

SPEECH BY MR. HIRAIZUMI

A short, yet, very informative talk on the development of the Akita since the establishment of Akiho was given by the official judge, Mr. Hiraizumi, at a pot luck dinner held in connection with the Nisei Week Akita Show of 1970. Mr. Hiraizumi's knowledge of the Akitainu dates back to early childhood when dog fighting was popular during the Meiji Era. He is one of two active members of Akiho having any knowledge of the Akita before the Second World War period. His father was the second Chairman of Akiho and remained so for seventeen years. Mr. Hiraizumi has been a judge and officer of Akiho since 1949 and became Vice-Chairman in 1966. As of this year, he became the Head Judge of Akiho as a result of an amendment in the By-Laws designating that a member cannot hold two offices concurrently.

According to Mr. Hiraizumi, the first Akitainu on record which is pre-Akiho, dates back to the latter part of the Meiji Era over sixty years ago. They were used as guard dogs or for dog fighting which was popular at that time. Cross breeding the Akitainu with other breeds such as the Tosainu brought about the movement for the preservation of the Akitainu. From this movement resulted the establishment of Akiho in 1927 when Mr. Izumi became its first Chairman. Because of the dog fighting era, there were many sizes and types of Akitas. This led to the desire for the standardization of the Akitainu. Following the designation of the Akita as a national monument in 1931, the first Akita dog standard was adopted by Akiho in 1937. Akita shows and research programs were conducted to improve the breed. During this time, Japan began extending its empire and eventually became involved in World War II. Lack of food brought breeding of Akitas almost to a halt. Individuals who kept Akitas were even labeled an enemy of the State for wasting food.

After the War, the reestablishment of breeding was aided through the G.I.'s interested in the Akita. Because of the lack of dogs, sixteen in Odate City for example, the breeding program was basically concerned with increasing the number of Akitas rather than in quality. Therefore, out of necessity, dogs lacking in quality were bred together producing more dogs with undesirable traits. Kongo, produced from Akitas owned by Mr. Hiraizumi was a result of such breeding. He was large, and lacked not only in general appearance but also possessed undesirable structural qualities. The condition of the coat as well as the "Kurogoma" coloring was unbecoming to an Akita. The skin on the face was loose causing wrinkles and the bone structure was such that it created weak joints in the hind quarter. Despite these shortcomings, Kongo gained much popularity in Tokyo, where he was raised. This popularity was the direct result of the desire to produce large, strong fighting Akitas.

In order to correct the shortcomings of Kongo, the Akagoma colored Goromaru line of Akitas were used heavily for breeding. During this period, people felt that an Akita had to be Akagoma in color in order to win a major award. While people, in general, showed preferences for a particular color during a given period, there was, and still is, no color preference as such. The Akagoma Akitas produced Akitas with a tight skin and a better over-all structure than the Kurogoma, thus, concealing the shortcomings of the kurogoma. Because of this, they were used heavily as stud dogs. In other words, they won prizes not because they were Akagoma, but because they had a better over-all structure, stronger joints, and tighter skin.

Following the Akagoma period, the brindle Akitas became popular. One of the more important brindles was Tamakumo-go. The brindle Akitas usually produced an excellent coat condition. The skin was tight and they had an especially good jowl. Tamakumo was used heavily as a stud not for his brindle coloring but for producing the desired qualities in his offsprings.

As Akitas became more available, preservation of the true Japanese type dog was once again emphasized. In order to breed the desirable qualities, size has been sacrificed possibly as a result of a movement to swing away from the Kongo line of Akitas. The Akitas that are winning in the shows today represent the above noted trend. However, they are not necessarily smaller Akitas. What has actually happened is that some dogs appear weak because of their small bone structure. Currently it appears that the pendulum is beginning to swing towards a sturdier dog.

The Akitainu was introduced to the United States at the end of the war some twenty years ago by the returning G.I.'s. Contact was not made with Japan or the United States until about five years ago through Dr. Abe and Dr. Ishiguro. The condition and quality of our dogs were not known prior to this time. When Dr Ogasawara

came as the official judge of the Nisei Week Akita Show last year, decisive steps were taken to cement relationships with the two countries and this Akiho branch resulted from the efforts.

(This is a summary of Mr. Hiraizumi's speech which was presented on August 14, 1970.)

