

So You Want to Judge Dogs?

Every sport has its “second guessers.” Football has Monday morning quarterbacks and showing dogs has ringside “judging.” There isn’t a person ringside who hasn’t “judged” along with the real judge and expressed their opinion on how the judge makes the placements.

It’s fun to “judge” the entry and talk about it with fellow exhibitors. We all have opinions on which dog should get which ribbon and sharing opinions is part of regular conversation at the dog show.

As part of the ringside “judging” invariably someone will remark, “If you think that, *you* really should be judging.”

Me judge?

Hmmm, what an interesting idea but what do most of us know about what it takes to become an AKC conformation judge? We know there’s a process to become approved to judge, but unless you’ve applied, very few exhibitors know what’s involved.

First, what does the AKC look for in a judge? There are three basic, underlying criteria: sound breed knowledge; ability to properly apply judging procedure through knowledge of AKC Rules/Policies; and impartiality in making decisions so that only the merits of the dogs are judged.

Second, what is the process to apply? There are several ways to apply, based on a person’s experience in dogs, but the most commonly used one is for people who start out owning, exhibiting and breeding one breed. For these applicants, the minimal, experiential requirements are; 12 or more years’ experience exhibiting; breeding and whelping five or more litters from which four or more champions have been produced. Additionally, applicants must complete six recent stewarding assignments at AKC shows and judge six sweepstakes/match assignments. There’s also a written test

on dog anatomy and ring procedures and a formal training class given by the AKC for those who apply to judge.

Write up this documented experience on an application form, and you're on your way to applying to judge. The next step is to schedule an interview through the AKC Judging Operations Dept. with an AKC Executive Field Representative. At this interview, there are a multitude of things that will be discussed including but not limited to: the breed standard, seminars attended, mentoring received, strengths and weakness within the breed, dentition, use of the wicket (including a demonstration of the applicant's ability to wicket a dog), and knowledge of AKC rules/regulations/policies, procedures for handling protests, disqualifications and excusals.

At this point you're still not approved to judge. Your application and the interview results go to the monthly meeting of the Judges Review Committee. This Committee has final say on granting the privilege of judging a breed on a trial ("Permit") basis.

Final approval for a breed comes after you have judged it a minimum of three times and there are enough dogs present to demonstrate competence. Additionally, the applicant must be observed by three Executive Field Representatives and show ability to rank the dogs.

Is there a bit more to becoming a judge than you thought there was? Surprisingly, so many of us exhibit for years but only have a vague idea of the approval process for our judges. Let me give one caveat...the process I've described is simplified and shrunk down to the size of this column. If you'd like to see the total picture, go to the AKC website and do a search on "JudgingResourceCenter."

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