establish their own requirements for observers and may limit how many observers they will accept in one day.

IX. Resources for finding qualified judges under whom one may observe:

- A. AKC - Past Judges Directories (at least 5 years old) can be used to see if a non-breeder judge qualifies.
- B. Judges Organizations - Judges groups should post a list of judges who are willing to participate in the program, and the breeds in which they are willing to accept observers.
- C. Parent Clubs - Some parent clubs have a list of judges they recommend for in-ring observing of their breed. Usually, these clubs ask for the judge's consent before including them on the list.

No educational program will ever be abuse proof. Nonetheless, the administrative cost of keeping a program relatively free of abuse must be balanced against the educational value of the program when it is well run. When the in-ring observer program has been implemented properly, it has proven to be one of the most valuable educational programs for judges ever devised by the AKC. It deserves the administrative effort required to maximize its value.*