IN THE BEGINNING - - -

The American Sighthound Field Association (ASFA) began running hounds in lure coursing competitions in 1972 but the basenji breed was not admitted to ASFA until late in 1979. Early basenji breeders and fanciers began supporting basenjis in coursing in several areas of the country.

IN THE MID-WEST

Among the earliest supporters of the sport were Mervin and Wilma Bauer (Basenjis of Wilmer). Their first taste of running basenjis came at a St. Louis Sighthound Club match that held Whippet Races. The basenjis were allowed to run on an ‘L’ shaped course without the use of starting boxes. The Bauers’ basenjis enjoyed it so much that Wilma got other basenji people to try it.

The Bauers learned that the Central Illinois Sighthound Club, Inc. (CISCI) was being formed. Merv and Wilma worked to help get that club started and encouraged others to join. CISCI held their fun trials and were accepted by ASFA around 1974.

The Bauers attended all the area trials to learn everything they could about the sport. Merv built his own equipment to run trials and loaned it anyone who needed it. The Bauers were involved in lure coursing long before basenjis were recognized.

In that area at that time, most courses were ‘drag’ as opposed to the ‘continuous loop’ that is common today. For a drag course, the string is taken up on the take-up wheel and has to be re-strung after each course. A dirt bike was used to make this operation go faster. Operating a drag line takes a lot more talent than running a continuous loop, because of backlash. A lot of time can be spent untangling string. The advantages of the drag are that the string is not always all over the field for hounds to trip over or get tangled in, and it also prevents hounds from forming the bad habit of following the line.

Merv kept a thirty acre field mowed, so that it could be used for coursing. He held lure coursing practice on this field every Monday night for all who wished to participate. ASFA’s first International Invitational (II) was held at DuQuoin State Fairground in Carbondale, IL in 1978, and the Bauers were on hand to help. After several machines burned up, the Bauers’ machine was used to finish the competition. The second day brought rain, and the judges used the Bauers’ portable judges’ stand while the Field Trial Secretaries took refuge in the Bauers’ motorhome.

After the trial, the record keepers asked where Marv’s and Wilma’s dogs were and learned that they had been sitting on some while others watched from over the driver’s compartments. The record keepers wanted to see the basenjis run and asked the Bauers to run three of them. The basenjis ran and worked together so well that it would have been hard to judge them. It was suggested that the Bauers come to the next ASFA Convention and request that basenjis be accepted. Wilma thanked them but said she would prefer to wait for the Basenji Club Of America to ask for acceptance.

IN THE MID-ATLANTIC

Meanwhile, in the eastern part of the country, another basenji fancier had discovered lure coursing. Mary Lou Kenworthy (Kenset) had followed the sport since trials started in the east. She knew many sighthound owners from showing and obedience training and soon found herself on the field with an Ibizan hound. Several clubs held their trials at Dean Wright’s Traybeau Kennel outside of Hanover, PA. While at one of these trials, Mary Lou asked Dean if he thought basenjis would run the lure. Dean said that a basenji had been to one of their practices and ran very well. He invited Mary Lou to bring her basenjis to the next practice. She did, they ran, and a new love was born.

Mary Lou was then a member of the Mid-Atlantic Basenji Club, and she arranged for Gary Forrester to come to a meeting and tell the members about the sport. Gary served ASFA in the capacities of 2nd Vice President, 1st Vice President, President and Immediate Past President from 1978 to 1990, when he was appointed ASFA’s first Field Representative. His enthusiasm for the sport was contagious, and MABC members were anxious to try coursing with their basenjis.

Soon, the MABC members were holding basenji practices in a pasture belonging to Allen and Iris Craven (Kasai) in Mt. Airy, MD. Basenji owners are as determined and creative as their dogs, and soon a drag lure machine was developed using an old bicycle. The string was taken up on the back wheel, while the pedals were turned by hand. The basenjis ran enthusiastically across a flat area and then up a hill to the bicycle, where the next person was waiting to take the lure and their basenji back down to the start. Many people with tired arms could attest to just how fast and often basenjis could run. From this humble beginning, the MABC went on to become an ASFA-recognized club.

