

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## BEST PRACTICES

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In May the AKC Judging Operations Department disseminated a new post entitled "Best Practices for Judges and Events". For the most part the statements and advice listed in this document are good common sense recommendations intended to help avoid the spread of the coronavirus once dog shows return. After reading the report by Jay Kim in DOG NEWS on the first pandemic-era dog show in South Korea and reading these guidelines in the "Best Practices" document, it is clear that either shows will be running longer or judging loads will have to be lightened as the number of dogs scheduled to be judged per hour is reduced to meet these new guidelines. Under these guidelines, a 175 dog assignment plus a group or two could run from early morning to late at night. Some judges may hesitate to accept a full load assignment under these circumstances, especially while wearing a mask, so scheduling accommodations should be made. Nonetheless, the choice may be to adhere to these guidelines with appropriate scheduling or risk not having shows at all. Carelessness at this point, which could cause an uptick in cases and deaths, will surely lead to the latter unfortunate outcome.

Toward the end of the Best Practices document there is a passage that raised a few eyebrows. It reads as follows, "Lastly, it must be understood that as a judge, it is not your responsibility nor within your authority to enforce club regulations. For example — if an event, facility or state should have a requirement currently in place related to the wearing of masks, it is the club's responsibility to enforce. Appropriately, if someone should not be compliant the proper recourse is to notify the show committee. It is outside of the judge's authority to deny entrance into the ring or excuse from the ring an exhibitor because they are non-compliant with a show regulation."

Now part of the above statement is clearly correct. Let's say the club in question is holding one of those theme events and this year the theme is "The Circus". In keeping with this theme, the club has asked that all exhibitors be dressed as clowns. I understand the AKC to be saying that it is not your responsibility to enforce such a club requirement. Since the club regulation would have no bearing on the process of judging dogs, it is solely the club's responsibility. In this instance I would heartily agree. Unfortunately, the example that is used in the Best

Practices document has to do with the wearing of face masks during the pandemic. Here the Best Practices document over states its position and even oversteps its own authority, by claiming that, "It is outside of the judge's authority to deny entrance into the ring or excuse from the ring an exhibitor because they are non-compliant with a show regulation." This would usually be true unless, as in this case, the show regulation happens to facilitate the judging in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, then it is clearly within the judge's authority to bar a non-compliant exhibitor from the ring. See Rule 16 in Chapter 7 of the Rules Governing Dog Shows, which states, "A judge may order any person or dog from the ring, for the purpose of facilitating the judging." These Rules can only be changed by a vote of the delegate body.

So how could a club's mask regulation facilitate judging. Let's say that a judge is over 60 years of age and has an underlying health condition such as COPD or high blood pressure or any other condition which puts the judge in the most vulnerable group of people for serious coronavirus consequences. Since the wearing of masks during this period is primarily for the protection of others within six feet of the mask wearer, it is perfectly reasonable, for such a judge to refuse to come within six feet of someone not wearing a mask, club regulation or no club regulation. If the judge refuses to approach an exhibit handled by someone without a mask, then obviously the wearing of masks during this pandemic facilitates the judging and anyone without a mask should be excused from the ring. In this case it is clearly within the judge's authority to bar or excuse an exhibitor from the ring for not wearing a mask. So, in the final analysis, the exhibitor in this case is excused not simply for violating a club regulation, but because the club regulation happens to facilitate judging. The Judge's authority is derived from the AKC Rules not the club's regulations. It is only when the two coincide that the Judge has the authority to bar or excuse an exhibitor from the ring.