

COONHOUND ADVISOR

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September will have come and gone by the time you read this magazine, meaning both Autumn Oaks and the World Championship are done, and we have crowned our 2021 champions. I sure hope that it is not the new regular to have to plan events with Covid variants and such hanging over your head, like a rain cloud ready to break loose at any moment. As of writing this, we are one week away from Autumn Oaks, and I am losing sleep at night worrying about a government mandate ruining the event. I keep having conversations with people about when things will get back to normal. I am starting to believe that we are going to have to come to grips with a new “normal”.

Getting away from the never-ending gloom and doom, let's talk coonhounds! One question we all see posted a lot on social media platforms is, “I am looking to get into coonhounds and competition, what's the best way to go about it?” Two quick things always come to mind, know your dog, and know the rules. It's easy to say that, I know, but how do you do that? Hunting your dog often and putting the dog and yourself into unique circumstances is a great way to become more familiar with your hound. If you have a dog you feel is competition ready, practice with buddies. Hunt with different hounds, set up scenarios, work on keeping scores, listen to differences in your dog's mouth on different tracks. A big difference I see in seasoned handlers and newer handlers is the depth of which they know their dogs. Being able to pick your dog's mouth out of a four-dog cast is easier said than done.

What's next then? Becoming familiar with the rules is imperative before competing. I don't mean that you need to be at Allen Gingerich's level out in the woods. That kind of expertise on the rules takes years of experience. It takes reading and re-reading the rulebook and these monthly advisor columns multiple times. At the same time, there is not enough reading in the world that can compare to firsthand experiences out in the woods seeing those rules be put to use. You will slowly become more familiar as you compete in casts, and let's be frank, you will take some lumps. In our sport, we call those lessons.

My best advice is to become active in the events before ever entering your dog. Become a member of your local club, be a part of those meetings. Come to the events and spectate on a few hunts. Sit back, pay close attention, and ask questions when the situation permits. A huge majority of coonhunters are willing to help. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there.

Licensed Officials Conduct

The advancement of social media platforms has taken the world by storm. Social media can be a useful tool when used properly. However, when used improperly, things can get out of hand in a hurry. Recently a situation came up

where a derogatory post had been made by an individual and we received a copy of that post in the mail. I want to preface this by saying that UKC has no authority to police a person's posts. I see posts daily that make me cringe. However, we do expect our licensed officials to conduct themselves in a way that represents not only themselves but also UKC in a positive light. Be cognizant of how you are representing yourself but also the folks affiliated with you.

Youth Events

It was just a couple months ago when I addressed filling out paperwork properly and since, there hasn't been much of an improvement with the paperwork for the Spotlight Series in our Youth events. Sometimes talking to clubs, I get the feeling that they are holding the YEP event just to give their club an extra event date. That's discouraging. Any Youth event should demand the effort and respect as any other event, if not more.

Event officials should be in place well ahead of time as the club knows they are going to need a licensed Master of Hounds and Bench Show Judge. That can be found in the rulebook. YEP class topics and activities should be well thought out and thought provoking for the youth. Make sure you teach them in a way that is sure to stick with them. Investing in the youth is as important now as it has ever been for our sport/lifestyle. The more time put into making a Youth event a great experience, the more likely it is that those young folks keep coming back for years to come.

Utilize the Rulebook

I want to take just a little bit of time to encourage anyone participating, hosting, or officiating UKC licensed events to take some time to become familiar with the Official Coonhound Rulebook. It never fails that each weekend I get multiple questions in my inboxes about not only rules but procedural processes. I don't mind it. It's my hope that every event is ran correctly and every ruling is right. I know that is a bit of a lofty goal but hey, we have to shoot for something.

The rulebook is the most beneficial tool for you. Of course, as I touched on in the introduction, entrants need to be familiar with rules before they ever enter the hunt or show. That is an obvious first step. But what about event officials and the host club? It is even more important for those folks to be familiar with the rulebook.

I'm not asking everyone to memorize the rulebook, but I think it would be worthwhile to at least read it over and know where to find what you are looking for. You have a slam event coming up? Flip the rulebook to page 89 and give it a quick glance before the event. Are you using the Hunt Director format? Page 63 my friend. You are about to attend Autumn Oaks? Give page 78 a quick look over in your free time. I'm not discouraging questions, but it is important to know that Allen and I are not always readily available to answer your questions the day of your event.