Some of the members who wished to pursue the sport began going to the practices at the Traybeau field near Hanover, PA. When Dean Wright saw how well the basenjis ran, he suggested that the breed seek recognition by ASFA.

Mary Lou Kenworthy belonged to several coursing clubs while living in Pennsylvania. She acquired her own coursing equipment (continuous loop) and helped train other people’s basenjis as well as her own. After moving to Georgia, she helped train basenjis there and started Coursing Hounds of the South East (CHASE), the first all-breed coursing club in the area.

IN THE WEST

In the west, the recognition of basenjis by ASFA sparked the interest of another basenji breeder, Jo Anne Fimlaid. Jo Anne bought the necessary equipment to set up drag courses and held practices for all who wanted to try running their hounds. There were all too few all-breed practices at this time - - a problem that is still true today.

Jo Anne called the editor of the Daily Pilot in Orange County, and they did a feature with photos about basenjis running the lure. During the 1980’s the Los Angeles Times also did a feature write-
up on lure coursing, and that brought the sport to the attention of more people.

Jo Anne acquainted other basenji owners with the sport by taking her equipment to a Basenji Club Of Southern California match. Some of the experienced basenjis ran for exhibition, and then there was a practice for anyone who wanted to try coursing. The BCOSC eventually affiliated with ASFA in 1982, and Jo Anne was its first delegate to ASFA. She also served on the ASFA Logo Committee.

Jo Anne realized the importance of practices to get the basenjis totally on the lure. The many practices held resulted in clean-running basenjis, so there was less animosity toward the breed in the west than there was in some other parts of the country. Jo Anne describes the way she feels about lure coursing as follows:

"Seeing the instincts come alive in the basenjis on the field was overwhelming. A few times it even brought me to tears - visibly seeing the natural ability coming to the forefront in a dog. It was gratifying to see the dogs do what they were bred for so many years ago and they just enjoyed it."

BASENJIS APPLY FOR ACCEPTANCE BY ASFA

In the early days of ASFA, all-breed coursing clubs could not hold single-breed specialty trials. In anticipation of being admitted to ASFA, basenji owners prepared for specialty trials by forming a basenji coursing club, the Central States Basenji Lure Coursing Club. The Bowers were instrumental in forming CSBLC and getting both ASFA and BCOA recognition for the club.

The topic of basenjis applying for acceptance by ASFA was first brought up at the 1977 BCOA Annual Meeting, held in Chicago, IL. Wilma and Mervin Bauer laid out all the reasons why it would be good for the breed to do lure coursing. A standing committee on Coursing and Racing was appointed, consisting of Rudy Mollner and Earl Evans. The pros and cons were debated in the following months. Some feared that lure coursing might change the structure of the basenji from the multi-purpose dog he is meant to be into a sighthound.

At the 1978 BCOA Annual Meeting, a motion was made and passed to send a letter to ASFA requesting recognition of the basenji breed for lure coursing.

The ASFA convention held on April 22, 1979 in St. Louis, MO was attended by the following basenji people: David Sorenson, Marilyn Stefanec, and Merv and Wilma Bauer. Apparently, the delegates had not previous been informed that there was to be a vote on accepting the basenjis, and they had come to the convention completely unprepared to vote on this issue. David Sorenson and Merv Bauer fielded questions from the floor about the breed. Ultimately, the decision was made that the matter should be decided by a mail vote of all the club delegates and that the basenji could be accepted by a 2/3 majority vote.

By fall of that year, the BCOA received the news that basenjis could compete and earn titles in ASFA trials. While this was welcome news to basenji owners, not all coursing people were pleased with the decision, and basenjis in ASFA were almost short lived.

