

Level Playing Field

A dog show veteran is upset about American Kennel Club judges' bias.

By Allan Reznik

Q. I've been showing Brittanys on and off for 20 years. I say "on and off" because I have to stop when I just can't take the arrogance of the American Kennel Club and the bias of judges who put up handlers. I know many people, including myself, who will not show to a former handler turned judge. Do you think the AKC will ever address this to the point that I feel the playing field has been leveled and I can once more enjoy showing dogs?

A. Well, many exhibitors feel as you do. I suspect that with the state of the economy, the price of gas, and the entries at AKC shows taking a nose dive, more and more owner-handlers will be needing to tighten their belts and show much more selectively, which will further skew the conformation world.

It has often been suggested that AKC create a two-tiered system that would allow owner-handlers to compete with other owner-handlers at the breed, group, and Best in Show levels. Interestingly, one show-giving club, the prestigious International Kennel Club of Chicago, has done just that for several years, and it is highly successful. Exhibitors who believe in the concept should contact their AKC delegates and field reps, and encourage this proposal to be advanced.

You might also give the United Kennel Club a try. Professional handlers are not permitted to exhibit at UKC shows unless they own the dog in question. This definitely contributes to a less stressful, more laidback environment.