

NZDJA

Blaming the Judge: Why do we do it?

by Lavina Diamanti

If one were to believe many comments on social media and the like, one could be forgiven for thinking that all dog judges are crooked, unethical, and are always putting up their friends and 'faces'.

Judge-bashing has become so common that newcomers to our sport reading online diatribes could be forgiven for thinking they don't stand a chance in the show ring, especially under NZ and Australian judges. I even read recently that our sport was in decline because of all the 'crooked judges'. Wow, that's a big call. Let's try and make some sense of what is happening.

Firstly, let's look at the 'blame game'. Why, when we don't win, do we feel the need to blame someone? Whether it is Saturday morning sports parents blaming the referee or tennis professionals blaming the umpire for a line call, when the result isn't the desired one, there is a culture in many sports to blame someone else. Quite often it is someone who is officiating. You don't have to look too far to see evidence of this culture — there are even signs at children's sports games reminding parents that umpires and referees are volunteers and the game is supposed to be fun.

Society has changed dramatically in this area in recent decades. However, one thing hasn't changed: top performers in any sport understand the destructive nature of the blame game. Imagine if Kane Williamson and the Black Caps had blamed the umpires for their World Cup Final loss... the effect would have been far-reaching.

Putting up the 'faces' is probably the easiest to explain. With any sport, there are individuals who have a higher level of experience and dedication to their hobby. It could be the years of training and practicing to be a great dog handler, or the years of effort and cost to be able to breed quality dogs consistently, or years of study and hard work to be a respected judge. Whatever their background, so-called faces generally consistently show good-quality dogs, so it is not unexpected that they will do a fair share of the winning. The judge's duty is to award the dog that, in their opinion, most fits the breed standard regardless of who is on the end of the lead. If that happens to be a top handler, breeder or another judge, then so be it.

Putting up 'friends'. Trust me: when you have an appointment coming up, everyone who thinks they might get an advantage wants to be your friend! We do have genuine friends, and the longer we are in this game, the more friends we make. But a good judge will put up the best dog, regardless of whether the dog's owner is their best friend or worst enemy. They will, however, agonise over both these decisions. It is far easier to judge where you know nobody.

Judges are the reason our sport is declining. In my opinion, this one is quite simply a cop-out. There are many reasons why our sport is in serious decline — lack of available pedigree dogs, lack of support

and guidance for new exhibitors, lack of club-level fun events such as ribbon parades and match days. These are most probably the main reasons within our control but bigger than all those is the lack of participation in sports across the board.

An article in *The New Zealand Herald* in February this year compared rugby in New Zealand with the *Titanic*, stating our national game is in danger of sinking due to declining participation across all ages. If you Google 'declining sports participation' you will find lots of articles from a variety of countries, all analysing this problem. Participation in sport is declining worldwide with only a few exceptions and these appear to be linked to video games. The FIFA series of soccer video games is credited with the recent surge in popularity of the sport. There is a similar basketball video game which is also helping to boost participation in the real game. So let's stop blaming judges for the decline in our sport. That's like saying the umpires and referees are to blame for the decline in all the other sports which we know just isn't true.

In summary, I believe most judges are honest and do an honest day's work. New Zealand and Australian judges spend years studying for their group licences: the journey to All Breeds status takes in excess of 20 years. We are not specialists in every breed, but the majority study hard to get a good understanding of the breeds they are judging and strive to do their best every time they walk into the ring.

We aren't all perfect, but a judge's decision is their interpretation and understanding of a breed standard based on their level of experience and knowledge.

One recurring comment from trainee judges is that they never realised how difficult it is to actually judge a dog show. So, let's cut our judges some slack and be grateful for the efforts they put in to obtain their licences.

Without judges, we have no dog shows. 🐾

National Board

Patroness:	Annette Buxton Email: annette.buxton@outlook.com
President:	Ray Greer Phone: (09) 292-9449 Email: shelton117@outlook.com
Vice President:	Pam Douglas Phone: (07) 824-1738 Email: pamdouglas@xtra.co.nz
Secretary:	Debbie Hull Phone: (07) 849-3467 Email: rclassi@xtra.co.nz
Treasurer:	Lesley Chalmers Phone: (03) 312-0413 Email: merthyr@xtra.co.nz

Important Dates

31 August Effective date for breed standards for 2020 exams.