



News Release

For Immediate Release

2026 AKC NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP **JUDGING PANEL NOW AVAILABLE**

NEW YORK, NY (May 14, 2026) – The American Kennel Club (AKC®) today announced the judging panel for the 26th AKC National Championship Presented by Royal Canin, to be held **December 12–13, 2026**, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida. The Club also released the judging panel for the **AKC National Owner-Handled Series (NOHS) Finals**. The panel for the **AKC Royal Canin National All-Breed Puppy and Junior Stakes** will be announced at a later date.

The 2026 event will showcase top canine athletes from across the country and feature popular competitions, including Best Bred-by-Exhibitor. The championship will again be held alongside the AKC Agility Invitational, Obedience Classic, and AKC RACH Invitational. Junior competitions in Conformation, Agility, Obedience, and Rally will also be offered, along with the North America Diving Dogs (NADD) Santa Splash.

Dr. Thomas M. Davies of Brimfield, Massachusetts, will serve as Best in Show judge. **Mr. David J. Kirkland** of Sanford, North Carolina, will judge Best Bred-by-Exhibitor in Show.

“The AKC National Championship continues to bring together the best of the best—exceptional canine athletes, exhibitors, and judges,” said Gina M. DiNardo, AKC President and Show Chair. “We are honored to have AKC Chairman Dr. Thomas Davies and Mr. David Kirkland leading the 26th show. It promises to be an exciting and highly competitive event.”

Judges for the seven variety groups and the Miscellaneous Classes at the AKC National Championship are:

SPORTING – Frank Kane

HOUND – Dennis Sprung

WORKING – Robin Stansell

TERRIER – Kathleen Ferris

TOY – David Fitzpatrick

NON-SPORTING – Grace Fritz

HERDING – James Noe

MISCELLANEOUS CLASS – Frank Kane

BEST JUNIOR HANDLER – Mary Dukes

JUNIOR PRELIMS – Adam Peterson and Caroline Clegg

Judges for the seven Bred-by-Exhibitor variety groups are:

SPORTING – Debbie Campbell-Freeman

HOUND – Jon Cole

WORKING – Dr. Steven Keating

TERRIER – Dr. Valeria Rickard

TOY – Angela Pickett

NON-SPORTING – Harold “Red” Tatro III

HERDING – Linda Clark

The **AKC NOHS Finals** will be held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida as a part of the AKC National Championship Presented by Royal Canin on Saturday, December 12 and Sunday, December 13, 2026.

Best in Show for the NOHS Finals will be judged by **Mr. Daniel J. Smyth, Esq.** of Bermuda Dunes, CA on Sunday evening.

Judges for the seven variety groups at the AKC NOHS Finals are:

SPORTING BREEDS AND GROUP: Sharon Ann Redmer

HOUND BREEDS AND GROUP: Bryan Martin

WORKING BREEDS AND GROUP: Chris Ann Moore

TERRIER BREEDS AND GROUP: Todd Clyde

TOY BREEDS AND GROUP: Debra Ferguson-Jones

NON-SPORTING BREEDS AND GROUP: Todd Clyde

HERDING BREEDS AND GROUP: Sharon Ann Redmer

BREED JUDGING FOR THE AKC NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

SPORTING GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
David Kittredge	Barbet, Spaniel (Cocker – all varieties), Spaniel (English Cocker), Spaniel (Field)
Jamie Hubbard	Bracco Italiano, Lagotto Romagnolo, Nederlandse Kooikerhondje, Spaniel (American Water), Spaniel (Clumber)
Corinne Miklos	Brittany, Pointer (German Wirehaired), Retriever (Curly-Coated), Weimaraner, Wirehaired Pointing Griffon
Jon Cole	Pointer, Pointer (German Shorthaired), Retriever (Chesapeake Bay), Retriever (Nova Scotia Duck Tolling)
Rosalind Kramer	Retriever (Flat-Coated), Setter (English), Setter (Irish)
Paula Nykiel	Retriever (Golden), Spinone Italiano, Wirehaired Vizsla
Carl Gene Liepmann	Retriever (Labrador)