THE FIRST DECADE (1980'S) BROUGHT THE FIRST TITLES

The acceptance into ASFA was followed by basenjis coursing all over the nation. Many of the early coursers came from the Mid-Atlantic Basenji Club in the eastern part of the country. The first basenji to earn a Field Championship was Bubalak’s Divine Bette, owned by Mary DeWhitt. Other basenjis quickly followed with titles earned.

Kenset Elusive Butterfly LCM, bred/owned by Mary Lou Kenworthy, was one of the first LCMs in the east. In 1985, Mary Lou’s Ch. Kenset Wayfarer From Asbah, F. Ch. became the first, and so far the only, field-titled basenji to win Best Of Breed in conformation at a BCOA National Specialty. ‘Prune’ was showing and coursing at the same time, proving that basenjis could do well in both arenas. Further proof lies in the fact that of all the sighthound breeds in the 1980’s, basenjis had the highest percentage of show champions competing in lure coursing.

The first ever basenji LCM was earned in the central part of the country by Dokhue’s Enul Lovins, owned by David Sorenson. In the west, Ch. Fimlaid’s Re Harakhy was the first of Jo Anne Fimlaid’s (Jamila) basenjis to earn an early title in California. Her Ch. Jamila’s Azizi Re, F. Ch. won the Continuum at the ‘Turkey Run’ in 1984. The Turkey Run is one of the oldest and most prestigious of the Special Events in lure coursing. The Continuum was designed to identify and recognize the most consistent performing dog in each breed, based on their multiple days’ performance. ‘Zizi,’ a Special in the show ring at the time, was one of the first basenjis to prove that a basenji could be successful in both showing and coursing.

Also in California, Anne Ductor - Humphreys (Dharian) finished her first of many Field Champions, Dharian Fancy Dancer of Woz.

In Colorado, J. Dorene Jones (Blue Rockies) entered the coursing scene, and among her title winners was Ch. Tarawind’s Blue Rockies Joy, who quickly earned her LCM, and was the top courser of her day.

In the south-central part of the nation, Russ and Vickie Jacobs (Cynosure) joined the sport in the late ‘80s. They started off by putting LCMs on their Ch. Jerlin’s Reckless Ricochet CDX and Ch. Reveille Early Light TD. These two basenjis were followed by many home-bred Cynosure coursers in the following decade.

The Jacobs were founding members of the Heartland Coursing Association and have remained active in the sport. They have held various offices in ASFA, and at this time, Vickie chairs the Membership committee and Russ is First Vice President. Russ is also the BCOA delegate to ASFA.

BASENJIS NEARLY BANNED FROM ASFA

Thus the stage was set for basenji lure coursing in the 1980’s but all did not go smoothly for the breed in that decade. There was a faction of the coursing population, originating in Region 8, that wanted to have basenjis removed from lure coursing. Some sighthound purists felt that since basenjis were not sight specialists but multi-purpose dogs they should not be considered as sighthounds. This was the reasoning they used when they presented their request to have basenjis removed from the ASFA list of sighthounds. However, there were other underlying motives as well.

At the time, there were some basenjis being cours ed that did not help the breed’s reputation. Not only were they a threat to other basenjis on the field, but they presented a problem to other breeds and their handlers in Best In Field runs. Eventually, most of them were disqualified, but some basenjis, owned by lure coursing judges, appeared to get away with more than other competitors, and consequently, those dogs stayed around longer. The owner of one particularly bad male finally started to run him
muzzled. The muzzle was not added as a consideration for the competition, but was worn so that the owner would not get bitten when he picked up his basenji at the end of the course. This kind of behavior discouraged many owners who would have liked to try coursing and caused others to have to make post entries, because they waited to see if any of the aggressive basenjis showed up. The poor sportsmanship of putting an aggressive or untrained basenji on the field was only practiced by a small segment of basenji owners but it did not reflect well on the breed.