THE JUDGE'S EVALUATION

The knowledge gained from the 1970 Nisei Week Akita Show Evaluation Meeting proved to be both valuable and informative. The evening began with comments on the Akita Show and the general condition of our dogs. Slides taken at the 58th Annual Headquarters Show accompanied by a critical analysis of the individual dogs were also presented by Mr. Hiraizumi at the meeting. The showing of these slides were most enlightening in that vague written and verbal descriptions, such as the proper size, shape and angulation of ears, were clarified visually. An interesting point which merits mentioning is that if these slides were shown to an audience in Japan, no one, including the Judge, would dare to make any analytical comments concerning the qualities of the various dog.

True to Dr. Ogasawara's reports, Mr. Hiraizumi found the Akitas in the U.S. to be twenty years behind. Although the winners of our show have the basic traits as those in Japan, it should not be implied that they will be winners in that country. However, it is possible to place in Branch shows though not in Headquarter Shows.

At the conclusion of the Akita Show, it was quite evident that the Kongo line was strongly bred in our dogs. The Kongo line

is characterized by the following traits. The coat is lacking in brilliance and distinctness in color. The facial traits are generally sloppy with loose jowls, wrinkles on the forehead and improperly shaped eyes. Body structure includes loose skin, weak hind quarters, a swayed rather than a straight back and a tail that is not wound tightly. This line of Akitainu are rather large and must be given a rigid exercise program in order to maintain proper conditioning. Needless to say, there are desirable traits within the Kongo line. However, a program, possibly one similar to that used in Japan after the war, is needed, to breed out the undesirable qualities within our dogs. To correct the kurogoma coloring of the Kongo line, the Goromaru line (akagoma), and later, the brindle colored Akitainu were bred into this line.

Also present among our dogs was a small sample of a Post World War line of Akitainu. These large sized Akitas, having undesirable traits, were carried over to the U.S. and has prevailed in our dogs.

In discussing the condition of our Akitas, Mr. Hiraizumi made the following general comments. One major fault was in the color and condition of the coat. For balance, a sturdy bone structure must be accompanied by a rich coat of proper length. The coat of our dogs were basically short which was especially noticed in the tail. The Kongo type, kurogoma coloring did not predominate as was anticipated. Although he felt there were not enough white Akitas, he was happy to see the large number of red and brindle colored dogs. However, the red coloring lacked in richness or brilliance (the desired tone was shown in the slides). The black mask is also undesirable as compared to the white face or mask. In general, here and in Japan, the brindles possessed the better traits. Though our brindles are not of equal quality as those in Japan, they were found to have good body structure and balance. The one drawback in the brindle is the difficulty to produce good facial traits. A second fault was a general weakness in bone structure especially in the joints and hind quarters. Lack of exercise or heredity may have caused this problem. A tail that was not tightly wound was a third major fault. This quality is most important in the male for it is a major factor in depicting his strength and masculinity.

Mr. Hiraizumi explained his method of judging before pointing out specific faults in the winners of our show. Just as we judge people on first impressions according to dress, speech, and general carriage, so a judge makes his judgment on first impressions which is color and condition of coats. This is the first item that is taken into consideration. If the color and condition of the coat is good, then he will continue with the over-all structure of the dog, followed by the finer details such as shape of eyes, ears, nose and mouth. The end result being the selection of a dog with the best qualities. Because color and condition of coat is a trait which is most eye-catching, it would appear to be a major factor in the selection of winners. However, it must be remembered that this is only one item in a long list of traits which is taken into consideration, and is used as a starting point only because of its eye-catching quality. Generally speaking, the over-all structure is taken into consideration followed by an individual study of its parts.

In conclusion, the evaluation given by Mr. Hiraizumi has pointed out that the Akitainu in the United States are twenty years behind and have the Kongo line strongly bred in them. Other than the traits that are characteristic of this line, our dogs were found to have three major faults. The coat was short and lacked in color and condition, there was general weakness in bone structure especially in the joints and hind quarters, and the tail was not wound tightly. They also lacked in good muscle tone from lack of exercise. Thus, the road to improvement is a long, yet promising one. The first steps towards improvement has been taken with the formation of this Akiho Branch, and the evaluation of our dogs by a qualified judge from Japan. With the continued efforts between the U.S. and Japan, further improvements will continue with the breed.

(Presented by Mr. Hiraizumi on August 21, 1970.)

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<http://www.northlandakitas.com>

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