

SPORTSMANSHIP (PART 1)

When it comes to dog show,s what is sportsmanship?

In my opinion, it is a great deal more than saying "Thank you" to the judge or giving the winner of the class a big smile and a "Congratulations."

Sportsmanship at a dog show isn't any different than "sportsmanship" in life. Dog shows and life can't be separated for dog shows are simply part of life ... just as life is part of dog shows.

The "Thank you" and the "Congratulations" are outward manifestations of sportsmanship but unless they are sincere these two terms become simply gestures, good manners if you wish, but not true sportsmanship. And don't get me wrong, good manners are part and parcel to sportsmanship but not the whole picture.

The ability and the desire to be of help to your fellow exhibitor; to encourage newcomers to the sport; to give praise and encouragement to those who need it to see the positive side of the sport all fall into the category of good sportsmanship.

The experienced breeder or handler who jumps in to help some one who has multiple entries; the junior who suddenly appears at ringside to hold dogs between classes for an exhibitor without having been asked; the steward who knows that someone is hard of hearing and so informs the judge without being asked; the judge who readily "spots" the newcomer and takes a few extra seconds to put him/her at ease all are examples of sportsmanship. And all are steps to be taken, nay, steps that are to be required if one is to partake of this marvelous sport of ours.

The rumor mongers, the naysayers, the constant

complainers and whiners soon become known to most of us. They continue their negative ways even if they continue to win. The complaints may change as the wins increase but there are some folks whose very nature it is to complain and whine. You know the type...those who walk away holding the BOB ribbon complaining that the rings weren't big enough or the judge didn't give them sufficient recognition and time to "really move their dog" [I'm not sure what they think the BOB ribbon symbolizes!]

But in my opinion, sportsmanship is our dog world goes well beyond what we encounter in the ring. It deals with the entire show scene ... and the show scene begins long before one arrives at the show site.

If you know someone inexperienced in whelping a litter is expecting their first or second litter, do you offer help? Do you explain grooming to the newcomer [or even the inept old timer] and offer to help them prepare their dog for the ring? Do you mentor less experienced breeder/exhibitors?

There may be judges you think are totally incompetent [and we all have a few on our DNS lists]. Do you just write off these judges with the "I'll never show to them again, they get a whole page in my DNS book" or do you find a way to meet the judge and take the time to explain your breed to him/her, emphasizing what the standard says, what it stresses, and WHY. Most judges are eager to learn but can become defensive when the conversations begins with "You did a really rotten job today. Probably because you don't know or understand what our breed's all about." Not the way to influence judges.

SPORTSMANSHIP (CONTINUED)

But in a relaxing minute an approach of "Mr. Judge, may I ask what you were looking for in coat texture today. I noticed a number of dogs did not have the harshness of coat called or in the standard ... did you find the same?" I've had relative "newbies" [a term I personally hate!] come to me after judging and in the questions they have asked, I have learned much about both my judging and my breed. Remember, judges are human beings with the same feelings and defense mechanisms each of us as exhibitors have.

None of us, judge or exhibitor, like to be criticized in public. All of us, judge or exhibitor, like to think we are doing a good job and are appreciative when we are told. If you did not win but think the judge did a good job in the ring, what's to stop you from after judging telling him/her that you liked what they did even though you didn't win that's not sucking up to the judge, that's being a good sport if you are sincere.

If you're in the ring and the exhibitor in front of you runs up on the novice in front of him what do you do about it? Do you assume that the judge will notice and say something? Do you ignore it and think to yourself, "Well, that person's new, he'll just have to learn and he will in time". Or do you step forward and quietly say to the person committing the bad play, "Hey, cut it out. It doesn't do you any great service to act like a jerk." Perhaps you would want to use slightly less inflammatory language, but you get the idea.

Do you share information on the judge with your fellow exhibitors? No, I don't mean on the list, I mean at the show. If the judge insists on a loose lead, do you share that information with your fellow exhibitors or do you figure they'll find out in the ring? Or do you

figure that if you tell them, you're giving them an "unfair advantage"? If the judge obviously dislikes squeaky toys in the ring, do you tell the competitor that you know uses a squeaky toy and may be in a later class?

If a strange face appears in your grooming area and is obviously unsure of themselves do you take a few seconds to introduce yourself and welcome them or are you too busy brushing to make sure that you win (or think you will win as the case may be)?

Corny as it may sound, sportsmanship at the dog show (and in life in general) is simply following the Golden Rule ... do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It's a tried and tested, principle that has been around for centuries.

On the other hand, many of our poorer sports have their own rule do unto others before they have a chance to do it to you!

Enjoy the shows, enjoy the people, but by all means do it in a manner that would have made your mother proud of you!

by
Gregory Alden Betor

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SPORTSMANSHIP REVISITED (part 2)

After my blurb on sportsmanship recently, I received a couple of e-mails that asked specifically, "What part does the judge play in the sportsmanship in pure bred dogs?"

A valid question and one that I think should be looked at carefully.

We all know, and most of us accept, that the judge is the "king" of his ring. He/She is the absolute arbitrator; he/she dictates how the ring is run and how the exhibitors are to perform to permit the evaluation of their exhibits. He/she may excuse any exhibitor from the ring for whatever reason he/she deems necessary. This ranges from disqualifying an exhibit that has a disqualifying fault according to the breed standard to excusing for poor sportsmanship. No other opinion is required, just that of the judge.

