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For 133 years, the Irish Wolfhound has avoided drifting from his original statuesque lines thanks to an eloquent 622-word document that has been the north star for generations of breeders.

The breed standard drawn up in 1885 by George Augustus Graham, the man credited with pulling the Irish Wolfhound back from the brink of extinction, has only undergone minor tweaking over the decades thanks to old guard breeders who insisted on a strictly hands-off approach to the breed blueprint.

As early as this summer, that could all change.

The Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), Europe's umbrella organization for purebred dog clubs, will publish a revised version of the wolfhound standard, and it has apparently decided to do away with Graham's "Lists of Points in Order of Merit," a crucial part of the Irish Wolfhound blueprint.

All breed clubs have published standards, which are the building blocks for a breed. But Graham's points of order told breeders the precise order that those blocks should be put together to faithfully reproduce the hound once coveted by kings around the globe.

He and the following generation of influential breeders who inherited Graham's vision insisted that the wolfhound is first and foremost a sighthound — a swift, beautiful and powerful hunter — and that it be big-boned like a Great Dane but elegant as a Scottish Deerhound. Each of Graham's 16 points refine that picture in order of importance.

The FCI says its new homogenized document will be easier to translate.

Irish Wolfhound clubs in America, England and Canada won't be directly affected by the change — they're not members of the FCI. But what some fear is that the FCI is opening the door for the Irish Wolfhound to suffer the fate of some other breeds — the personal preferences of a few breeders overseas could steer the breed into something unrecognizable to today's wolfhound owners. Many sires for American Irish Wolfhound litters come from countries in the FCI.

In America, several breeds like the Irish Setter or the Golden Retriever — dogs originally bred with the hunt in mind —

have split into two groups, one that still hunts and one meant primarily for the show ring. Their appearances are startlingly different. The breeds drifted from their original function when the personal preferences of some breeders were rewarded by judges in the show ring, and other breeders followed suit.

But others in the breeds were alarmed that their dogs were no longer sporting dogs fit to take to the field, chase and pin or retrieve game. Eventually, those breeds split into form vs. function.

Most of us no longer hunt deer or wolves with our Irish Wolfhounds, but the legendary Irish wolf dog that Graham brought back was always so much more than a war dog or hunting hound. His awe-inspiring frame has always been home to a quirky, inspiring giant personality. And we know that, [genetically](#), small changes in appearance can snowball into giant effects in a breed's health and behavior.

How did all this happen?

The FCI wanted all its Irish Wolfhound clubs to use the same breed standard so that show judges would know what was expected as they handled shows in different nations. The FCI turned to the Irish Wolfhound Club of Ireland to draft the standard. Ireland is designated the "country of origin" for the Irish Wolfhound, so the task fell to that club. The club said that for the most part, its draft was written so that it could be easily interpreted from country to country.

But then the Irish club learned that the FCI would not publish the standard *and* Graham's points of order because it did not fit into the FCI's standard style of formatting. Ireland's wolfhound

club went back to work, trying to make sure all the points were covered in the revised standard. But the order of priority that guides breeders will be lost when the FCI adopts the new standard.

The Irish club is suggesting that FCI clubs continue to publish the List of Points in Order of Merit on their own websites.

America's old guard has resisted tinkering with the standard. In 1934 when the breed was finally off to a solid start here, a move was made by a group of novice breeders to change the standard because they said it was too general.

Florence Nagle, a giant in the early days of the breed in both England and America, wrote, "Hands off the standard. I do not believe in too much amplification of giving the points in greater detail. It is a great mistake to tie a judge down to too many details that are not half so important as the dog as a whole.

"I think the standard is a good one and perfectly adequate to convey to any judge what an Irish Wolfhound should be. Novices in a breed get to that stage where a little knowledge is dangerous, and finding they cannot breed to the standard wish to alter it to fit their dogs. In cattle breeding, where they have tried the system of judging on points, it has been a ghastly failure. You may get an animal that appears to have every small point right, but is not an Irish Wolfhound at all."

When Graham revived the Irish wolf dog, he relied on remaining specimens for his breeding efforts and turned to every written account and illustration he could find on the dog through history in an effort to faithfully capture the Irish Wolfhound of early history.

A major thread which ran through the early historical accounts was that the hound of the Celts and kings was elegant like a greyhound, only much larger and bigger boned, and that was the dog Graham set about breeding. At the beginning, he heavily used outcrosses with Scottish Deerhounds because he and many others believed that at some point, wolfhounds and deerhounds were the same dog.

A powerful and elegant coursing hound is what Graham carefully described in the breed standard adopted in 1885 by the first Irish Wolfhound club in England. From then until today, the vision of that spectacular hunting hound embodied in the standard has guided every breeder producing a litter of tomorrow's Irish Wolfhounds. Every breeder has recognized that we don't own the Irish Wolfhound — we're caretakers of this gift from the ages.

We'll have to wait until after this summer to see if we continue the faithful stewardship for future generations...

You can read the standard followed by the Irish Wolfhound Club of America [here](#).

Also, if you're a member of the IWCA and want to learn more, the club's official publication, the Harp and Hound, is taking a detailed look at the history of the standard.