

Lehigh Valley dogs to watch at Westminster

More than a dozen pooches from Lehigh Valley region will compete in nation's top dog show

February 07, 2014 | By Ryan Kneller, Of The Morning Call

A week after the Seattle Seahawks destroyed the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XLVIII, a pack of preeminent pooches will look for glory in another elite competition — the 138th [Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show](#).

The event, held Monday and Tuesday in New York City, will feature 2,845 dogs (the most entries since 1990). They'll vie for various awards, including the contest's top honor, Best in Show. All participants will be judged by how closely they conform to their breed's standards.

Among the hopeful hounds are more than a dozen Lehigh Valley entries, including Kronos, a Dogue de Bordeaux (type of French mastiff) owned and handled by McKenzie Cushing of Bath; Rocky, a smooth-coat Chihuahua owned and handled by Connie Newcomb of Allentown; Hudson, a Chesapeake Bay retriever owned by Jan and Karen Sosik of Palmerton; Sage, a briard owned by Odile and Tim Smith of Macungie; and Trader, the No. 1 nationally ranked Akita owned by Tom and Ann Bavaria of Weisenberg Township.

The canine showdown, which is the second-oldest continuously held sporting event in the country after the Kentucky Derby, has long showcased top purebreds. However, this year's competition will open a door to mixed-breed competitors in a new agility trial. Mutts have not participated at Westminster "since the very earliest days of the show," organizers say.

The first Masters Agility Championship at Westminster, being held Monday at Pier 94, will feature 225 dogs competing in two qualifying rounds consisting of a Standard Agility course and a Jumpers with Weaves course.

The 50 dogs that best navigate tires, tunnels and more make it to the championship round, which will be broadcast live 7-9 p.m. on Fox Sports 1.

Lehigh Valley dogs competing in the agility trial include Sassy and Screech, mother and son golden retrievers owned and handled by Mardi McGuire-Closson of Schnecksville; Rose, a springer spaniel owned and handled by Karen Schelling of Pen Argyl; and Edward, a mixed breed owned and handled by Yale West of Bethlehem.

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The two-day main event will feature three new breeds for 2014: Chinook, rat terrier and Portuguese Podengo Pequeno.

Westminster's best in group and Best in Show competitions will be televised live 8-11 p.m. Monday on [CNBC](#) and 8-11 p.m. Tuesday on USA Network.

To [help](#) you prepare for what organizers call the "Super Bowl of dog shows," here are some profiles of local pooches.

KRONOS

Young talent abounds with 18-month-old Kronos, a Dogue de Bordeaux, and his 11-year-old owner/handler, McKenzie Cushing of Bath.

The pair, who participated in about 25 shows in 2013, finished the year with Kronos ranked 18th in his breed nationally.

"Every time they enter the ring, they compete against adult professional handlers and dogs much older and mature," says Tom Cushing, McKenzie's father. "But they always find a way to win. They have earned the nickname 'the dynamic duo' from their peers."

Highlights of Kronos' blossoming career include winning Reserve Winners Dog (runner-up to Winners Dog) at the Dogue de Bordeaux Society of America's National Specialty show in March and earning his Champion title in August. He is just two points away from his Grand Champion title, which the Cushings are hopeful he can attain at Westminster.

Tom Cushing says, Kronos' strengths are his movement, inherited from his mother, Bronze Grand Champion Urszula z Orisku (ranked No. 5 in breed), as well as his muscle tone, inherited from his father, Bronze Grand Champion Storm de Legeane (ranked No. 4 in breed).

"His weakness is a short attention span," Cushing adds. "He's still very much a puppy!"

When not in the ring, Kronos can often be found either on the couch or soaking up sun with the family's non-show dog, Max, also a Dogue de Bordeaux. He is far from lazy, though, as he also loves playing in the yard, swimming in the creek and stealing food off the kitchen counter, Tom Cushing says.

"Kronos is a very active, athletic dog with a battery that lasts all day," he adds. "His favorite toy is his 'pacifier,' a softball-size rubber ball covered in rubber spikes. He chews on it at bedtime and it never fails to put him to sleep."

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WESTMINSTER ON TV

•**What:** 2,845 dogs compete in the second-oldest continuously held sporting event in the country

•**When:** 8-11 p.m. Monday, **CNBC**; 8-11 p.m. Tuesday, including Best in Show competition, USA Network

•**Info:** westminsterkennelclub.org