A JUDGE WHO FAILS TO MAINTAIN THAT IMPARTIALITY; WHO FAVORS ONE OR MORE EXHIBITORS FOR WHATEVER REASON IS, BLUNTLY, DISHONEST. NO IFS, ANDS, OR BUTS ABOUT IT. EITHER EACH EXHIBITOR WHO ENTERS THE RING IS GIVEN A FAIR SHOT OR THE JUDGE IS NOT ONLY VIOLATING HIS/HER POSITION BUT IS EXHIBITING THE ESSENCE OF POOR SPORTSMANSHIP.

In view of this, sportsmanship on the part of the judge is at least as important as that of the exhibitor both inside and outside the ring.

I'm not sure which is more important, the need for the judge to be totally impartial or the need for the judge to be knowledgeable about the breed he/she is judging. If there is not an in depth knowledge of the breed, frankly, the judge should not be in the ring for he/she does the breed a disservice by adjudicating in ignorance. The ring

remains a proving ground for breeding stock in the eyes of most of us ... a judge who is not totally familiar with the breed and the breed standard cannot properly evaluate breeding stock.

The need for impartiality is the keystone of the dog show. A judge who fails to maintain that impartiality; who favors one or more exhibitors for whatever reason is, bluntly, dishonest. No ifs, ands, or buts about it. Either each exhibitor who enters the ring is given a fair shot or the judge is not only violating his/her position but is exhibiting the essence of poor sportsmanship.

At times the appearance of impartiality is as important as impartiality itself. Both good sportsmanship and good manners require that if an exhibitor says, "Good Morning" to a judge upon meeting him/her outside the ring, the judge should return the greeting. That's called common courtesy.

What is not common courtesy is the visiting with friends, be they old time friends with whom the judge used to compete, old time friends who became handlers and shared many a show with all its trials and tribulations, or the show chair who hired the judge. Time for such visits at the end of the day when the judging is complete and there are no more exhibitors to enter the ring.

Sportsmanship relies on actions but it also relies on appearances! The dog show judge must be as Caesar's wife ... above suspicion. Sportsmanship does not demand that one ignore old friends ... only that the old friends renew or continue the friendships at the appropriate time and place. And the appropriate time and place is not in the ring while one is adjudicating the classes nor at the gate to the ring immediately before the judging is to begin!!!

SPORTSMANSHIP REVISITED (CONTINUED)

Good sportsmanship on the part of the judge requires that he/she be aware of what is going on in his/her ring. If some new to the sport is in the ring and the newness is shown by their actions, the judge should be aware of the situation. No time limit is so inflexible that a few seconds can't be taken to put the person at ease; to explain clearly what is required at that particular time, as well as the best way to perform the required action.

I remember well at one of the first of my shows, I had not the foggiest notion of what to do in the ring. The judge quietly came to me and said, "Your puppy has one of the strongest rears I have seen, but I need to see the rest of him. Turn him so he faces into the center of the ring and not away from it." Embarrassed beyond belief, I turned the puppy ... and she came to me again, this time saying, "That's too pretty a face not to let the judge see it." All said with a smile. That was the day I became hooked on dog shows! That day I took fourth in a class of twelve. There's not a BIS that equals the pride as I said, "Thank you" when I accepted that ribbon. And for many years, that fourth place ribbon held the place of honor in my ribbon collection ... it was the centerpiece of a quilt made for me by a friend using all the ribbons won over the years.

In going out of her way to put me at ease and instruct me at the same time, that judge showed true sportsmanship. She gained a "convert" to the sport which is one of the jobs of a judge in my opinion.

How many time have you been at a show where ringside loudly applauded and cheered for a particular entry ... only to be stone silent for every other entry. Or the cheers move around the ring with each little group cheering and being boisterously impolite to the other exhibits? A notable example on the part of ringside. And what should the judge do about such situations? Good sportsmanship on the part of the judge requires that he/she notify ringside such

partisanship is not acceptable. I watched the late Roy Ayers, turn to ringside and announce that judging would continue only when ringside could act as adults! It goes without saying that any judge in the ring should not be influenced by such cheering on the part of an exhibit any more than they should be influenced by the lack of such cheers for an exhibit. The judge's job is to evaluate the exhibit presented to him/her, not evaluate the popularity of the exhibit.

Just as the principal of a school sets the tenor of his/her school so, too, does the judge set the tenor of his/her ring. If he/she is courteous, impartial, and knowledgeable the exhibitors will reflect this. Seldom do you see "dirty tricks" played in a ring where the judge runs a "tight ship" and watches over "his charges" ... and each and every exhibitor is a "charge" of the judge, just as each student in a school is a "charge" of the principal of that school.

Good sportsmanship is contagious. If the judge is infected with good sportsmanship it soon spreads, infecting each and every exhibitor who comes in contact with that judge.

Poor sportsmanship is also contagious ... and judges who permit it to flourish do no service to our sport. The judge who permits an exhibitor to show discourtesy to the judge or other exhibitors; the judge who permits ringside to make loud, rude comments at ringside about either the judging or specific entries; the judge who shows favoritism of any kind; the judge who does not respect his/her ring steward are all examples of poor sportsmanship. And the judge who exhibits such has not only made a fool of him/herself but has lessened the nobility of our sport and that is an unforgivable sin.

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