

Hounding Down a Best in Show

Beagle makes history as the first to win Westminster's top honor in 2008.

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Posted: February 13, 2008, 12 p.m. EST

As the lights dimmed, the seven Best in Show finalists were announced and entered the ring individually: the Weimaraner, the 15-inch Beagle, the Akita, the Sealyham, the Toy Poodle, the Standard Poodle, and the Australian Shepherd. All were awaiting judge Dr. J. Donald Jones' expert assessment. Spectators were encouraged to root for their favorites and that they did, with gusto, shouting out the breed of their choice. "Bea-gle! Bea-gle!" seemed to ring out more loudly than the rest, and Dr. Jones ultimately agreed, pointing to the hammy little hound dog "Uno" as his chosen Best in Show winner.

Here's a recap of the two-day event's history-making decisions that led to another memorable Westminster win.

Day One

February 11, 2008, was opening night of the Westminster Kennel Club's 132nd annual dog show held at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Four groups were judged Monday evening; the remaining three groups along with the highly coveted Best in Show will be determined Tuesday.

During its venerable history, longshot wins and surprises have added extra spice to an already colorful event. Tonight was no exception. While the Herding Group was the last to be judged, it provided the biggest upset, as judge Stanley Saltzman pointed to a red merle Australian Shepherd bitch for first place. Ch. Vinelake Collinswood Yablon, owned by Terri K. Collins and bred by Sandra Landry, sailed around the center ring as an enthusiastic crowd cheered her on. Following closely behind was the Canadian-bred Bouvier des Flandres, Ch. Quiche's Demetrius. The top AKC Herding dog of 2007, the German Shepherd Ch. Kaleef's Geneva Aeval-Achtung, was Group 3rd. Rounding out the quartet was the blue merle Rough Collie, Ch. Sylvan Argent Simply Irresistible.

The Hound Group launched the evening in fine style. This group is divided into sighthounds and scenthounds, but judge Ralph Lemcke favored the latter for his four top placements. Leading the pack was the 15" Beagle "Uno," more formally known as Ch. K-Runs Park Me In First, bred by Kathy Weichert and Leah Bertagnolli, and owned by Caroline Dowell, Eddie Dziuk, Jon Woodring and Kathy Weichert. The Standard Long-haired Dachshund Ch. Solo's Drag-Queen picked up Group 2nd. Third place was awarded to a breed not commonly seen, the Harrier ... resembling a smaller English Foxhound. Ch. Downhome Family Tradition has become a great ambassador for her breed. The English import Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen, Ch. Afterglows Ebenezer, claimed Group 4th.

The strong Terrier Group was judged by Betty-Anne Stenmark, a long-time authority and a breeder of Dandie Dinmont Terriers herself. First in this most impressive lineup was the Sealyham Ch. Efbe's Hidalgo at Goodspice, another Canadian-bred entry, owned by Margery and Richard Good and Sandra Middlebrooks. His older full brother, "Merci," ended 2007 as Canada's No. 1 terrier and a top all-breed dog. Always a popular breed, the Scottie representative, Ch. Roundtown Mercedes of Maryscot, strutted her way to Group 2nd, followed by the Norfolk Terrier, Ch. Max-Well's Viper, and the South American-bred Smooth Fox Terrier, Ch. Torquay S Demetrio.

Dr. Michael T. Manning, a Dalmatian breeder, favored the white Standard Poodle, Ch. Brighton Minimoto, to head up his Non-Sporting Group. "Remy," bred by L'Dyne Brennan and owned by Cindy Coggin, Don Rochow and Zuleika Borges Torrealba, claimed this victory for the second year in a row. Bulldogs are always a crowd pleaser, and tonight's Best of Breed winner was no exception: Ch. Cherokee Legend Rock. The charming Bichon Frise Ch. Paray's Paragon took Group 3rd while 4th went to the lavishly coated Tibetan Terrier, Ch. Players Prodigy.

A poignant moment occurred midway through the evening as service-and-assistance dogs involved in the Angels on a Leash program were acknowledged. "James," the English Springer Spaniel who went Best in Show at the Garden last year, was among the dogs honored for his work.

Day Two

With sleet, snow flurries and blustery winds marking the second day of the Westminster Kennel Club dog show, exhibitors and determined spectators gamely made their way to Madison Square Garden. Three groups remained to be judged,

along with the crowning of a Best in Show victor.

Judge Elliott Weiss is a Sporting Group specialist, having shown many dogs in this group as a former professional handler and continuing to breed English Setters today. It was his honor to select the winners from this group first. The silver cup went to the equally silver and sleek Weimaraner bitch, Ch. Colsidex Seabreeze Perfect Fit, owned by Ellen Charles, Judy Colan and Alessandra Folz, and handled by Folz. Just two months before, "Marge" won Group 1st at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship so she is on a roll.

Another worthy bitch, the lightly marked lemon-and-white Pointer, Ch. Cookieland Seasyde Hollyberry, placed second, followed by the buff American Cocker Spaniel, Ch. Lydgate Rise N' Shine in third, and the red-gold English Cocker Spaniel, Ch. Chestnuts Selling the Drama, fourth.

The small but mighty Toy breeds filled the center ring next, judged by author and Toy Group authority Sari Brewster Tietjen. Repeat Group 1st honors went to the Japanese-bred sensation "Vikki," Ch. Smash JP Win A Victory, a white Toy Poodle owned by Ron Scott and handled by Kaz Hosaka. Vikki ended 2007 as the No. 1 dog all breeds. The big-winning Smooth Brussels Griffon Ch. Cilleine Masquerade powered into second place. Black-and-white Havanese, Ch. Yup's Cohiba Esplendido, claimed Group 3rd and the lineup was rounded out by the Pug, Ch. Tupelo Shoboat Tu China Tu.

Constance Barton judged the last group of the evening, the Working Dogs. Another repeat winner here: the Akita bitch "Macey," Ch. Redwitch Reason To Believe, an English import and the No. 2 dog all breeds for 2007, owned by Roger Rechler and handled by Laurie Jordan-Fenner. Doberman Pinscher bitch Ch. Cambria's Victoria Secret claimed second place. The Great Dane bitch Ch. Maitau's Eye Candy V MJM went Group third while fourth place went to the sole male in the lineup, the Bullmastiff Ch. Bastion's Music in the Glen RN. Tibetan Mastiffs were competing at the Garden for the first time and a huge and most engaging 7-year-old gold male, Ch. Timberline Barni Drakyi, made Mrs. Barton's cut, much to the delight of the enthusiastic crowd.

With that, the seven Group winners went on to compete in the Best in Show ring. The crowd cheered for the fan-favorite Beagle as he bayed and barked playfully at the judge. As Dr. Jones handed down his decision, the crowd went wild as another year was capped with a historic first-time win for the Beagle.

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