

COONHOUND ADVISOR

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If you've seen any of UKC's content over the past several months, including social media platforms, website, and even the UKC Hunting Ops Podcast, you've seen mention of the new UKC Pro Slam events. Dating back to the Saturday YouTube live show at the Coonhound World Championship when Jamie Estep, Allen Gingerich, and I sat down for a brief 20-minute discussion on the newly implemented format, news has trickled out, including information for the first few scheduled events, which by the time you read this, will be completed.

Today I thought we could talk a little bit about the events to introduce them to the crowd who get the bulk of their information from the magazine. If you haven't yet, I would suggest you take time to listen to episode 75 of the UKC Hunting Ops Podcast. There is a lot of information on there, more than I could type out here, with more detail. You can find that podcast on Spotify, Apple, YouTube, or anywhere you listen to podcasts.

Let's start by looking at the journey getting here. Allen and I have been discussing having high entry fee, high payout events ever since the inception of the Tournament of Champions and probably before that. It's no secret that the Tournament of Champions along with the payout at the World Championship has brought hunters back to UKC that had gotten away from competing in our events. Having said that, having pro style events for top end hounds was a priority. Not only for those that enjoy competing in those type of events, but we believe that there are plenty of hounds out there that can compete in these events and do quite well.

The plan started to take shape back in November of 2022 when we had a pilot event for coonhounds in Tennessee. The hunt sold out in minutes, and I was able to make it down to see it go down. From that event, we learned a lot. It helped shape our thought process on the best way to administer these events. After long discussions and meetings hashing out details, the UKC Pro Slam format was ready to be revealed. Let's talk about some of the questions you may have now.

Why?

We touched on this briefly in the introduction but let's reiterate that here. UKC thought it was important to have a level for all hunters. With the implementation of this format, I feel we have achieved that.

1. There is a place for beginning hunters, with the YEP events and Poor Boy events that are out there with nominal entry fees, ranging from free to \$15.
2. For the intermediate hunters there are tons of options. From local level events to slams, state championships, breed championships, Autumn Oaks, Winter Classic,

Grand American, etc. These events vary in difficulty and the quality of the opponent, but you are looking at entry fees typically ranging from \$25 - \$50.

3. Veteran handlers that have achieved success at these levels to varying degrees can and will have success competing at the World Championship and Tournament of Champions. These events require qualification, making it through a semi-final event, and running through 100 dogs to hit the pinnacle of the sport. However, entering these events is going to cost you around \$150.
4. Now we have the Pro Slams for those who consider themselves that. That isn't for us to decide, you paying those higher entry fees will decide that. As of this writing we have pro slams scheduled that have entry fees ranging from \$300 all the way to \$1,250 with plans for even higher events in the works.

So, as you can see, on any given weekend there will be an event within driving distance of you with entry fees ranging from free to a couple thousand dollars, with the large majority living in the \$25-\$35 range. Truly something for everyone.

How Do We Enter?

After the initial pilot event, the decision was made that the entries would be taken by UKC in advance of the event. We have a dedicated webpage where all the information for the UKC Pro Slams will live. On this webpage you will find event dates, ads, entry lists, and most importantly, the date and information for when entries open.

This webpage and each specific event's ad will have a date denoting when entries open, but for clarity, entries will open a month ahead of time. That means that if the event is going to be January 10th, the entries will open on December 10th. If the event is February 22nd and 23rd, the entries will open on January 22nd.

When an individual is reserving an entry, they won't need to enter any dog information. The reservation will simply be under an individual's name. We do suggest that the reservation is for the owner of the dogs being entered, as there is some tax information that will be required but it doesn't necessarily have to be. If it's not the owner, it just means some work will need to be done on the back end. Having said that, obviously a handler's name doesn't need to match the name on the reservation.

Lastly, the host club will have the ability to reserve spots for hunting guides for each cast in advance of the event opening to the public. In the week before entries open, Allen or I will be in contact with the host club to help get those hunting guides entered. Obviously, not every club will fill those spots with hunting guides and whatever they don't use will become available when entries open to the public.

