

## **The Govednik Affair: USCA Credibility in the Balance**

Early on a rainy morning in late September of 2011 Al Govednik's German Shepherd dog Hex, alone in an unfenced front yard on a rural highway, disappeared. The obvious explanation, that the dog had wandered off, perhaps to be struck by a passing vehicle, was ignored, perhaps in some obscure way in denial of the unfortunate fate of a previous dog under similar circumstances. Rather than immediately searching for his dog, Govednik concocted a bizarre abduction story which he tried to sell to the police and began an elaborate publicity and fund raising campaign, highlighted by local television appearances, widely circulated on the internet, using his position as working trial judge and national officer to promote his public persona, his agenda and his fund raising scheme. There was a firestorm of vindictive rhetoric on the internet directed against the imagined abductors, a massive, irrational wallowing in righteous indignation. Family and friends implied that they well knew who these abductors were, that it was only a matter of time before justice would prevail and the evil perpetrators – well known in the working dog world – would be revealed and punished. Those noting that this was a cockamamie story supported by not a shred of reason or evidence, that perhaps there should be a pause in the rush to judgment, were swept aside by the lynch mob mentality.

The Henry County Sheriff's department conducted an immediate and exhaustive investigation and found not a trace of evidence of an abduction; a local truck driver reported to the Sheriff's office striking a dog on that stretch of road early that rainy morning; and a couple of weeks later the decomposing body was found some 400 feet down the road off to the side in a ditch. The exhaustive Sheriff's department report – published through the Freedom of Information act – supported the finding of accidental death in every detail. Many of the self-righteous internet experts sought to portray this quasi rural Sheriff's department as semi-literate rubes lacking the sophistication to perceive the conspiracy, so obvious to them, even though they knew nothing of the people, history or issues involved, were playing this out in the fantasy world of self-reinforcing internet speculation.

Reason should have prevailed at this point, but the crusade was in full fury, bringing forth a renewed appeal for even more money for a private investigator to turn the tide of evidence, carry on the investigation and reveal the perpetrators of the supposed abduction. On the internet the mob mentality prevailed and anyone questioning the abduction, the mere suggestion that dogs allowed to run loose do wander off to be killed in traffic, that perhaps the Sheriff's department was not made up of incompetent hicks, was marginalized and shouted down.

But more than a year has passed with nothing from the mysterious private investigator, no new evidence or explanations of any sort, just a continuation of the silent stonewalling. Judgment has been rightly deferred to provide every possible opportunity for explanation or the presentation of contrary evidence, but the time for patience and forbearance is at an end. The time to face reality and act accordingly is at hand.

The vast preponderance of the evidence is that this was from virtually the moment the dog went missing a hoax which has produced through overt and ongoing deception many thousands of dollars of illicit contributions. Rather than stand up for the truth and account for the money and attempt restitution – seek forgiveness – Govednik has continued to stonewall, allowing his family and flunkies to carry on the hoax. The scheme has collapsed and the credibility is gone.

What remains in the balance is the credibility and relevance of the United Schutzhund Clubs of America. In order to survive and prosper USCA needs to emerge from a period of extraordinarily bad leadership and declining fortunes, and the overwhelmingly rejection of Govednik and his associates in the recent USCA election was a start. But he remains as a working trial judge, and the office of judge demands absolute integrity above all else. Incessant, aggressive solicitation of funds

to search for abductors, the existence of which the Sheriff's department has categorically eliminated, is eerily reminiscent of O. J. Simpson searching the golf courses of America for the mythical other killer. The reality is that the credibility of USCA can be no better than the integrity of the least of its judges. Had the man stepped forward, admitted a grievous mistake and made restitution then mitigating circumstances could perhaps justify a lenient posture. But he has not.

This is not an isolated scandal but an ongoing manifestation of self-serving, out of control power. Even now USCA is in the process of enforcing formal sanctions and judging limitations for Govednik's deceit, deception and financial irresponsibility relative to his estrangement from his local club, with a mandated formal apology to be forthcoming. Whether this is a slap on the wrist for a member of the old boy establishment or evenhanded justice is a matter of perception; speculation and comparison to harsh penalties to others for relatively minor offences is inevitable. None of this can reflect credit on the AWDF or his service as president of that organization.

Govednik's ongoing role as judge will inevitably be perceived as integral to the public persona of the working dog movement, each time he steps on the trial field USCA becomes a de facto enabler of the hoax, an implicit partner in the sordid scheme.

USCA must act now, must suspend the Govednik judging license in order to maintain the integrity and credibility of the association and indeed the American working dog movement as a whole. We are at a crossroads. If this sordid affair is just swept under the rug it will mean that in spite of new office holders it is going to be more business as usual, with self-serving insiders protected from the consequences of their actions. The membership of USCA and the working dog movement as a whole deserve more than that.

Jim Engel

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**<http://www.angelplace.net/hex/>**

Schutzhund America commentaries:

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