

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Regarding the most recent failure to create a better judging approval system, the AKC Board must know by now that there are serious flaws with the current approval process. The problem seems to be that they cannot find enough corrective measures to save the process (and save face). They abhor the thought of starting over, but that is exactly what is needed. The reason corrective measures, short of a complete overhaul, will be fruitless is that the current process is so fundamentally flawed that no amount of tinkering will save it. Like a bad apple it is rotten at its core. There is no cutting away the bad part without destroying the whole.

The preceding system certainly did need improvement. This improvement would have been essentially a matter of clarifying requirements and raising standards. In fact, with our help, progress was being made in that area. No doubt a number of additional modifications would have been necessary to achieve a truly satisfactory implementation of the basic principles implicit in the process. That said, there was nothing wrong with the basic operating principles of that system, namely, advancement based on both preparation and evaluation. After the first approval to judge, the fundamentals of the earlier process for adding additional breeds were reflected in the following process:

1. Enumerate and describe the education, mentoring and other experiences (called "Components" under the old system) that are generally agreed to impart breed-specific knowledge to an interested learner.

2. Require a minimum number of these preparatory experiences with an opportunity to add any other experiences the applicant believes were of value in learning about the breed.

3. Administer written and oral tests to insure that sufficient breed knowledge has been acquired. (At one time a performance evaluation

test was also possible.)

4. After all tests have been passed, grant provisional approval for a specific number of breeds. The specific number of breeds to be determined by the applicant's level of performance in previously approved breeds as documented by Field Rep reports.

5. Evaluate the applicant's performance in these provisional breeds. When performance meets an acceptable level grant regular status.

6. Continue periodic evaluations of performance to help determine a judge's future rate of progress.

The above process, as it was implemented, had a number of problems which needed to be addressed. The fact is that over the years these shortcomings were gradually being corrected and the system was slowly improving. Certainly there was much more to be done to insure that all approved judges were capable entry level judges in their newest breeds. While the previous approval process needed to continue evolving, it was already the best approval process in the world. It is a shame that the AKC Board of Directors did not appreciate this fact. They allowed themselves to be sold a bill of goods based on silly rhetoric about "box-checking" Of course, that can be said of every licensing and certification process in the land. This rhetoric masked some very faulty logic which focused on some of the weak but correctable points of the previous system. In the end the previous system was jettisoned in favor of this current abomination.

Under the new system applicants are told to write a synopsis of their efforts to prepare to judge a new breed. Unlike the transparent system that preceded it, no one knows what the secret formula is for a successful synopsis. This leaves the decision entirely in the hands of a Judges Review Committee, an appointed group of five (in practice three, and now two) who meet and secretly make what appears to be arbitrary breed

approvals. Applicants who are turned down for some or all of the breeds they applied for are not told why they were turned down nor how to improve their next application. Even the AKC Reps who spend many hours interviewing applicants are not told why the applicant they supported was turned down. This, after paying \$25 per breed to have your application reviewed by the Judges Review Committee. Could those who came up with this new system have managed to create a more insulting approach to judging approval? Is it any wonder that more and more experienced judges are refusing to submit themselves to the indignity of this approval process? Oddly enough, just when the AKC realizes that more multi-group judges are needed, it devises a system which is so demeaning and apparently arbitrary that experienced judges have decided to refrain from applying for additional breeds.

This lack of respect for judges reflected in the current process should not come as a surprise since the Smith Committee intentionally omitted any representation from the judges' organizations. People outside of the dog show world find it very odd that a committee overhauling the judging approval process would display such disdain for judges and their associations as to prohibit their contribution to the formation of a new approval process.

When this new approval process was first introduced it was presented as an approach that was going to award breeds on the basis of one's performance, which with a fair and transparent evaluation process, makes perfectly good sense. However, with the number of Field Reps reduced to half, one wonders who will be doing the evaluation of judging performance. It seems without the Reps, the Committee must rely on scuttlebutt, popularity, connections and solicited letters of support.

Very recently the system has been modified to tell an unsuccessful applicant why some or all breeds were turned down. A well

intentioned step in the right direction, but wouldn't it be better if the applicant knew what was expected before applying and paying \$25 per breed. Having to wait until after the application has been submitted shows a cavalier disregard for the time, effort and money judges invest in their advancement.

Now, in an attempt to answer the growing concern regarding corruption in the form of favoritism, which, by the way, is a natural by product of the current system, the AKC has decided to mask the applicants' names when their application is before the Committee. Of course, this contradicts the basic premiss of awarding breeds on the basis of one's past performance. It only goes to show the confusion on the part of the AKC Board and highlights the futility of trying to put Band-Aids on such a fatally flawed process.

An immediate and dramatic improvement in the approval process could easily be accomplished by simply returning to the previous system. As I said earlier, there were still many things that needed to be improved under that process, but it was relatively transparent and it was based on preparation and evaluation. The major problem with the former process was the expense of maintaining and training an adequate number of Field Reps to handle the judging evaluation part of the preparation/evaluation equation. The problem was never the fundamental principles behind the process. The preparation part of that equation was already being handled by the initiative of the judges themselves, their associations and the parent clubs, none of which cost the AKC a dime. Yet the AKC found it too costly to maintain their end of the bargain - a fair and relevant judging evaluation process.