

Sports Illustrated

Demand is Surging for the Alaskan Klee Kai, After Bill Belichick's Dog Won the NFL Draft

Bill Belichick's Alaskan Klee Kai is such a good boy, yes he is, that now everyone wants one.

CONOR ORR
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Mark Albers, Alaskan Klee Kai Association of America.
Courtesy of Sherry Holloway

A few weeks back, Sherry Holloway began to notice that a lot more people were asking about her favorite dogs.

Holloway first came across her life's passion back in 1997 and, at the moment, says she has 15 of them between her home and a heated kennel. The community of breeders and enthusiasts likes to keep a tight circle to prevent the relatively young breed from overpopulating and ending up in mills or shelters, so it's hard for miniature husky news to percolate without Holloway hearing about it.

There are the inevitable moments when the Alaskan Klee Kai reaches the big time and marries with celebrity. Holloway, who is the president of the Alaskan Klee Kai Association of America, as well as its chief historian, remembered when Joe Jonas and Sophie Turner owned a pair of Klee Kai pups (named Porky Basquait and Waldo Picasso).

"I think Billy Ray Cyrus's daughter had one as well," she said. (Indeed, Miley Cyrus's Klee Kai [was named Floyd](#).)

But this was different.

"It's been quite an experience," Holloway said. "We've had major questionnaires put in over the breeders' websites and all these people are inquiring. I wasn't quite sure if it was just the

[stimulus checks during the pandemic] or maybe that everyone is home and trying to find a puppy to play with. Or maybe it was Belichick.”

That’s Bill Belichick, Patriots head coach. Around the time of the spike in Klee Kai inquiries, his own Klee Kai, Nike, [took center stage during the NFL draft](#) by dutifully sitting at the kitchen table behind Belichick’s laptop while the team was finalizing its first pick of the night, Lenoir-Rhyne safety Kyle Dugger. (Belichick’s girlfriend, Linda Holliday, told ESPN that Nike saw some leftover treats on the table and hopped up on the chair to wait patiently for a reward.) His television appearance led to a windfall of social media love and an interview with Belichick and Holliday on CNBC about the new pup. A [picture from Nike’s official Instagram page](#) reveals his own window on the team’s Cisco Webex virtual draft meeting, right above Robert and Jonathan Kraft, and to the right of Patriots player personnel director Nick Caserio.

Such is life for the most powerful dog in sports, who is quickly becoming a poster child for the breed.

Bill Belichick's dog deputising in his absence. What a sight. #NFLDraft



If Nike seems like an odd fit for the Patriots’ head coach, Holloway described a window into the breeding and adoption process that makes the union totally sensible; a match between a dog that takes a great deal of preparation to acquire and a coach who excels at preparing. One doesn’t just create a Klee Kai, which the original breeder, Linda Spurlin, described as a blend of elite dogs.

“Alaskan Husky is a mixture of the best, and so was the creation of the Alaskan Klee Kai. I also added a small dose of Siberian Husky, and just the right amount of smaller dogs of similar conformation for developing my original stock.”

One does not easily acquire one from a breeder, either, with an application process that would make the notoriously prepared head coach smile.

“You can’t just pick up the phone and get one,” Holloway said. “It’s almost like adopting a child, I would say.”

Holloway said that there is a 50-line questionnaire prospective owners have to fill out, which asks about the family and their habits. Breeders check up on the family’s home life and ensure they have proper space to keep the dogs in house.

“They’re Houdinis, they can get out of anything,” Holloway said.

Also, many breeders expect to be connected to the dog throughout its life. For those who prefer to adopt, there are some Klee Kai focused rescue groups and the ASPCA offers adoption resources for any dogs in need of a home near you.



More very good Alaskan Klee Kai puppies.
Courtesy of Sherry Holloway

Coaches and general managers around the league have a lot of changes for which to thank Belichick. There aren't many recent developments in the NFL that do not have his fingerprints on them. Now, if you get a slight emotional lift from seeing an influx of miniature Alaskan huskies ambling down the street, you have Belichick to thank for that as well.

Initially, Holloway admitted that she wasn't sure whether or not Nike's exposure was a good thing, given that spikes in popularity tend to expand the number of breeders, making it harder to ensure that everyone is taken care of. But then she saw how happy Nike looked up on the chair with his new owner.

"He looks like he did OK for himself," she said, laughing.



Bill Belichick's dog wears a hoodie, because of course