

# IT'S A HOME RUN, FIRST TIME UP AT BAT!



by Lisa Dubé Forman

**I**t's a disappointment at every turn. I am referring to the October and November AKC Board of Directors meeting minutes wherein the new judging approval process has been approved with only two changes to the original proposal. One being insignificant and the other, a slight alteration.

I am very curious to know the fate of our comments directed to the designated [judgingapproval@akc.org](mailto:judgingapproval@akc.org) collection addy? Furthermore, what about the volume of the responses and the general tone of such? You will notice that I can only refer to a collection point because I, along with others, am unclear who collected our responses. This is a natural lead-in into the whys and wherefores.

It is generally agreed that the new proposal con-

tains some positive aspects and I feel comfortable saying that many of us appreciate the hard work that went into the proposal. That said, the AKC Board, even after receiving valuable and knowledgeable commentary from the judges community on the new procedure, cavalierly voted to accept the ad hoc committee proposal without incorporating what many felt to be quite necessary revisions? Why wouldn't the AKC Board want to make the utmost, careful and scrupulous determination when it affects the all-important judging approval process? The AKC is fond of asserting that they have the best judges in the world and it expends millions of dollars a year to administer its judging approval system to ensure that quality remains high. They believe judging approval confers a certain status on an individual

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and with such status comes an enormous responsibility to both AKC and the Sport. Yet, on August 8-9, 2011, we have the AKC Board of Directors, all members present, in receipt of the new judging approval process, fully prepared to vote on the new judging approval procedure without ANY input from the judges groups, delegate body or a public comment period. The latter being a public of veteran judges with decades of well-grounded experience and younger, newer judges possessing fresh, constructive insight; but instead, we were all minimized.

Mr. Steven Gladstone, AKC Director, reported on his now defunct website - [Judgesapproval.com](http://Judgesapproval.com) - that after considerable debate, the Board narrowly passed by just one vote, to publish and distribute the proposal for public review with a 21-day comment period. The abridged and official AKC Board meeting minutes are sanitized and, therefore, this discussion has not been published.

Mr. Gladstone's website contained numerous comments regarding the new Judging Approval Process. One such criticism was the makeup of the Judges Review Committee. He felt the new proposal created a "super" judging committee made up of four AKC staff members, plus an additional Board member from the Board - and such formula would be disastrous to the credibility of this program. Mr. Gladstone declared, "Get both the board and the staff out of the judges review committee." Continuing his emphasis, "The AKC is always perceived as having to have the ultimate control of the situation. That means the Board and the Staff are perceived as dictating results and controlling outcomes of all issues. The proposed makeup of the Judges Review Committee simply furthers that reality and perception." He favored a Judges Review Committee of non-staff and non-Board members made up of affected fanciers as such committee would be seen as truly impartial and unbiased. His suggestion was to amend the Proposal to: two Senior Judges (at least 20 years judging experience and 3 groups), one non-senior judge (one group or less and at least five years judging experience), one AKC Parent Club President, and one AKC Breeder of Merit. Building on this, he specified the AKC Board of Directors shall appoint the Committee annually, provided that no person shall serve on the Committee for more than two consecutive years or more than four years cumulatively.

During this August AKC Board meeting with all Directors in attendance, it was VOTED (unanimously) to support the concept of the proposed procedures. The ad hoc committee was to consider the Board's input and to bring back a final proposal to the Board. Since the meeting minutes are censored, we can logically surmise by the subsequent October and November meeting minutes that the considerable discussion and referenced 'Board input' was on just two modifications of what is a highly influential, protracted, wide-ranging, piece of work. These changes were the timeframe for implementation of the procedure and the makeup of the judges review committee. Does anyone else find this irregular yet dolefully unsurprising?

On October 10-11, 2011 (this is five-days after the deadline

for public comment) the Board met again with all members present. Dr. Smith, Chairman of the ad hoc committee appointed by the Board, made a motion on the proposal to approve the Revised Judging Approval process, to have the committee remain active as long as needed to consider and analyze all the input received on the procedure, submitting any proposed changes to the procedure it considers appropriate by the end of the year. Initially, as phrased, it sounded promising. As if there was a glimmer of hope that all our commentary might be considered, albeit, in a very short period by year's end. All the same, the Board, before adopting the new procedure, decides to make only two modifications. The first of two changes the Board focused on was to modify the Judges Review Committee. It was VOTED to change the composition of the Judges Review Committee to: three senior judges appointed by the AKC Board annually (at least 20 years judging experience and 3 groups) one of whom shall be the Chair, the AKC Vice President of Judging Operations, and one additional member of AKC Senior Staff appointed by the President. The second change was the timeliness for implementation of the new judging approval procedure. It was VOTED to apply the revised procedure when implemented, as much as practical, to all pending applications and all judges currently on Provisional status for any breed. The main motion, approving the proposed conformation judging approval procedure as amended was then approved (unanimously) with the effective date to be determined by the end of 2011. The procedure is the same as was posted on the AKC website, with the two changes indicated above.