Refunds and Transferring Reservations

The entry will be paid in full when you pay for the entry online. Once you pay for the entry, there will be no

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refunds, unless the event ends up being cancelled, which we hope never happens. You can, however, sell or transfer the entry to someone else. That entire process is to be done between the buyer and the seller. There will need to be some form of proof of transfer at the club when confirming your entry if you have bought it from someone else.

Payouts

Prize payouts will be made to the first owner on the dog's record with a check after the event. If you look at the official rules, you'll see that it indicates this will happen within three weeks. In actuality, it will be much shorter than that. In most cases it will go out within a few days. That is just a safeguard that protects us in case something happened at the event, or in the days following.

Payouts are subject to any applicable IRS reporting and withholding requirements. IRS 1099 forms will be issued to prize winners. Having said that, before we can issue checks to the winners, it is required that we have an IRS W9 form on file for the first owner of the winning dogs. Again, the required information is captured in the online entry process. If the first owner isn't one that we captured information for, they would then need to fill out a physical form that the club will have to turn in to UKC.

Hunt Details

These UKC Pro Slams will be held using the full elimination format. By now, we are almost a year into this format being implemented for select events and everything is going great. So far, this format has been used at the Tournament of Champions Finals, the Grand 16 of Autumn Oaks, and the World Championship Finals. The feedback from the hunters has been overwhelmingly positive and I expect that to be the case in these Pro Slam events as well. If you aren't familiar with this format, I would take the time to read pages 87-88 of the newest Official Coonhound Rulebook before heading to the hunt. Two of the most prevalent features are plus points aren't required for advancement and if any cast gets down to one dog remaining, that dog is your winner, even without completing hunt time.

Like other slam events, all dogs will be drawn from the same pool regardless of their titles. Each individual event ad will give specific details on hunting time and about the judging situation. In most instances, hunting judges will be used in preliminary rounds with non-hunting judges being used in subsequent rounds. Splitting awards and placements is not an option in these events unless otherwise approved by UKC. That means you will more than likely be hunting it off. These hunts will be held using the Hunt Director format meaning your questions will go straight to a panel. All questions must be accompanied by a \$20 fee. If you would like to appeal the panel's decision,

you can do so immediately following their decision being rendered with an additional \$100 fee. Remember, if the call goes in your favor, the fees are refunded to you.

Championship Wins and Money Earned

A dog winning its cast in any round of a UKC Pro Slam will have that win count towards the dog's degree. To go ahead and answer your next question, these wins also count towards qualifying for the Tournament of Champions.

Additionally, UKC is now tracking money earned by hounds at the following events, the World Championship, Tournament of Champions, and UKC Pro Slam events. This covers the World Championship starting in 2019 when money was first awarded, and also the Tournament of Champions starting with the first year in 2021. That list lives on the same webpage as the other Pro Slam information, ukcdogs.com/proslam.

Scheduling Events

Two of UKC's main concerns with scheduling these events were:

1. They need to fill consistently.
2. The winners of the events need to get the attention they deserve. We felt that both of those could be achieved by keeping a limited schedule with events being spaced out and not competing with one another. As we work to complete the 2024 schedule, you will notice that. There is the opportunity for the program to grow in the coming years but 2024 is going to be pretty limited with around 10-12 events taking place across the country.

Formats

There are many possibilities for what these events can look like. As of this writing, and it could change by the time this is published, but four events have been scheduled. We have a 16-dog \$300 entry fee hunt in Tennessee, a 27-dog \$1,250 entry fee hunt in Missouri, a 16-dog \$500 entry fee hunt in Indiana, and a 27-dog \$750 entry fee hunt in Michigan scheduled and more in the works. It is going to be fun to see these events get scheduled and what the clubs decide to do. One thing I will promise, we will continue to push to optimize the payout for the hunters regardless of the number of dogs and entry fees.

ATTENTION!

The following person's Nite Hunt Director and Nite Hunt Judging privileges have been suspended until the date listed.

Justin Crockett • Senatobia, MS • May 1, 2024

Andrew Ratliff • Winchester, KY • January 1, 2025

Violations to these privileges should be reported to the United

Kennel Club.



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