The Art of Critiquing – by Ray Greer

This is a transcript of Rays' very popular critiquing workshop.

Preamble:
I want to start off with a few stats of my own that I have concluded exist out in our market place. In reality, there are only about 10% at best of the dogs entered at any show that are top winners, the balance are entrants. Turning that into numbers, for a group of 120 dogs, there are 12 in that top category, and 108 in the entrant category. Turning that into time at 2 mins per dog, that group judging of 240 mins, or 4 hours, consists of 24 mins on top dogs and 3 ½ hours on the entrants.

We read and learn "the good book" & what is in there strictly relates to those top dogs, so we need some mechanism to relate the standard to the entrants and to place them in the correct order. Trust me you will live & die by the way you judge the entrants, not the top winners.

The art of critiquing is not soley to achieve a critique when you are doing an appointment where that is a requirement, but in my mind it is a vital tool in bridging that gap in what we know and what we are faced with. It takes us from the breed standards to the placings. This is tack that we will be taking today, learning together the basics of critiquing that if used correctly will make us all better judges.

Despite critiquing being somewhat mechanical in nature, what I don't want to achieve is to produce clones or parrots. What I do want to produce is a thinking judge, and the ability to critique, either verbally or mentally, is what will produce a thinking judge.

We want to have PD's opinion, we want to have DH's opinion, we don't want to have fb's opinion.

For any of you who want to be viewed as being credible, a big part of that credibility tag is earned the way you judge the entrants. Picking winners is easier than placing the entrants section in the correct order, breed after breed.

Critiquing the art of……………………..

To my mind the understanding of, and the ability to critique, is a prime component to being a competent dog show judge. Judging is a subjective thing, we all view things slightly differently…thank goodness.

Judging is not a facebook thing either, we just have to work at our craft & hone our skills. Facebook is here to stay, there are many negative connotations around fb, what it does do is make us learn our craft & apply it more diligently.

There is no doubt about the power of advertising, and sadly a well advertised inferior widget will often generate more sales than a better quality similar widget. Our job is to learn the tools to make that better quality determination, despite whatever is happening around us.

Believe it or not it is more of a human trait to latch onto what you don't like & to totally discard it. Judging is the exact opposite of that, so we have to be conscious of that trait, we have to work on that art, we have to be able to recognize specific breed characteristics, we have to put up dogs that have the most of those breed characteristics.

Critiquing teaches you to be more objective and clinical in your approach, as opposed to being subjective, and of variable decision making. Critiquing is a positive and constructive process….not a destructive one.

It's benefits are many, but four reasons quickly float to the top.

1. Lines up your mind to be methodical and consistent in your approach to the way you should judge dogs.
2. It takes your mind down the same pathway as the breed standards we all proclaim we know so well.
3. It just happens to be a requirement of our own practical examination procedure.
4. You will, without a doubt, sometime be asked to critique your own specialty show somewhere in the world, & if you get an appointment in Europe it will be a requirement of any breed that you are asked to judge. For example when I judged in Finland I had 80 cardigan corgis & 80 odd english springers to judge & critique. The exhibitors crowded around the dog and listened to my critique to the steno, who transcribed it into the local language. At the end of the class, they were all handed out…they clambered for them, & each viewed each others, the process was very open.
5. There is simply no-where to hide
6. To be viewed as a credible judge your methodology with respect to critiquing has to be right & you have to be consistent.

The spin off effects are numerous

1. An increase in confidence.
2. An increased appreciation of you as a judge from your fellow exhibitors.
3. An elimination of 3 "hate" words from your vocabulary when speaking of dogs…**lovely, gorgeous & nice** these are romantic words…they are bedroom words….they are not dog judging words. As an aside, out of those three words how would you rank them. How do you rank **good, very good & excellent**…………
4. A better judge

Downside is that it is something that you have to embrace, & to work on. It doesn't come all that easy, especially the verbal part.

Hopefully this lecture will kick start that process.

In some breeds the sequence of steps, the grades and the wording are all narrowly defined, ie the german shepherd, but this is not about that. It is about understanding the concept of critiquing and for you to use your own words, but in a methodical sequence of steps. It is up to you to set your own rates, and it will achieve for you the benefits that we have just spoken about.

Initially let us determine the sequence of steps.

1. General appearance. Breed, sex, size, coat, colour degree of substance
2. Head
3. Neck
4. Forequarters & feet
5. Body , top-line & coat
6. Hindquarters & feet
7. Tail set
8. Movement.
9. Overall grade?

Let's draw our self a scale out of 10, & place a word beside it that adequately or correctly describes that level.

9 to 10 = excellent
7 to 8 = very good
5 to 6 = good
Less than 5 = satisfactory
Can go less than this & the terminology is poor. But I don't like it, critiquing is not a destructive process. Where ever you draw those lines is up to you, whatever the descriptor is up to you, but you must be consistent.

There can an assumption drawn from what i have just put up, & that is those 8 points of the dog carry equal value, when we know that that is simply not correct.

That is the mechanical part that i want to avoid, but to avoid it we must work our way through it.

Some parts of some dogs are so specific and so important that those parts carry a lot of weight in terms of points.

In the majority of breeds the head is a defining part of that dog.

 let's have a critique of the generic dog, as an example.

Medium sized, heavily coated black & white male of medium proportions.

Dog has a very good head, full dentition, with very good expression and good eye shape & colour. Neck very good.

Satisfactory fore quarters, could do with a better layback of shoulder, length of upper arm good. Very good feet, and pasterns.

Body proportions are very good, good substance and coat of excellent texture and very good length.

Hind quarters are very good with a good let down of hock, excellent when viewed from behind, with very good hind feet. Tail length & set are very good, correct length of croup.

Movement coming and going was very good, reach and drive was satisfactory.

Dog was graded as ……………………………

The verbal critique is:

A medium sized heavily coated male, of medium proportions. The head is very good with very good planes and muzzle to skull ratios. Expression is very good with correct eye shape and colour. Forequarters are satisfactory, upper arm is short and layback of shoulder is steep. Has very good body proportions with good substance and an excellent coat with correct texture and length. Hindquarters and croup and tail length & set are very good. Movement was clean coming & going but lacked reach & drive.