Linda Clark	Setter (Gordon), Setter (Irish Red & White), Spaniel (Boykin), Spaniel (English Springer), Spaniel (Irish Water)
Ann Ingram	Spaniel (Sussex), Spaniel (Welsh Springer)
Phoebe Jordan Booth	Vizsla
HOUND GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
Patricia Clark	Afghan Hound, Greyhound, Scottish Deerhound
Pamela Lambie	American English Coonhound, American Foxhound, Basset Fauve de Bretagne, Black and Tan Coonhound, English Foxhound, Harrier, Otterhound, Pharaoh Hound, Plott Hound, Redbone Coonhound, Treeing Walker Coonhound
Dr. Steven Keating	Azawakh, Bluetick Coonhound
Rosalind Kramer	Basenji, Bloodhound, Cirneco dell'Etna, Grand Basset Griffon Vendéen, Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen
Ryan Horvath	Basset Hound, Dachshund (all varieties), Portuguese Podengo Pequeno
Harold "Red" Tatro III	Beagle (both varieties), Rhodesian Ridgeback
Mary Dukes	Borzoi, Ibizan Hound, Irish Wolfhound, Norwegian Elkhound, Saluki, Sloughi
Phoebe Jordan Booth	Whippet
WORKING GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
Dr. Joyce Dandridge	Akita, Alaskan Malamute, Great Dane, Kuvasz
Paula Nykiel	Anatolian Shepherd Dog, Bernese Mountain Dog, Black Russian Terrier, Boerboel, Boxer, Chinook, Danish-Swedish Farmdog, German Pinscher
Pamela Lambie	Bullmastiff, Dogo Argentino, Dogue de Bordeaux, Mastiff
Jon Cole	Cane Corso, Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, Komondor, Neapolitan Mastiff
Carolyn Herbel	Doberman Pinscher, Portuguese Water Dog, Rottweiler, St. Bernard, Standard Schnauzer
Ann Ingram	Giant Schnauzer, Great Pyrenees, Leonberger
Debbie Campbell-Freeman	Newfoundland
Clay Coady	Samoyed, Siberian Husky, Tibetan Mastiff
TERRIER GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
April Clyde	Airedale Terrier, American Hairless Terrier, Cesky Terrier, Dandie Dinmont Terrier, Irish Terrier, Lakeland Terrier, Rat Terrier, Welsh Terrier

Jamie Hubbard	American Staffordshire Terrier, Glen of Imaal Terrier, Parson Russell Terrier, Russell Terrier, Sealyham Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier
Richard Powell	Australian Terrier, Fox Terrier (Smooth), Fox Terrier (Wire), Kerry Blue Terrier, Standard Manchester Terrier, Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier
Kathi Brown	Bedlington Terrier, Cairn Terrier, Scottish Terrier, Skye Terrier, West Highland White Terrier
Debbie Campbell-Freeman	Border Terrier, Bull Terrier (both varieties), Miniature Bull Terrier, Miniature Schnauzer
Ann Ingram	Norfolk Terrier
Desmond Murphy	Norwich Terrier, Teddy Roosevelt Terrier
TOY GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
Patricia Proctor	Affenpinscher, Brussels Griffon, Japanese Chin, Papillon
Dr. Valeria Rickard	Biewer Terrier, English Toy Spaniel (all varieties), Russian Toy, Russian Tsvetnaya Bolonka, Silky Terrier
Richard Powell	Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Maltese, Toy Manchester Terrier
Joe Walton	Chihuahua (both varieties), Shih Tzu
Margaret Reed	Chinese Crested, Italian Greyhound, Toy Fox Terrier
George Milutinovich	Havanese, Miniature Pinscher, Pug, Yorkshire Terrier
Clay Coady	Pekingese, Poodle (Toy)
Fred Bassett	Pomeranian
NON-SPORTING GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
Angela Pickett	American Eskimo Dog, Coton de Tulear, Finnish Spitz, Lhasa Apso, Löwchen, Norwegian Lundehund, Shiba Inu, Tibetan Spaniel
Fred Bassett	Bichon Frise, Schipperke, Xoloitzcuintli
Debbie Campbell-Freeman	Boston Terrier, Chinese Shar Pei, Chow Chow, Keeshond, Tibetan Terrier
Phoebe Jordan Booth	Bulldog
Frank Kane	Dalmatian, French Bulldog
Clay Coady	Poodle (Miniature & Standard)
HERDING GROUP	BREED ASSIGNMENTS
Amy Gau	Australian Cattle Dog, Bergamasco, Border Collie, Lancashire Heeler, Norwegian Buhund
Susan Landry-Whiticar	Australian Shepherd
Frank Kane	Bearded Collie, Pembroke Welsh Corgi, Spanish Water Dog

Debbie Melgreen	Beauceron, Berger Picard, Entlebucher Mountain Dog, Finnish Lapphund, Icelandic Sheepdog, Miniature American Shepherd, Shetland Sheepdog, Swedish Vallhund
Fred Bassett	Belgian Laekenois, Belgian Malinois, Belgian Sheepdog, Belgian Tervuren
Clay Coady	Bouvier des Flandres, German Shepherd Dog
Thomas Coen	Briard, Canaan Dog, Collie (both varieties), Puli, Pumi
Ann Ingram	Cardigan Welsh Corgi, Mudi
Jon Cole	Old English Sheepdog, Polish Lowland Sheepdog, Pyrenean Shepherd

*Panel subject to final approval.

