

Brittanys

Brittany or Épagneul Breton?

They are not really in opposition to each other, but definitely different. Why? Because of World War II.

In the early 1930s the épagneul Breton arrived in this country and was called (in direct translation) the Brittany Spaniel. Our standard was also directly translated from the French, including the disqualification for black.

During the war, French breeding programs were almost nonexistent. Afterward, due to the small gene pool, crosses were made to several varieties of braques and to épagnuels from different regions of France. These crosses let in the black gene and the French standard was changed to allow it. But we had the original Brittany and felt no need to bastardize it. Thus began an ever-widening gap.

The other day, I saw a French video on the épagneul Breton. In look and performance I could hardly tell that these dogs are supposed to be the same as our Brittany.

The Federation Cynologique International (FCI) is not a registry devoted to protecting breeds, it's merely a show-sponsoring organization. The standard of a breed's country of origin must be used at shows held under FCI rules. Country of origin is of great importance in understanding a breed, just as original function dictates in large part the breed's character, but country of development is often more important in evaluating today's phenotype.

According to the FCI, if the French decide Brittanys may be black and must be 24 inches tall, everyone everywhere must follow suit. This is an obvious reason the AKC should not become associated with the FCI.

The French developed a lovely, useful breed, for which we are grateful. It is this original we must protect, in its original state. To allow black is to accept mongrelization of our pure breed. Perhaps the French had to do so because they didn't have enough orange or liver dogs to preserve the breed, but happily this reasoning doesn't apply to us. Let's preserve what, -we inherited as we inherited it. We've grown to know, admire and love the Brittany as it is in this country. Let's keep it forever this way.

— Dorothy Macdonald, P.O. Box 332, Carmel Valley, CA 93924