

NZDJA

**NZ Dog Judges
Association Inc**

To critique or not to critique? That is the question

by Lavina Diamanti

As a judge, would you value the opportunity to justify your placings? Would you also be more comfortable in the knowledge that you have interpreted the written words of the standard and put it into practice? Would you give an overview of the breed you have just judged? As an exhibitor, would you like to know why the dogs were placed as they were, what the judge was looking for and that they understood your breed? How many sports can you think of where you can lose, but you never know why? With all the major sports we watch on TV, the referee indicates as to the reasons for the decisions made. How many new exhibitors give up because they don't win and they never know why?

We constantly hear criticism of judge's decisions, right down to being blamed for the falling numbers in the show ring, but our current system prevents judges from doing anything about it. We are not allowed to critique unless it is a specialty show. Even then, few of these nowadays have critiques available. We are not allowed to publish an overview of the breeds we have judged and we are definitely not allowed to discuss the dogs in the ring with the exhibitor. Imagine if we could critique our challenge winners for each breed? Imagine these being published weekly online or monthly in *NZ Dog World*. In the UK and Europe, critiques are published each week and judges are required to furnish the critique as a condition of their assignment. They are accountable for their decisions and it is there for all to read.

In our part of the world, Australasia, the critiquing regulations are similar, and as a result we see written critiques that often fall well short of the mark. Some are wishy washy and don't really tell us anything, but the good critiques do. And they should back up the decisions being made. Then, and only then, can exhibitors get an understanding of the decisions and some direction for their breeding programmes. But more than that, we as judges, are accountable for our decisions and our reasons are there for all to see. If multiple judges are stating the same thing then surely this gives direction not only to the breeder and/or owner but to other competitors as well.

On a recent judging assignment in Australia I was excitedly looking forward to judging the large entry of a breed which I am rather fond of. How disappointed I was when the classes started to come in. Untypical heads, poorly constructed fronts and hindquarters and poor movement reflective of the construction. I was lucky enough to find a dog worthy of the challenge and a beautiful bitch I put

Best of Breed and gave a group placing to. I later found out she was a strong winner in that area and quite rightly so. But, I also wonder what the ringside spectators would have said, and if what I hear in our own show scene is anything to go by, it would probably be along the lines of "she probably knew from Facebook what one to put up" or "well of course, it is the top winner on Dogs on Line, she would know that" All the while I wanted to scream "what are you doing to this beautiful breed?" Yet I had no forum to offer any guidance.

In this digital age we live in, everyone has an opinion and many happily share that opinion for all to see. Where judges' decisions are concerned, the opinion is often negative, often unfounded and based on perception not facts. Isn't it time we have the opportunity to voice our opinion too and quash some of the negativity that surrounds judges decisions in the ring.

To critique or not to critique? Why not? Why are regulations holding us back? We have nothing to lose.

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Important Dates

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21 & 22 July	Practical Examinations – Auckland
28 & 29 July	Practical Examinations – Christchurch