

SPORTING GROUP



When asked what drew her to the Nederlandse Kooikerhondje, Sarah responds, “Everything about them!”

I’m from a large family in a small town in Massachusetts. All of my life we have had animals, and I knew ever since I was young that I wanted my life to in some way be connected to them. I was thinking about being a veterinarian for years, which led me to my amazing high school, which is where my interest of getting a dog to train was truly sparked. Now, just

one and a half years after getting my dog, I could not imagine a life without him. I would describe myself as completely dog-obsessed—and I think anyone who knows me would say the same!

Can you tell us about the high school you attend?

My high school is definitely not the conventional type people think of. Yes, it has all of the core academic classes—history, English, math, and science—but it also has an extensive vocational program. There are four categories to “major” in: animal science, plant science, environmental science, and agricultural mechanics. Within each major, there are different fields. Of course, I am an animal major—specifically, canine science. Every fourth day I get to bring my dog in for obedience and agility training, there is a full grooming shop where outside clients bring in their dogs for us to groom, and we even have a dog show fun match every winter and spring. The school is 45 minutes away from where I live, but distance means nothing when taken into account the amazing education I’ve been given. [Congratulations to Sarah for graduating last month!]

How long have you been interested in dogs?

I’ve loved them since I could walk and talk! In preschool, when the teacher asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I said I wanted to be a dog. I’m serious—it’s written down on

a piece of paper somewhere. I was convinced it could happen someday.

When did you become interested in the Nederlandse Kooikerhondje, and what drew you to the breed?

At my school, I trained a dog named Derby who I absolutely loved to work with. It was through training him that I began to want a dog of my own. So one day, I went home and created a spreadsheet. I wrote down every single AKC-recognized breed, and then wrote down every trait they had that would matter to me—energy, size, grooming requirements, trainability, and even how cute I thought they were, just to name a few. I must have researched the depths of the internet for four hours straight, but I was committed to finding the “perfect breed” for me. At the end, I was left with one really strange-sounding breed that matched with me on every level: the Nederlandse Kooikerhondje. So what drew me to the breed? Every single thing about them!

What has it been like getting Charlie and raising him? What is the story behind his name?

The night I first got Charlie, I could not stop thinking, “Is this real?” Each day I was so excited to wake up and hang out with him. Not much has changed. I still find myself looking over and wondering how I got so lucky. Raising him has been everything I hoped it would be and more. He is so incredi-

bly smart and always excited to learn—especially if there are treats involved. I have yet to find a trick he won’t learn.

As for his name, it’s a funny story. I have a cat named Prince Severus, after Severus Snape from Harry Potter. Prince is a seal point Siamese, so his points are nearly black—just like Severus Snape’s hair. I wanted to get an orange-red cat and have its name match Prince’s, so I settled on the name Charlie, as in Charlie Weasley, a redhead from the Harry Potter series. I kept the name in my head for years. Well, plans changed, and instead of getting a cat I got a dog. The dog still ended up being orange-red, though, so I decided to use the name anyway! And my last name is Brown, so Charlie’s full name is Charlie Brown, just like the famous cartoon character. I loved that coincidence and ended up using his full name as his registered name!

Do you have any special mentors in the dog world?

My biggest mentor in the dog world is a lovely lady who goes by the name of Jody Desroches. She took me under her wing and showed me the ropes of dog shows. She invited me to my first-ever dog show, helped me navigate Infodog, showed me an amazing training center where I still go for handling class, gave me my first-ever show lead, helped me learn foot trims, answered a million of my (probably annoying) questions, and way more

KOOIKERHONDJE/COURTESY SARAH BROWN

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that would take forever to list. I come from a family that is not dog-savvy in any way, so I was completely on my own in the show world. The task of figuring out what the heck I was supposed to do was almost too daunting to even try, but then she came and taught me pretty much everything I know. I owe so much of my success to her, because without her I probably wouldn't be showing today.

What was it like to show at the national specialty—and then win Best of Breed, and then show in the Sporting Group for the first time?

Before every dog show I attend, I always get nervous. That feeling has never seemed to go away, no matter how many I go to—but boy-oh-boy, was it intensified at the national! I woke up and my heart was already racing. I had to sit ringside two hours beforehand just to calm myself down. After Charlie had taken Winners Dog, though, all of my fear slipped away and I just had unbridled joy. I wasn't nervous at all anymore; I was just glad to be there, because I knew there was no chance Charlie would ever win Best of Breed against the amazing lineup of other Kooikers there. Then, against my wildest dreams, Charlie won Best of Breed. There is no other way to say it than seriously I could not believe it. I couldn't do much of anything besides bend down to pet Charlie and tell him, "You did it!"

The break from all of my nerves only lasted



Sarah says that after their win, "I couldn't do much of anything besides bend down to pet Charlie and tell him, 'You did it!'"

a short while, and then we went on to be in the Sporting Group for the first time ever. Luckily, I was blessed to have two amazing people helping me out along the way—Louise Brady and Marlene Valter. The regular group was terrifying, but Louise was able to get me

through it with a lot of advice and breath mints. Charlie didn't place, but I was just proud to be in the same group as a lot of amazing dogs that night. The Owner-Handled group was far more relaxed, and definitely not as scary—but at this point, both

Charlie and I were exhausted. I could tell that he just wanted to fall asleep right then and there, but the turkey treat I had in my hand was luckily more intriguing to him than a good nap. For one last time that night, he showed his little heart out—and he impressed me yet again when he placed fourth in the Owner-Handled Sporting Group!

What advice would you give to other young people who might be interested in doing events with their dogs?

Some advice that I was given by my mentor when I was just starting out has always stuck with me, and probably always will. I went to handling class for the first time, and quickly got frustrated when Charlie wouldn't do what I was asking him to. She told me something that I will never forget: Don't be so serious, just have fun! It seems simple, but never forget it. Remember that your dog is just as new to this as you are, and getting annoyed won't help. If you make it fun, the dog will like doing his "job," and you will love doing it with them! If all you're doing is getting upset, your dog will hate doing it, and so will you. Secondly, dive in and go for it! It seems like such a daunting task when you're first starting out, but it is so worth it to give it a try. If I had never given it a shot, I would never be who I am today (which is somebody entirely obsessed with dog shows). Whatever type of dog sport it may be, just get out there! Who

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