About Best in Show judge Dr. Thomas Davies: Dr. Thomas M. Davies, of Brimfield, Massachusetts, became heavily involved in the world of purebred dogs after his college graduation. He is currently serving as Chairman of the AKC's Board of Directors since 2020 and has served on AKC's Board of Directors for many years, having held the position of Vice Chairman from 2009 -2012 and again from 2017- March 2019. He has served on numerous AKC related boards and committees, including the Chairman's Committee on the Judging Approval Process, Public Relations Committee, the Events and Clubs Committee and the Breeders Committee.

Dr. Davies became president of the Bearded Collie Club of America and oversaw its acceptance into the AKC Stud Book. He is an honorary lifetime member of that club and is the author of the Bearded Collie standard. Dr. Davies has been extensively involved with Old English Sheepdogs, Bearded Collies, Siberian Huskies, Belgian Sheepdogs and Tervuren, Beagles and Xoloitzcuintli.

He and his wife, Roberta, have bred and finished numerous champions in many of their breeds. Dr. Davies judges Best in Show, Junior Showmanship, the Herding Group and 11 Working breeds. He has served as president and show chairman of the Springfield Kennel Club and has been the club's AKC Delegate for more than 50 years. He is the longtime show chair for the Springfield Kennel Club and previously for the country's first working group club, the Connecticut River Working Group Association, for which he is vice-president. Dr. Davies is retired after more than 30 years in various areas of scientific research, and product and market development.

About Best Bred-By-Exhibitor judge Mr. David Kirkland: David J. Kirkland of Sanford, NC attended his first dog show in 1973. Starting in Obedience, Mr. Kirkland thereafter acquired his first show dog, a Miniature Schnauzer. He has bred, owned and handled many to championship titles including Group and National Specialty winners. In 1994, Mr. Kirkland acquired his first Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. His love affair with the breed continues to the present. Mr. Kirkland has also owned and bred multiple champions in Japanese Chin and Tibetan Spaniels.

Mr. Kirkland became an AKC judge in 1995 and currently judges BIS, Junior Showmanship, the Working Group Schnauzers, the Hound, Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding Groups. He has judged at the AKC National Championship show multiple times including judging a Group twice.

During his tenure in the dog fancy, Mr. Kirkland has enjoyed serving as an Officer, Board Member, Show Chairman and JEC Chairman for several all-breed and specialty clubs.

After 27 years, he retired from GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals. He shares his life with his partner Stephen and spends his time judging dog shows worldwide and working in the music ministry at his church.

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

Founded in 1884, the American Kennel Club is a not-for-profit organization which maintains the largest registry of purebred dogs in the world and oversees the sport of dogs in the United States. The AKC is dedicated to upholding the integrity of its registry, promoting the sport of purebred dogs and breeding for type and function. Along with its more than 4,900 licensed and member clubs and its affiliated organizations, the AKC advocates for the purebred dog as a family companion, advances canine health and well-being, works to protect the rights of all dog owners and promotes responsible dog ownership. More than 28,000 competitions for AKC-registered purebred and mixed breed dogs are held under AKC rules and regulations each year including conformation, agility, obedience, rally, tracking, herding, lure coursing, coonhound events, scent work, hunt tests, field and earthdog tests.

Affiliate AKC organizations include the AKC Humane Fund, AKC Canine Health Foundation, AKC Reunite, the AKC Museum of the Dog, and the AKC Purebred Preservation Bank. For more information, visit www.akc.org.

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About ROYAL CANIN®

ROYAL CANIN® is part of the Royal Canin Division in the Mars, Incorporated group, and a global leader in Health Through Nutrition for cats and dogs fulfilling its Purpose: A BETTER WORLD FOR PETS. Founded in 1968 by French veterinarian, Dr. Jean Cathary, ROYAL CANIN® designs precise, science-based nutrition for cats and dogs available at pet specialty retailers and veterinary practices worldwide.

Over the years, ROYAL CANIN® has pushed the limits of nutrition and knowledge in partnership with pet professionals, including breeders and veterinarians. Its unique business approach puts the nutritional requirements of cats and dogs at the heart of innovation. Pet's age, lifestyle, size, breed, and sensitivities are studied through science and observation to produce diets that meet their specific needs.

ROYAL CANIN® generates value not only for pets, but also for people and the planet. This means being mutually beneficial to the ecosystem, empowering Associates, building enduring relationships with stakeholders, and always thinking about how to ensure a viable future for generations to come.

To learn more about ROYAL CANIN®, visit www.royalcanin.com and follow us on Instagram at @royalcaninus.

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