The 1987 ACOD, held in New Orleans, LA, drew a lot of people because of one item on the agenda. A rule change was proposed that would remove basenjis from the list of breeds recognized by ASFA. Fortunately, for the breed, the motion was defeated.

There were many good, clean-running basenjis throughout the country that had their supporters and many basenji people belonged to, and worked for, a variety of lure coursing clubs. Since the basenji can follow by sight and does have the double suspension gallop employed by sighthounds, they are considered to be sighthounds, even though they do have other talents.

**OPINIONS ABOUT BASENJIS COURSING VARIED**

Following is Betz Leone’s unbiased view of basenjis as written in fall 1983 to Jo Anne Fimlaid. Betz (a non-basenji person) was the ASFA record keeper and had a good knowledge of what went on all over the country. When Betz attended the Region II Invitational in Arizona, she was disappointed to find only one basenji entered. She was even more disappointed when she went to judge the Region I Invitational in Portland and found that there was no basenji entry.

She wrote, “I spoke to some of the people who owned basenjis and asked, Why? They came back with the familiar answer, They don’t like basenjis. It has been my experience that when basenjis have been properly trained, most people’s objections, most of the time, cease to exist. I recall when basenjis first started coursing in this area. They were really combative little rascals, we rarely completed the preliminary and final courses without some sort of altercation - - playful or otherwise. Now we seldom see interference, and certainly no more than any other breed. This says something for the exhibitors and their dedication to improving their breed, and certainly no more than any other breed. This says something about the breed.

I have found my best coursers are those that chase anything that moves, including butterflies, leaves, flies, birds, and so on. The alpha puppy in the litter tends to be the most focused on lure coursing, but without proper socialization and training, this dog can be aggressive on the field.

I also look for a pup that’s not afraid to leave my side. A timid puppy will have a difficult time leaving the owner long enough to chase a lure, so independence must be encouraged.

When the time comes for them to practice with another dog, I will put them with a seasoned lure courser that won’t be inclined to chase. The adults discipline the young ones, who learn by watching the adults. Puppies raised in a pack when they are playing and are bumped and rolled means they can take it if it happens to them on the field.

While they are growing, I watch them to see how they interact with littermates, adult dogs, strange dogs, and people, and how much desire they have to chase moving things.

**Identifying Coursing Potential in Basenji Puppies**

By Linda Stilwell

A good beginning for getting a good lure coursing prospect is for the pup to have coursing parents. But a good coursing dog doesn’t just happen. It requires nurturing and encouraging the chase instinct.

When puppies are on their feet and playing, I encourage the chase instinct by dragging a toy, a plastic bag, anything they are likely to chase. This activity imprints the puppies and enhances their desire to chase.

A puppy raised in a pack with adults seems to be more inclined to lure coursing. The adults discipline the young ones, who learn by watching the adults. Puppies raised in a pack when they are playing and are bumped and rolled means they can take it if it happens to them on the field.

While they are growing, I watch them to see how they interact with littermates, adult dogs, strange dogs, and people, and how much desire they have to chase moving things.

I have found my best coursers are those that chase anything that moves, including butterflies, leaves, flies, birds, and so on. The alpha puppy in the litter tends to be the most focused on lure coursing, but without proper socialization and training, this dog can be aggressive on the field.

When the time comes for them to practice with another dog, I put them with a seasoned lure courser that won’t be bothered if the young one interferes, but will discipline them if necessary. I never put a youngster on the field with a strange dog until it has had multiple practice runs, is focused on the lure, and has run with its kennel mates without interference. If he does interfere, it’s back to practicing alone to make sure he stays focused only on the lure. I normally do not start a basenji in serious competition until at least 14 to 15 months of age for girls and for boys often not until 16 months of age, or older.

It helps to have a dog with coursing parents, but a good coursing dog is also the result of careful nurturing and encouragement.