

## Editor's Page

amateur -- (?a m' - - tûr', ?a m' - - choor) n. [Fr. < Lat. amator, lover < amare, to love.]

1. One who engages in an art, science, study, or athletic activity as a pastime rather than as a profession.
2. An athlete who has never participated in competition for money or a livelihood.

Webster's II New College Dictionary

I'm vexed about something. Blackie Nygood reported from the recent AKC Delegates meeting that AKC is considering replacing the seldom-used Novice class at conformation shows with what they've termed an "Amateur Owner-Handler" class. "What a great idea," I thought when I heard about it. The sport of showing dogs is, after all, one of the few where professionals and non-professionals compete head-to-head. Although I know many non-professional owner-handlers thrive on competing with the professionals, for others this class could be great. The owner-handler, of course, would still have to be equal to or better than the professional to win the ultimate prizes — that is, have a quality dog in equal or better condition that is well-groomed and thoughtfully presented.

Now that it has actually been proposed, Blackie reports that there was objection to the use of the word "amateur." I am a great believer that semantics do matter — how people interpret words or language can greatly influence a situation or outcome. Words are a powerful force. But I was perplexed that people in the sport of dogs think themselves above being called amateurs. Thousands of very talented amateur golfers aren't offended to be called "amateur," because it doesn't mean they aren't great golfers — it means that they don't golf for a living. Likewise, horse shows have long offered amateur divisions for their participants: the Arabian Horse, American Quarter Horse, American Paint Horse and National Walking Horse Associations, as well as the U.S. Dressage Federation and others, offer amateur classes in all different competitions at their shows.

Even if neither golf nor horse shows are familiar to you, what about one of the country's most beloved sporting events? Though in recent years the Olympics has relaxed regulations on having only amateur athletes — those who are not financially compensated for their athletic training or performances — compete, no one thought less of the great past Olympians because they were amateur athletes. They still thrilled spectators, broke records, won medals and became our heroes.

Olympic athletes, in order to be competitive, must train on a full-time basis while still somehow managing to feed, house and clothe themselves. By contrast, amateur dog exhibitors are passionately devoted to their sport as a hobby, and although many, many of them spend countless hours producing and preparing their dogs for the show ring, they have chosen to make their livings in careers other than professional handling. Is there something wrong with that? Of course not! The fact that I could go to a dog show, entered in the Amateur Owner-Handler class, and have my dog looking and showing great, and be recognized as a hobbyist rather than a professional, would please me to no end — not offend me.

Do those who object to the use of the descriptive term "amateur" realize that if such a class is not so designated, it means that they will be competing not only against other talented, dedicated owner-handlers of the weekend-warrior variety, but also with the sometimes-owner-handled dogs shown by the decidedly professional and talented likes of the Bill McFaddens, Susie Kipps, Amy Rodrigues', Joe Vergnetis, Robin Novacks and Laurie Fenners (just to name a few) of our sport? Yes, they're very definitely professionals, in every sense of the word, but they also breed and own dogs, and sometimes they show their own dogs. They are a bit of a horse of a different color than most owner-handlers, though, don't you think?

Unless a specific designation is made that a class is specifically for those handlers who do not accept payment for showing dogs, we might as well stick with the status quo, and go on competing with the professionals in the Open, Bred-By and other classes, just as we always have. Instead, why don't we give AKC credit for their efforts and try something new? And this once let's not be so sensitive about semantics.

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