Perhaps a fitting question to ask here: were our comments and suggestions ever given the appropriate standard of care and consideration by the AKC Board of Directors, or were they delegated to staff or members of the ad hoc committee for review?

After the close of the public comment period, the Board was unwilling to identify any other issues within the proposed procedure. We are left only to postulate that they ignored the commentary and recommendations especially since this public review was not a unanimous decision but only narrowly passed by one vote.

At the November AKC Board meeting in which two board members, Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Goodman, were absent, the Board recanted on their resolved action from the October meeting on one of the aforementioned two changes. With the following discussion specific to the Judges Review Committee, it was VOTED to change the composition of the Committee again. The Judges Review Committee of the new judging approval procedure is now defined as a committee of five members comprised of the COO of the American Kennel Club (Mr. John Lyons), the Vice President of Dog Show Judges whom shall be Chair (Mr. Darryl Hayes), one AKC Executive Field Representative appointed by the CEO for a two-year term, one Senior Judge (at least 20 years judging experience and having at least three groups), and one designated person both of whom will be recommended by the CEO and confirmed by the Board

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of Directors. The last two appointees shall not serve more than two terms and shall not be a member of AKC staff or Board of Directors. Am I the only one intrigued with the Board's reversal when two members were absent or is it possible that everyone is so jaded with politics as usual?

Hence, we are right back where we started. Forgive the cynicism, but how charitable that we will not have a fourth and fifth AKC staff employee or another Board member serving on such an important, five-member Judges Review Committee. Such imbalance could have imparted an appearance of impropriety to the process while providing fuel for claims of favoritism and bias. If the informed reader recalls, this remodified proposal is almost verbatim the initial Ad Hoc Judges Review Committee recommendations. The slightest difference is that now, one, not two, Field Representatives (of the 12 employed by AKC) is appointed with the addition of one Senior Judge and another, as yet, unidentified individual. Mr. Gladstone brought forward a good point regarding an AKC Field Rep seated on the Judges Review Committee. On the aforementioned website he stated, "AKC Field Rep's well-documented opinions of an applicant before the Committee are completely represented and it is the Field Staff that has observed and agreed upon advancing the individual in question. So, what is the point and where is the credibility of sending the recommendation and application to another group of the same staff members?"

Basic, logical questions need answering. Why were there no representatives of the judges groups - those directly affected by the new procedures - ruminating over the specifics of such an overarching, consequential procedure affecting nearly 3,200 judges? Why wasn't this new procedure provided to the delegates body before the Board voted? Why are there no judges group representatives seated on the new Judges Review Committee? Why were the previously adopted recommendations for the composition of this new Judges Review Committee from October overturned with the Board withdrawing to the composition originally set forth by the ad hoc committee?

I am a member of an emerging, younger Judges generation therefore this and other similar situations are puzzling. To many of us it is almost a farce. The Board implements an unrealistic policy and then it is met with appreciable backlash and, as history has shown, it is either reversed or modified after doing battle with the Senior Conformation Judges Group. This process is maddening and a waste of time. Many will agree the graying of this sport is considerable and we continue to have unsophisticated, staid leadership championing or ascribing to the old boys club. Ostensibly, this sport has changed and this new judges approval process contains several unrealistic issues which required addressing but were left unaltered. I suspect that those AKC Board members and ad hoc committee members who are judges are not vulnerable to unfounded complaints by embittered exhibitors or handlers. Nor, I suspect, are they exposed to bombardment by a disagreeable AKC Field Rep after completion of their assignments with a potentially career-ending, 'does not meet' or 'marginal' rating. Several do not have

to criss-cross the country satisfying the required evaluations dependent on Field Rep attendance and availability, quality and quantity of entries. I am inclined to believe, because of their status and marketability, they are not in holding patterns while trying to complete all permit breed assignments before they are authorized to apply for additional breeds.

I have great reverence for our sport's past. I embrace, hold dear and am unyielding on the original purpose for a dog show. Nevertheless, the future for this sport requires the AKC Board to be forward-looking, embracing necessary, sound, change rather than willingly and enthusiastically supporting conservative, old-fashioned stereotypes. The Board needs to open their eyes. They need to transport themselves into the twenty-first century and recognize that the makeup of today's dog fancy, along with economics, is not as benign and virtuous as it may once have been.

This Board readily accepted a proposal, one year's time in the making, without having any objections or rational, probing questions regarding its influential 10-page recommendations. This must be one of the cleanest, most well-prepared, vetted proposals ever produced. It is remarkable that a 10-page directional proposal for a multi-million dollar non-profit organization was met with one minuscule adjustment and was a shoo-in after the first read. Wow, a home-run first time up at bat! Seriously, we should hire these guys out to Congress so they can also solve most of our country's critical issues in one fell swoop.



"I KNOW THAT YOU'RE A WORKING CLASS DOG, BUT EVER HEAR THE TERM, 'WORK-A-HOLIC'?"